INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

Margery: This is an interview with Esther Taylor at her home on July 9, 1986. It is for the American Jewish Committee and the Council of Jewish Women Oral History Project, Jewish Women of Achievement. Margery Diamond [is the] interviewer, Esther, I'd like to begin with asking you about your early life and your memories of that early life.

Esther: I'm a native Atlantan, the daughter of East European immigrants. My two brothers, Samuel, eight years, and Louis, 11 years older than I, were born in Russia. Of course, I didn't know until after I was born in Atlanta. My mother—Janice was her name—brought them here five years after my father, Marcus Kahn, settled in Atlanta. He became a United States citizen and furnished a small house in a Jewish Orthodox neighborhood. That's where I was born in 1905.

Margery: Where was that . . . in Atlanta?

Esther: Yes.

Margery: What area?

Esther: The area, which is now the old—actually, it's in a whole general area of where the Georgia State University is, and also the old City Auditorium. I spoke in that Auditorium, which I'll tell you about later. My childhood memories are vague, but I have a clear recollection at age four when we were living in a neighborhood in a corner house with three Christian neighbors. One was on one side, one was on the other, and then one right in back of our house on the adjoining street. They were courteous and friendly and quite often, each one invited me to come
in and have a cookie or candy. I'm not sure whether they invited me because I came to the door or not. I just remember the cookies and the candy. One of them had a grown daughter. I remember her name: Nonie Rae [sp]. She played the piano. When she saw me listening at the window, she called me in and asked if I could sing. Apparently I said ‘Yes.’ “Let me teach you songs,” she said. Straightaway I had a repertoire of popular songs. Some of the words I didn't even understand. Then she bought a few children's picture story books and read the stories to me.

One day, my father said to me, “Nonie Rae says you can read.” I brought the book home and I turned the pages at the right place and seemed to be reading. Actually, I had memorized each page. So he thought it was time for me to go to school. I was only five years old. They accepted me. Nothing happened, really, of any importance while I was in grammar school, except that I was always chosen to memorize poems to recite for special occasions. Evidently I began to talk without any fear from the time when I was five years old.

Margery: Let me ask you this, Esther, your memory used to be absolutely phenomenal, according to what you've just read. Do you think that we could put that down and just sort of talk from what you remember writing and not read it? Because it . . .

Esther: The only thing that I know is that my father taught me to read by memory the Sh’mah Yisrael.¹ When he'd go to a special event, he would put me on the table . . . stand me on the table . . . and I would recite it. All the Jewish men in the congregation, Shearith Israel,² thought it was quite a feat. I didn't know what I was saying.

Margery: I know it's important to you to get it all right, but I don't think we have to worry so much about that today, if we can just put what was written away and talk about the things that come up. Then we can go back over it and see if there is anything that we've missed. I think it would suit the project needs a little better.

Esther: I do want to tell you that while I was in grammar school I attended Hebrew school in the afternoon. I also started to take music lessons. Our house was not heated with automatic heating as we have it today. The living room, which we then called the parlor, didn't even have a

¹ Literally “Hear, [O] Israel,” Sh’mah Yisrael is often considered the most important prayer in Judaism. The first verse affirms the monotheistic essence of Judaism: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”
² Founded in 1904, Shearith Israel began as a congregation that met in the homes of congregants until 1906 when they began using a Methodist church on Hunter Street. After World War II, Rabbi Tobias Geffen moved the congregation to University Drive, where it became the first synagogue in DeKalb County. In the 1960s, they removed the barrier between the men’s and women’s sections in the sanctuary, and officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement in 2002.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
stove in it . . . so when I took the lessons, I put on a coat. During the week I practiced very, very little.

**Margery:** It was too cold.

**Esther:** But at the same time, I learned some of the fundamentals. By the age of 12, I was already ready for high school.

**Margery:** Did the music teacher come to your house?

**Esther:** Yes. In those days, if I were to tell you what my father paid for the lessons, of course, it would sound ridiculous. Fifty cents a lesson . . . she walked from one pupil's house to the other.

**Margery:** You had a woman teacher to be your first teacher?

**Esther:** Yes. In high school . . . it was very interesting because in those days, there were just three high schools in Atlanta. There was Commercial High School, which was co-educational. Then there was Girls’ High and Boys’ High. Those were for the students to take the courses which would give them the necessary courses to enter college. Naturally I was sure that I was going to college because my younger brother was already in pre-med. My older brother was going to law school. I had started from the very beginning to think that I was going to be a teacher. I loved all of my teachers . . . so that was what I expected.

**Margery:** You also expected to go to college even though you were a girl?

**Esther:** No doubt about it. I did realize that not many of the youngsters in our general neighborhood were going to college. Most of them married quite young or went to work as stenographers or sales people. But my father wouldn't allow that. I don't know why he thought he . . . I think that was something that came over from Eastern Europe . . . that a man of education couldn't have his daughter work in a public place. That's a supposition.

**Margery:** What kind of educational background did your father have?

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3 Commercial High School began as a department of Girls’ High School in 1889 for girls who wanted to learn business skills. They taught bookkeeping, typing, math and history. It expanded to a four-story brick building on Pryor Street, and in 1910 became Atlanta’s first coed high school. It closed in June 1947.

4 Girls’ High School was one of seven schools as part of the original Atlanta public school system. It opened in 1872, and was the only public school in the area exclusively for girls. It was a superb school academically, and had 104 rooms including science halls, laboratories, sewing rooms, a library, and outdoor classrooms. In 1947, Atlanta high schools became co-educational and Girls’ High was renamed Roosevelt High School.

5 Boys’ High School was founded in 1924 and is now known as Henry W. Grady High School. It is part of the Atlanta Public School System. It has had many notable alumni, including S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A. It is located in Midtown Atlanta.
Esther: My father was naturally a Hebrew student up until he was practically married. He started the Shearith Israel congregation in Atlanta and brought over Rabbi [Tobias] Geffen⁶. Every morning they had their regular studies, the Torah⁷ studies. He took the most active part, I think, in the congregation. He was called Morptha [sp] Kahn. Many people called him by his first name. During the holidays, he was the one who . . . in whatever period that they had for raising funds, did that. I imagine that was for the poor, but it was also for the rabbi. In those days, they didn't even pay a rabbi a regular salary. Did you know that?

Margery: No, I didn’t.

Esther: In the Orthodox groups, they didn't. Perhaps in Reform groups they did. As you know, there was quite a division between the Orthodox and Reform Jews. The Reforms came here, I think, in about the 1860's. By the time the Russian Jews started immigrating . . . as my father and my father-in-law did in the late 1890's . . . no, my father-in-law came in the 1880's . . . but my father came in 1890's. That's when the large East European immigration started.

Margery: Did your father come through Ellis Island⁸ and all?

Esther: He didn't tell us about that very much. I heard much more from my mother and my brothers. When they came, my brothers had never seen a banana, and they had never eaten chocolate. So my brother . . . I don't know if he told me the truth, but he said he actually ate the peeling of the banana and threw out the banana.

Margery: I had heard that when I visited Ellis Island, but I didn't know people that . . .

Esther: Maybe he made it up. I don't know. But chocolate . . . they just couldn't understand how anything could be as good as chocolate.

Margery: How old were your brothers when they came with your mother? Did they come with your mother?

Esther: Yes. As I said, they came with my mother five years after my father had been here. My father was more or less established in just those five years. But I wanted to go back, if I can, to something about going to high school.

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⁶ Rabbi Tobias Geffen (1870-1970) was an Orthodox rabbi and leader of Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta from 1910-1970. He is widely known for his 1935 decision that certified Coca-Cola as kosher. He also organized the first Hebrew school in Atlanta, and standardized regulation of kosher supervision in the Atlanta area.

⁷ Hebrew for ‘teaching. ‘Torah’ is general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinical works. ‘Sefer Torah’ refers to the sacred scroll on which the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) are written.

⁸ Ellis Island in New York Harbor was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States. It was the nation’s busiest immigrant inspection station from 1892 until 1954. Today it is a museum.
Margery: Sure.
Esther: I had never done any homework in the other school. It didn't seem to be necessary. But in high school, I suddenly realized that I wanted to do the homework. I think I needed to do it. So it was arranged for me to have a private Hebrew teacher, twice a week, I think it was and to find a new music teacher, since I wasn't practicing her assignments at all, but I was improvising actually popular ragtime songs. This suited me so I could play for dancing and singing at parties.

Margery: Did you hear this ragtime on the radio? How did you discover this ragtime music?
Esther: I didn't hear it on the radio. We didn't have radio then. But one of my neighbors had what we called then a Victrola. I heard it there. My brother, my eldest brother, often took me to a show which I think we used to call . . . let's see . . . what did we call it? I can't remember. Anyhow, it was at the Atlanta Theater where the girls danced.

Margery: Was it a revue type?
Esther: It might be called ‘revue’ as it's done today, but it was quite different then. I really don't remember well enough, except that I was always dancing the steps at home. It was mostly kicking high and that sort of thing. But, of course, the ballroom dancing was something that I saw because I did that in high school. You see, my brother took me to some of his parties at the frat[ernity] house at Emory [University—Atlanta, Georgia]. The reason he took me was because I could play the piano so they could dance. I guess that's one of the reasons why I started improvising ragtime songs.

Margery: About how old were you when you were going out to the Emory fraternity?
Esther: About 14.

Margery: How did that feel, being in that environment?

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9 Ragtime is an original musical genre which enjoyed its peak between 1897 and 1918. Its main characteristic trait is its syncopated or “ragged” rhythm. It began as dance music in African-American communities in St. Louis and New Orleans. When it caught on it was published a popular sheet music for piano. Ragtime fell out of favor when jazz claimed the public imagination after 1917, but it has enjoyed several renewals most notably in the 1950’s.

10 The Victrola is a phonograph which is a machine that played records. Its name comes from the name of the company, Victor Talking Machine Company. The early phonographs had to be hand cranked and they had a big horn on them to produce the sound. In 1906 Victor Talking Machines Company introduced phonographs with the turntable and amplifying horn tucked away inside a wooden cabinet. It became the most popular brand of home phonographs and sold in great numbers until the end of the 1920’s.

11 Emory University is a private university outside Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked twentieth among national universities in U.S. News & World Report’s 2014 rankings.
Esther: It was very good for me, because it gave me an idea of the outside world. I really hadn't been away anywhere except to visit my aunt down in Thomaston, Georgia. We didn't move out in any circles. Once my father took me to hear [Enrico] Caruso\textsuperscript{12} . . .

Margery: Where was that?

Esther: . . . in Atlanta at the auditorium. I know he took me to hear a concert by a great chazzan\textsuperscript{13} . . . the cantor. But outside of that, we really lived more or less in our own little neighborhood and naturally, the whatever festivities and holidays in the synagogue.

Margery: Did your mother also accompany your father when you went to hear Caruso?

Esther: No. I almost cry when I think of the way my mother lived. She worked, I would say, harder than anybody I have ever seen or known. She'd rise early in the morning. She did all the housework, all the cooking . . . served most of us separately. The only thing she wouldn't do was to wash clothes. That's something that she said she had never done and she just . . . that was the only thing I know of. On Friday she baked for the holidays, for Saturday, and the house was full of the odors of what they used to call Milford cake—milk cake with eggs—and then bread. Sometimes, if we were going to have guests . . . the guests in those days were called ‘[hachnasat] orchim [Hebrew: hospitality] . . . they would be visitors from Israel (then it was Palestine) or some charitable organization. Very often they came to our house for a midday meal after synagogue. If we knew that we were going to have a guest, we had something special. But the only day she rested, really, was on Saturday. That's when she read the papers, the Tagblatt. [German: Daily News or Daily Paper] In the Tagblatt was a continuing story. She saved all the papers. On Saturday she read all the stories and really enjoyed it, I think, more than almost anything else she did. But I never understood exactly why my mother didn't attend all the events. There could be a lot of reasons. I would have to just guess them. I'd rather not do that.

Margery: Was her life in Russia . . . Poland, similar?

Esther: Not at all, not at all. Her father had a mill. That's seems to be one of the things the Jewish people were allowed to have. They had a mill and with it farmland. She was one of seven girls, and there was only one boy. He used to go to Germany to have his clothes made. But in their house, they kept a dressmaker to do all of the ladies' clothes. They used to have servants by

\textsuperscript{12} Enrico Caruso (1873-1921) was an Italian tenor. He sang in all the major opera houses in Europe and North and South America. His 1904 recordings of an aria from Pagliacci was the first sound recording to sell one million copies.

\textsuperscript{13} The chazzan (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
the year or by the lifetime. She would tell us stories about them. Each one of the girls was in charge of one department, so to speak. One would take care of something in the mill. One would take care of the cows. One would take care . . . I don't really know what the different categories of their work were. But that is the way they were brought up.

**Margery:** Do you know what your mother's responsibilities were?

**Esther:** No, except that I know my aunt could sew and she couldn't. So apparently my aunt was the one who did some of the sewing.

**Margery:** Do you know how your parents met?

**Esther:** Have no idea. I do know that the general custom there was for the parents to arrange the marriages. I also know that the pretty girl and the talented girl had the students, and the ordinary girl or the girl who wasn't so pretty had the so-called ‘workers.’ So my father had a feeling that anyone who was a tailor or a shoemaker or a butcher was of lower caste. It was strange really to me, even as a child, because as I grew a little older, every time a young man came to ask me for a date, [my father] wanted to know who his father was. He was not polite to some. He was more polite to others. Of course, I realize why [now].

**Margery:** What did your father do before he came to America?

**Esther:** I'm not absolutely sure, except that I remember his telling us that he had a number of men working under him as foresters, that he had a background in mathematics and understood how to select the trees that were to be taken down and shipped. So he had men working under him. Evidently he worked for the . . . I don't know what they called them . . . the duke or the man who owned most of the land in the area, because they didn't live in a large city. They lived not too far from Bialystok [Poland]. He, evidently, with his education, even though it wasn't an English . . . the kind that we would think of as an education, he had studied so that he had mathematics. He was able to find out not only which trees should be taken, but how many and their lengths and which ones should be shipped and that sort of thing.

**Margery:** So he came with skills?

**Esther:** A skill which he wasn't able to use here at all.

**Margery:** What did he do when he got here?

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14 Bialystok is in northeast Poland. Over the centuries it has been in Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and Russia. Today it is currently back in Poland.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Esther: That is something I'm not certain about. I know that many of the Russian immigrants who couldn't speak English started with packs on their back. Evidently my father didn't, because all I ever remember was that he had a buggy and a horse. It was no wagon either; it was a lovely buggy. So he must have been selling clothing to the neighborhoods on credit. In those days, I don't think that most people had the . . . evidently they couldn't charge anything in the store. They didn't have the background. I also imagine that most of them were black people. I'm not certain about this. So even today I think there are insurance policies for which the insurance agents visit houses and collect their payments by the week or the month. It's that kind of thing. So unless that's gone out of fashion too . . . maybe they do it by mail. But it hasn't been many years ago when I knew somebody who did just that.

Margery: What did your father do when you were young in Atlanta?

Esther: This is what he did.

Margery: He did that?

Esther: Yes.

Margery: Then what did he do after that?

Esther: A great many things intervened. One of the . . . I'm really skipping a lot of my history in answering that question, because my older brother . . . a little later, when he became a lawyer, my father was able to talk with him. By the way, my father spoke English. Of course, some of his grammar wasn't perfect. He started quite early to think in terms of retiring early.

Margery: So in other words, through all your girlhood he sold clothes on credit? That was what he did?

Esther: More or less.

Margery: We can get back to your story and come back to your father again.

Esther: I think I was talking about high school.

Margery: Right. You got up to high school where you were going at age 14 to Emory to play the piano . . . ragtime.

Esther: That's right. As I said, I was playing ragtime at the time and . . .

Margery: Your father changed teachers?

Esther: . . . my father changed teachers because he said that I had to learn other music. I really didn't want to at that time. In my senior year at Girls’ High, something extraordinary did
happen. At the school's semi-annual student government assembly, a Christian schoolmate
nominated me for president.

Margery: How did you feel when that happened?

Esther: I couldn't believe it. There was a round of applause, the same as that for the other
nominees. Then after the assembly . . . my schoolmate . . . her name was Catherine Culberson
[sp] . . . sort of sheepishly, I said, “You know good and well that I can't be elected president of
the student government.”

Margery: Why did you feel that you couldn't be elected president of the student government at
that time?

Esther: I think it was because I did not have the confidence of being special. The reason for
that was because I wore very simple clothes. I didn't play games and basketball and tennis like
the other girls. I didn't think that I was well-known.

Margery: Did you think being Jewish . . .

Esther: Being Jewish was very important. I should have mentioned that. There had never
been a Jewish girl president of Girls’ High. There were very few Jewish girls in the school
because most of the Jewish girls went to Commercial High. But anyhow, this Catherine was very
vehement when she said, “Esther, you know that a lot of the girls in this school know that you
have given up your lunch time to play for them while they danced during gym and that you've . . 
.”— she was in two or three of my homeroom classes—“You always came to school early to
help some of us who weren't certain about the answers to the questions in algebra and so forth.”

Margery: So you did some one-to-one tutoring with your friends?

Esther: Yes. She said, “You have also very often offered to do things whenever anybody
asked for something to be done at school . . . Besides, the faculty and the principal have
something to say about this, too.” I guess she meant that they evidently knew that I made good
grades. I was an A student. So sure enough, I was elected President. Not only that, but they asked
me to do the valedictory address at graduation. Now, at graduation, I think I ought to tell you that
the auditorium seated 5,000 people, and Girls’ High had a large number of students. The
auditorium was filled. I evidently knew how to project my voice. So the next day or so . . . the
story in the paper—it was the first time I ever got into the paper—said it was the first time that a
female voice had been heard all over the auditorium because in those days . . . that's a
tremendous place and they didn't have the loudspeakers. So I thought that was a strange thing for
them to say. They didn't say that it was a good oration, but they said that was the first time a female's voice had been heard in the auditorium.

**Margery:** How did it feel to be heard?

**Esther:** I can say that it did inflate my ego a bit. But one month before graduation, my father told me that he couldn't send me to college. I wept and reminded him that I was supposed to become a teacher. He assured me that I could become a teacher, that I had studied Hebrew for seven years and that the Hebrew school needed a first and second grade teacher. He was certain the board members would accept me even though they had never had a female Hebrew teacher. I didn't think this was a fair compromise, but my mother was now an invalid, and my father made the rules in our house. So at the ripe old age of 16, I taught Hebrew school for two years.

**Margery:** You said your brothers were sent to college?

**Esther:** Yes, yes. That's the old-fashioned idea that men—and I suppose some of that still exists—that men have to make the living for the family and they have to have a profession. Women can be homemakers and they don't have to [make a living]. In fact, my father said, “You're smart enough.” That's exactly what he said. I didn't think I would admit it, but that is exactly what he said. After that, I think two years after, I married Herbert Taylor, ten years my senior. A new and completely different life was before me then because...the wonderful part was that my husband permitted me to do almost anything I wanted to do. I didn't ask for the world, but I could feel the liberty of being my own person and doing whatever I chose to do for the first time.

**Margery:** Can you talk a little bit about how you and Mr. Taylor met and decided to get married?

**Esther:** That's a very long story. I had a lot of boyfriends because, I suppose, my brother and the fraternity. He used to really use me. He would say, “You go see ‘X’.” When you have a date with ‘X’, you be sure and tell him about our fraternity. Tell him all about it, and you see if you can't get him to join.” I was, I suppose, so naïve that I did it. So I did have a number of dates. Some of the boys, knowing that my brother didn't come back from school until late in the afternoon, would come over about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock and say, “Is Sam home?” Then they'd spend the afternoon talking with me. So I had quite a few dates with boys, all of whom were seniors in college. I did go out with a few older men really—we called them ‘boys’—one of whom was my husband. I noticed that my father—my mother, too—liked him better than
anybody else. He was very bright. He didn't bring chocolate candy. He brought ice cream from the drugstore so. . . But he always took the time to talk with them. He used to come ask me for regular dates for Friday night. After a month or two, my father didn't like it. He said, “It's too often. It's too regular.” From that, I really knew that he didn't expect me to get married. It never occurred to me. But one night Herbert did ask me to marry him. I said, “There's not a chance. My father is not going to let me get married at this age. But you can try.” I did like him. He asked my father, and my father said, “I tell you, Herbert. Esther is too young to get married but her mother is sick, and she really should be out of this house.” My mother had tuberculosis. The doctor said it was better. “I can't afford to send her to college. If you'll raise her”—that was the word he used—“and take good care of her, I think I can let her marry.”

Margery: Wow. What did Herbert Taylor do at that time?

Esther: He was a druggist. He was in partners with his brother. He had gone through pharmacy school. His brother had two small children. The business was really not adequate for two people. I suppose I was thinking of the future already. I suggested that he open a drugstore of his own and let his brother have the drugstore so that there would be enough for his family, because actually we had no responsibilities. I was still teaching Hebrew school. So he started out with a drugstore of his own and a lot of debts.

Margery: Was your Hebrew school position a paid position?

Esther: Indeed. I was getting as much as a secretary. Yes, I did. I had to turn over a good part of it to my father, which was for a dowry. Again, that was the old-fashioned idea that every girl had to have a fine dowry. My dowry had a fur coat and all my linens were hand-embroidered . . . the usual things that a girl needs. Not in great numbers, but I had a fine dress for parties. I had a fine suit, and the bed linens, all of that. I still had some money left for myself during the time. I made a good salary . . . for those days that is.

Margery: So you turned over part of your salary to your father? It wasn't considered room and board?

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15 Tuberculosis (or ‘TB’ for short) is a common, and in many cases lethal, infectious disease that attacks the lungs. The classic symptoms of active TB infections are a chronic cough, fever, night sweats and weight loss (so much so that in the past it was called “consumption”). Treatment requires multiple antibiotics over a long period of time. Before the age of antibiotics the disease was often fatal.

16 A dowry is a gift money, goods or property that a woman brings to her husband in marriage.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Esther: No. This was strictly for my dowry. I heard him speaking to my mother occasionally. That's how I found out some of these things. He never told it to me. But I remember that I knew it, so I imagine I must have overheard it. I don't ever remember him telling me that.

Margery: What kind of wedding did you have?

Esther: Not much of a wedding, really. It was supposed to have been in the rabbi's . . . there was a special room in the Shearith Israel synagogue. It really wasn't in the rabbi's home at all. No one was supposed to come except just a very few close friends. When I walked in, the shul [Yiddish: synagogue] was all lighted up, and there were at least 100 people sitting out in the audience. I don't know how they found out. I suppose some of the people that my father invited must have told them. I felt very embarrassed. I came running down the aisle. So it wasn't much of a wedding, I can assure you. I think there is one interesting feature of that evening. There was a party . . . I guess you would call it the assembly hall of the synagogue . . . my father brought out a bottle of wine that he said he had put up when I was born. He made wine every year with grapes. Part of it went to the shul and part of it we used for all the holidays. He opened up the wine and was going to give everybody a taste. It was pure vinegar.

Margery: Oh, no. I want to ask you one question. You said you dated on Friday night. You were obviously from a religious family affiliated with a congregation, and yet you dated on Friday night. Was there a problem there?

Esther: My husband parked a block away from the house. My father asked no questions,

Margery: So you were allowed to go without talking about it?

Esther: Yes. He was really in many ways a liberal because I remember a little later on a Conservative group started . . . there was talk about it, at least. My father encouraged it very much. He said, “If you want the young people to come to services so they can sit together, you'd better stop this Conservative temple or synagogue.” What do they call it . . . a synagogue. They did start one, but he never left the Shearith Israel, because after all, that was his home place.

Margery: Did you attend services on Friday night and Saturday morning?

Esther: No. I went to the synagogue every morning when I was in grammar school and recited the . . . you see what my memory is like for that time . . . Ani Ma’amin. He gave me a penny to buy candy with. I did that for a number of years. So that's why all the men knew me.

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17 Hebrew: “I believe.” A prose rendition of Maimonides’ thirteen point version of the Jewish principles of faith. It is often recited in synagogue at the conclusion of morning prayers. It has also been made into a song.
They would always ask my father, “What are you going to do with Esther when she grows up?” I don't know why they asked that question, but I was the only girl that ever came in. He said . . . this is very personal . . . “I'm going up to the Yitzchak Elchanan Yeshiva”\textsuperscript{18} . . . that's where the rabbis are trained . . . “I'm going to find the right kind of man for her.” I never forgot that, because I said to my inner self, “I will never marry a rabbi.”

\textbf{Margery:} You didn't.

\textbf{Esther:} That's one of the reasons I got married as early as I did. I might have wanted to do something else before I married, but I was so afraid that maybe my father really meant it.

\textbf{Margery:} I'm going to stop the tape right now and let us take a break.

\texttt{<End Tape 1, Side 1>}
\texttt{<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>}

\textbf{Margery:} We left off on the other side that you had just gotten married, and we talked about your wedding. How was your life different after you got married?

\textbf{Esther:} At first besides learning how to cook, and to keep house, because I had not really done any of this before . . . I also helped some in the drugstore. I decided it was time to resume the music studies. This time I really meant it for real. But somehow or another, it just didn't work out, because during the next ten years, the music was just on and off. Sometimes I would take a lesson and then not be able to come back for months, depending on all the different events, such as the death of my mother. Then I had two surgical operations. Then my father died. Then our son Mark was born. That was in 1928. Mark is now 58 years old, and he has four lovely children. So that was a time when I just simply couldn't do very much with the music. But I did join \textit{Hadassah}\textsuperscript{19} before Mark was born. I don't really know how I did this. I think when you're young it's possible to do almost anything. You make the time and you never get tired. It's so different from today, when it's all I can do to do one thing during the day. I accepted various chairmanships. For example, I took the program for the meetings. Then I took the chairman of the choral group and wrote the . . . had to change the keys and all that kind of thing . . . we had a regular choral group. Then I was asked to be hostess for some of the parties and convention

\textsuperscript{18}Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, also known as \textit{Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan}, is the rabbinical seminary of Yeshiva University in Washington Heights, New York. It is named after Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, who died in 1896, the year it was founded.

\textsuperscript{19}The Women’s Zionist Organization of America. It is a volunteer organization founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold. It is an international Jewish organization with around 300,000 members worldwide. It supports health care, education and youth programs in Israel.
people who came in and membership. You always had to work on membership. Really, I did a little of everything.

Margery: Did you stop teaching your Hebrew school?

Esther: Yes. I just taught for two years.

Margery: So when you got married . . .

Esther: I taught one year after I married, and that was it. I did have some free time in between all these events that happened. But as I said, they were all very serious kinds of things. When you have surgery you can't do anything for a good while, and then you had deaths in the family. I had a very hard time with birthing our son. It took me months before I could get over that. So I really didn't have too much leisure.

Margery: How did you choose Hadassah? What made you choose Hadassah to do your volunteer work?

Esther: Hadassah was a natural because in our dining room there was a large, framed picture of [Theodor] Herzl.²⁰ My father was a Zionist,²¹ and he was the one who was in charge of collecting the pushkas.²² Do you know the word ‘pushkas’?

Margery: Yes.

Esther: Those were little tin banks, which we all had. Every one of us had to put pennies and nickels or whatever money we had, even on our birthdays, any special occasions. Then my father would ask me to call the same group of men every year, and they would come and sit around our dining room table and count the pennies and wrap them, or the dimes and wrap them. By the way, I used to help. So I knew the bit about Palestine and Zionism. Naturally the first organization that I would join would be Hadassah. It was a very short time after I joined . . . after I did all of these . . . took these memberships, that they asked me to be the president. They would have given this to anybody that would take it, I'm sure, because the national office expected us to . . . they increased our quotas for memberships and for funding so much, it was way out of our reach. My phone was busy every hour of the day. I tell you, I learned a great deal about accepting a position as president of an organization because it is a tremendous responsibility. But in the

²⁰ Theodor Herzl was the father of modern political Zionism. In 1896 he published The Jewish State, in which he advocated the establishment of a Jewish state.
²¹ Zionism is a movement which supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890’s Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.
²² Pushka (alternatively pushke) is Yiddish for a charity box (tzedakah box in Hebrew).
meantime, I really felt it was the kind of thing that I couldn't do for any length of time. I had a friend who I really influenced to join Hadassah. She came from New York [City, New York] and was a neighbor of mine, Bert Travis. I influenced her to come to the meetings. She didn't know anything about Hadassah or Zionism. I gave her a good bit of literature. Then she gave it to her husband. It was really like a miracle. Bert and Bob Travis because the foremost Zionist leaders, not only in Atlanta, but in the whole Southeast region. So when Bert became the president, I felt it was in very good hands. So I decided that I wanted to join a different kind of organization . . . something in which I would be involved in legislation. It was the League of Women Voters that I favored. I did know a few people who belonged to the League. I saw what they were doing. So after I joined them, I thought: the [National] Council of Jewish Women has a legislative department. I'll join them. The Council of Jewish Women had nearly all—certainly a preponderance—of the German-Jewish women. Hadassah was sort of Russian. The Council was the German groups. But that didn't bother me. I joined because I wanted to participate, especially in the legislative program. They were very cordial. I think any of the others could have joined and they would have been cordial. Some few said, “Oh, they're snobs” . . . some few of the women . . . of the Hadassahs, which shows that things have changed a great deal. So almost immediately, I was made chairman of legislation and was sent to the Cause and Cure of War Conference in Washington [D.C.]. Everybody laughed about that when I said, “I'm going to the Cause and Cure of War.” We haven't found out that yet, have we?

Margery: No, we haven't. But tell me about that Conference.

Esther: Actually, I don't remember too much about it, because I was so enamored of Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt. She received us at the White House. My memory keeps going back to that. So little of what I heard at the Conference now comes to me. Yet I made a good speech when I came back about it. The reason I know it was a good speech was because right after that,

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23 Bert Travis was president of Greater Atlanta Hadassah from 1936-1938.
24 A civic organization that was formed by Carrie Chapman Catt in 1920 to help women take a larger role in public affairs. It does not support or oppose candidates for office at any level of government but rather works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and to influence public policy through education and advocacy.
25 An organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.
26 The Conference on the Cause and Cure of War met annually from 1925 until 1941. It was hosted by the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, which was made up of representatives of nine women’s organizations who worked together to lobby the United States to join the World Court.
27 Eleanor Roosevelt was the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the president of the United States from 1933 to 1945. She supported the New Deal policies of her husband and became an advocate for civil rights. After her husband’s death in 1945, Eleanor continued to be an international author, speaker and politician and activist.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
they asked me to speak at the Southeast Regional Conference in Savannah [Georgia]. I know if it wasn't a good speech, they wouldn't have sent me to Savannah. Then a short time after that, I was asked to represent the [National] Council [of Jewish Women] for the Council Sabbath as a speaker at the Friday night Purim service. Now that was really very unusual. I had never heard of anybody taking the pulpit in the Temple. Here I was, an Orthodox girl, and I was being asked to speak in the pulpit for Council.

**Margery:** Which pulpit was that?

**Esther:** At the big Temple.

**Margery:** At the Temple?

**Esther:** Yes, the big Temple, right where it is now. So I chose for a subject great woman in Jewish history. Incidentally, one of the men in the audience had this booklet printed. By the way, in those days I didn't read anything. My memory was still good. I gave this without any notes. It was nearly a 30-minute talk. I ended it . . . I forgot to tell you the subject. The subject was ‘Great Women in Jewish History.’ I was born on Purim, and that's why my name is Esther. So at the end—I want to read this last paragraph—I said, “No matter what our citizenship, our initial value is based on whether we are genuine. First we have to pass the test of family, then of community and country, and finally of the world. The ideal world will not be one in which all mankind is fused through a regimentation of being exactly alike. Only insofar as each of us contributes to our specific culture will we aid in the historic process of humanity and help to bring about the union of all mankind. Towards this goal, every Jewish woman can play a part and become a heroine.”

**Margery:** That's beautiful.

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28 The National Council of Jewish Women created Council Sabbaths in 1920. They were a once-a-year event designed to recognize the work done by the council members of the NCJW by leading services in private homes. In many places, it was the first time women got the opportunity to actively participate in services and lead prayers.

29 A Jewish holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian Empire from destruction in the wake of a plot by Haman, a story recorded in the Biblical book of Esther. According to the Book of Esther, Haman planned to kill all the Jews, but his plans were foiled by Mordecai and his adopted daughter Queen Esther. The day of deliverance became a day of feasting and rejoicing. Some of the customs of Purim include drinking wine, wearing masks and costumes, and public celebration.

30 The synagogue was dedicated on August 31, 1877. There was standing room only. A string band was playing as a procession of the rabbi, Board of Trustees, the building committee, two elderly members carrying Torahs, and fifteen young girls dressed in white, their leader bearing a cushion upon which lay the key to the building. Joseph T. Eichberg carefully lifted the key from the velvet cushion and delivered it to the president, Levi Cohen. Mr. Cohen gave a speech, then opened the ark and placed the Torahs inside. The rabbi, Dr. Browne, read a Bible portion and the choir sang a hymn. After that the rabbi preached his sermon and then he formally dedicated the synagogue. Then the regular service began.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Esther: I think that this really constituted the depth of my feeling because my work in the few organizations and my background and the fact that I think Jewish people do have a heritage of *tzedakah*[^31] [Hebrew: justice, righteousness] that I felt this way about it. When I said “family,” first said “in family” I believe that foremost. I really do. I knew a number of people. I think my father was maybe a little example of that . . . [he] reached out in the community and gave more time there than he did to his family. Not that he in any way shirked his obligations. I don't mean that. But in the way of time . . . the amount of time that he spent at home, I think it’s less than the time that he spent in communal things. So I always felt that any part of my family came first. I have . . . hundreds of letters. I've kept in touch with all the members of the family, both my husband's and mine. I have so many letters, many of which I've kept, that I value. I keep them. A good many of these are letters from my relatives, those who lived away from Atlanta. I write . . . to this day, I have something like eight regular correspondents every week—nieces, sister-in-law. I still feel that that's the first order of business. Let me go on and tell you a little bit about the time that this speech was made and what happened then. May I?

Margery: Yes.

Esther: This speech was made in 1949. By this time, my husband had changed from being a druggist to a house builder. Our son was grown. We had responsible household help. We had never crossed the ocean. We traveled just to New York occasionally. That was the most. So we began our travels every summer to all parts of the world. In Palestine[^32]—at the time it was called Palestine—and especially in Morocco, we saw the impoverishment of the Jew, and the basic need of an organization which I really hadn't heard about, ORT[^33]. The sight of the young children in this ORT school will always linger in my memory. There were two rooms in this little . . . I guess you might call it a house . . . one large room, which was a schoolroom. There wasn't one child there that had on a decent pair of shoes. Some of them had a shoe of one kind and then a second shoe of another. Some had shoes which were much too big for them. They looked so

[^31]: Hebrew word meaning “justice” or “righteousness” but is commonly used to signify charity. *Tzedakah* refers to the religious obligations to do what is right and just. The highest form is to give a gift, loan or partnership that will result in the recipient supporting himself instead of living upon others; the second highest is to give donations anonymously to unknown recipients.

[^32]: ‘Palestine’ was the name of the area that is now Israel and Jordan. After World War I, the area came under the administration of the British and was called the “British Mandate.” After World War II, the states of Israel and Trans-Jordan (now Jordan) were established.

[^33]: Founded at the end of the eighteenth century, the ORT’s mission is to advance Jewish people through training and education. After World War II, ORT was very active in the DP camps with rehabilitation programs in 78 camps. Some 85,000 Jews were trained in new profession and provided with the tools they needed to rebuild their lives.
poverty-stricken. Really, I didn't see a fat child in the whole room. In the next room was a big stove—I guess it was a coal stove—and a lady was stirring a gigantic black pot. It had in there food which is common in Eastern Europe . . . couscous.\(^{34}\) She told us that many of these children had very little nutrition except for that big bowl of couscous that they had in this school. I know a lot more about ORT now. I know that they do training, really, for people to learn professions or any vocation that they're able to train them for. But at that time, I knew very little about it. So the first thing I did when we returned from this trip was to invite about 20 of [my] friends. I showed the slides and made comments about it. All of them agreed that we had to start a women’s ORT organization in Atlanta. It took quite a while before the ORT women’s group developed, and now they have a very fine . . . I think they have quite a few ORT chapters in Atlanta, and they do very well.

**Margery:** Was there a men's ORT chapter?

**Esther:** There was. I think there was a men's group. But again, my husband worked such long hours in the drugstore that he couldn't be a joiner. So he was not a member of it. I wasn't aware of it. That was a real eye-opener for me . . . that ORT school. So in recent years I have been going to the meetings and it is in our Foundation.\(^{35}\) I think that they do one of the most important pieces of work. In those days, everybody talked about the ‘Joint.’\(^{36}\) That was the [American Jewish] Joint Distribution Committee. That was the organization that we all knew. It still exists. It was probably the most important institution which took care of needy Jews in all parts of Europe and maybe the Near East. But ORT has really become a very valuable organization in Atlanta now. I must go back to the idea of the music because this was a repressed desire on my part, to become a graduate musician. I wanted to be a real musician. It kept welling up in my psyche. My dear husband had no objection when I asked him if I could register at the Juilliard School of Music.\(^{37}\) I continued to go there every single summer for eight years.

**Margery:** When did you start? When did you begin?

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\(^{34}\) A dish of semolina which is steamed, traditionally served with meat or vegetables. It is a staple food in Northern Africa and the Mediterranean.

\(^{35}\) Taylor Family Foundation was founded in 1983 and is administered by the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta. The Foundation supports this Oral History Project at the Breman.

\(^{36}\) The Joint Distribution Committee is a Jewish humanitarian assistance organization founded in 1914 to alleviate hunger and hardship, rescue Jews in danger, create lasting connections to Jewish life, and provide immediate relief and long-term development support for victims of natural and man-made disasters.

\(^{37}\) The Juilliard School was established in 1905 in New York City as a performing arts conservatory. It trains about 800 undergraduate and graduate students in dance, drama, and music, and is widely regarded as one of the world’s leading music schools.
Transcript IC: OHC10715

**Esther:** I'll have to go get my report cards. I don't remember the years. But I think it was somewhere in the Fifties.

**Margery:** So Mark was . . .

**Esther:** Mark was grown, yes. During the winter, I practiced every day, and about that time . . . I don't remember the exact year, but I think it was in the Forties—I was asked to be a member of the Atlanta Music Club. Now, in those days, I think people thought you had to be asked. Maybe it's even to this day. I don't know. But one of the reasons that I joined when I was asked was to see what they were doing in the educational department. I knew that they gave scholarships to talented young people in order for them to be able to go to college. But this was for just the chosen few. So I talked with the president. I discussed the possibility of a radio program. It was really no trouble at all to get permission from the music department of the schools because in those days the schools didn't have an audio-visual department; we arranged to schedule—or they arranged it, really—to schedule a period of listening [to a] program every single day at a certain time . . . [during] the music period, which I gave on radio. Then it was called WCON. Now it's WAGA. I started immediately to do research. Luckily I was able to get a fine volume . . . I think it was about six-volume . . . of a course, so that I could choose the things that I wanted. The first year I called it 'Stories in Music.' The second year I borrowed the idea from the radio program called ‘Hit Parade’ and I called it ‘Classical Hit Parade.’ The third year I think the title was ‘Music by American Composers.’ Then the fourth year, the schools established an audio-visual department. I really didn't think there was any need for me to have to go down . . . every single day I'd get up at 5 o'clock every morning to write the scripts. So the last year, I had interviews . . . no, it was just once a week at night in prime time. It was called ‘Interviews and Happenings in Atlanta.’ I can tell you that it was very rewarding to receive many, many letters—you can see a lot of them there—commending the program. But I was very weary of all this continuous research. I really thought I might be able to put my time elsewhere. For some reason, I am fickle about doing the same thing over and over again. I wonder how in the world I ever stayed with music as long as I did. But you see I never did accomplish what I wanted. So I guess that's the reason. There's always so much more to learn. But other than that, I moved around a lot.

**Margery:** In that sense, your music programs fulfilled your desire to be a teacher?
Esther: Yes, that's right. Then, sure enough, it wasn't very long that they asked me to take the vice-presidency and chairmanship of education.

Margery: Your programs that you did . . . was that a volunteer situation?

Esther: All this was voluntary. I never earned anything. This chairmanship put me in charge of three different age groups of students. They met once a month. They played for themselves and for their parents, relatives, or anybody who wanted to come. I didn't think that all the time and money we spent for it, too . . . the Music Club had just a limited amount for them . . . was worth the small attendance. Most of the children who came were talented children. I thought all the children . . . a good many more children . . . should come. I asked the board if they would sponsor a spring festival in which many of the talented students could participate. I offered to write the scripts to introduce facts about the composers and dress the players in appropriate costumes. So we had violin, piano, dual piano, wind instruments . . . all of them included in a one-and-a-half hour program at the Woman's Club auditorium.

Margery: Where did the children come from . . . what segment of the population?

Esther: The same thing, white children from the middle class for the most part . . . middle class families. In most every case, the most talented came from poorer parents. It was most interesting to see that they all really needed . . . the ones that got the scholarships in most every case were from poor parents . . . those who really couldn't afford a music education because that is more than any other field—with regard to private lessons. Besides school, they have to pay for private lessons, instruments, music, all that. The Atlanta Journal printed nearly a whole page of pictures—I want you to look at them—about this, with appropriate remarks. We really did increase the participation in this group quite a lot.

Margery: You accomplished what you set out to do?

Esther: Yes, I don't know how long it lasted, because I wasn't chairman of that for too long. I think it was two years. Anyhow, it was worthwhile, and it was fun, too. All of this time, I wondered if there was some way in which the Music Club could extend its educational program to include the blacks. This was long before all of the changes took place. On one occasion, I

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38 An Atlanta-based daily paper. In 1982, The Atlanta Journal combined staff with The Atlanta Constitution to become the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Today, it is Atlanta’s only major daily paper.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
called up the president of an organization—a black organization—called ‘Links.’ Are you familiar with it?

Margery: No.

Esther: Links is composed of black ladies, all quite wealthy and well-educated. It’s the equivalent of the white Junior League. I thought maybe to talk to them and ask them to become members of the Music Club. Perhaps some of them would later on because we'd never had a black person in the Music Club. Anyhow, they listened to my invitation to become members of the Music Club. They were courteous. But not one joined.

Margery: This was in the Fifties? Forties?

Esther: In the early Fifties. Yet I thought we could do something to stimulate interest for good music among the youngsters, most of whom had little or no opportunity for learning the one art in which their race had made so many contributions. It just seemed such a pity that the boys' and girls' clubs had everything. They had not only swimming pools and ball and pool table and religious things, but no music.

Margery: Why do you think that the black women in Links and the children and the facilities didn't include music?

Esther: The public schools did have a music program. Evidently since they were segregated . . . in the black schools . . . if there was a very talented youngster, some person . . . maybe most of the time white . . . would adopt that talented person. I mean by that, they would . . . it was always possible to find someone who would help any artist: black, white or any color . . . whereas, the others didn't have any encouragement at home. They certainly didn't have the money to have music lessons and buy the instruments. So it was almost impossible, really, for them to have that advantage. At this point . . . I was thinking about it and wondering if there was any way to do it, because I suppose it was out of the question to do it on a big scale. But I heard about a black schoolteacher whose name was John Lawhorn [sp] who was getting excellent results with a method which he called ‘Having Fun with Music.’ The way he did this was very unusual. The youngsters that he taught were supplied with simple instruments like the autoharp, bells, drums, and ukuleles. While he played records of well-known classical pieces and some good jazz, they accompanied by reading the rhythmic score on an overhead projector. So they

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39 Links, Incorporated is a non-profit organization founded in 1946 based on the ideals of combining friendship and community service. It consists primarily of professional African-American women.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
were really learning rhythm and also listening and hearing some good classical music. I had the matching funds in order to obtain a grant from the National Association [Endowment?] for the Arts.

**Margery:** You had the funds personally? You got them?

**Esther:** Yes. I had them. The office of the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs[^40] was going to supply the space and the services of executive directors of the clubs. In order to get a grant, you always had to have matching funds. It took us quite a long time to get that application in. My husband helped. I wrote out an application and I was told that would never work. Then Herbert helped me with it. It took a long time before I got an answer. We happened to know Senator [Herman] Talmadge.[^41] I called him up one day and I told him about it, and sure enough, about two or three days later I got an answer.

**Margery:** It helps to know the right people?

**Esther:** Yes, it really does. I might have gotten it later, but it would take much longer. The best part of this program was that this black teacher taught one of our young members in the music club, Miss Rustin [sp], to direct and teach in the program. While she was there . . . it was for the Boys’ Clubs and the Girls’ Club. We started with three. While she was there, WSB-TV[^42] made a documentary of the program which was distributed to a number of Sigma Alpha Iota[^43] sororities. I was a member there. We thought it was really going places. Then Miss Rustin moved out of the city. We had to engage the Spelman [College—Atlanta, Georgia][^44] students to take charge. They were not really interested in anything but getting their salary. The project was very costly. It really lacked the expertise that was needed. Unfortunately, it had to be dropped. I was very disappointed.

[^40]: Boys & Girls Clubs of America is a national organization of local chapters which provide after-school programs for young people. The organization, which holds a congressional charter under Title 36 of the United States Code, has its headquarters in Atlanta. The first Boys’ club was founded in 1860, and they joined with other clubs to become a national organization in 1906.

[^41]: There were two Talmadges that played a big part in Georgia history: Eugene and Herman. Herman was Governor twice; one in 1947 and then from 1951 to 1955. Herman is not to be confused with his brother, Eugene, was also elected Governor of Georgia in 1946, but who died before he could take office. So his brother Herman took over for him, but then he was kicked out by the State Supreme Court as unconstitutional, and Ellis Arnall took over until the next election, which Herman then won.

[^42]: WSB-TV is an Atlanta-based news TV station. It is the flagship television property of Cox Media Group, another Atlanta-based company. WSB-TV began broadcasting in 1948 as an NBC affiliate, and in 1980 switched to ABC.

[^43]: Sigma Alpha Iota is a professional International Music Fraternity for women. It was founded in 1903 at the University School of Music in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to uphold the highest standards of music.

[^44]: Spelman College is a liberal arts women’s college in Atlanta. It was founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, and is one of America’s oldest historically black colleges for women. Spelman received its charter in 1924.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Margery: Sigma Alpha Rhoda sorority . . .

Esther: Iota . . . I-O-T-A . . . Iota. [That is: Sigma Alpha Iota.]

Margery: What is that?

Esther: That's a music sorority of graduate music students.

Margery: So you joined that after graduating from Juilliard?

Esther: I actually didn't graduate Juilliard. I went during the summers, but you have to . . . before you get your degree, you have to stay there for six months, which I couldn't do. But I had all my grades up to that time. If ever I wanted to go back and stay half a year, I could, but I never went.

Margery: So the only requirement that you lacked for graduation was a six-month residency?

Esther: That's what I would have to have had, yes. I couldn't take two more summers. I had to be there for six months. I wasn't too disappointed, frankly, because I had so many things going here. I wouldn't leave my family here for six months. It was bad enough for the six weeks. Even then, Herbert and my son used to drive up in the middle of the season. It was a little bit more than a married person could do I think. I was grateful for what I had. As a matter of fact, I did something different. The next two years, I went to Paris [France] to study French, because I had arthritis quite bad in my fingers and in my toes. I wasn't playing anymore. It was always my ear that predominated. I loved French. So I asked my husband if I could go there to Sorbonne\(^{45}\) and study French and do some traveling around on the weekends. He was to come in the midseason. I was very disappointed in many ways during my stay in Paris, but that's a long story. Then the next summer I went to Canada, to Quebec. That was at Laval University.\(^{46}\) For a while, I was quite proficient in French and was even asked to be the president of *Alliance*,\(^{47}\) but I did not accept that. I really wasn't proficient enough, I thought, to be the president, because when they met a few times here and I met and addressed them and spoke to them, all that was easy. But to have a real conversation, in spite of those . . . I had some in high school and I had taken some

\(^{45}\) The Sorbonne (or la Sorbonne) is actually the University of Paris in Paris, France. It is currently organized into 13 autonomous universities (most of them with ‘Sorbonne’ in their names) in 1970, each independent from each other although formally supervised by a common chancellor. The Sorbonne is actually a building which houses the former University of Paris and other educational and research institutions.

\(^{46}\) Laval University is the oldest center of education in Canada, established in 1663. It is located in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, and is the first institution in North America to offer higher education in French. It is ranked among the top ten universities in Canada in terms of research funding.

\(^{47}\) *Alliance française* is an international organization that aims to promote the French language and culture around the world. It was created in 1883 and is headquartered in Paris.
private lessons, and I still didn't feel that I could . . . was an adequate president for Alliance. One of the teachers that I had here, by the way, was a marvelous person by the name of Nora Sapporta [sp]. We became close friends. We did some two-piano work and also studied some theory together. This was quite a few years after I was playing with two pianos. I played regularly dual piano with Harriet Hirsch. We gave concerts to nearly all of the organizations here and at the university in Rome [Georgia] 48 and at the art museum [High Museum of Art]. 49 Two pianos were what I liked the best and what I did most of. But getting back . . .

Margery:  Who was the piano teacher that most influenced your . . .

Esther:  Guy Maier. 50 There was a dual piano team which was known all over this country called ‘Maier and Pattison.’ They were the only dual pianists at the time. Guy Maier also had a teacher's page in the music magazine called Etude. 51 He was, I think, one of the finest pedagogues in music that I have ever had the pleasure of studying with. I had him as a teacher for piano and dual piano all during those eight years. After him, we began to have a number of dual pianists. I studied composition with [Louis] Teicher of Ferrante & Teicher. 52 He was teaching at Juilliard during that time . . . quite a few other very prominent teachers. The head of the school then . . . let's see if I can think of his name . . . he's been gone for a long time.

Margery:  Were any of your teachers women?

Esther:  Yes. There was one young person then who was just beginning a very great career specializing in [Johann Sebastian] Bach. 53 She knows and plays everything that Bach has ever written . . . Rosalyn Tureck. 54 She played here in concert for the Music Club. So naturally when I was in New York, she had a course. It was a listening course. I took that course with Rosalyn

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48 Rome, Georgia, is the largest city in Northwest Georgia, and the home of Darlington School, Berry College, and Shorter University.
49 The High Museum of Art (colloquially ‘The High’), located in Atlanta, is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. Located on Peachtree Street in Midtown, the city's arts district, the High is a division of the Woodruff Arts Center. It was founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association and renamed after the High family donated their house as an exhibit space in 1926.
50 Guy Maier (1891-1956) was a noted American pianist, composer, arranger teacher and writer. From about 1919 to 1931, he was a member of the popular two-piano team of Maier and Pattison. He wrote monthly columns in Etude Magazine in which he answered questions from piano teachers.
51 Etude Magazine was a music magazine founded by Theodore Presser in 1883 and ran until 1957.
52 Arthur Ferrante and Louis Teicher where a duo of American piano players, known for their light arrangements of familiar classical pieces, movie soundtracks, and show tunes.
53 Johann Sebastian Bach was a German composer and musician of the Baroque period.
54 Rosalyn Tureck (1914-2003) was an American pianist and harpsichordist who was particularly associated with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.
Tureck. I also entertained her in our house. She is, I think, the world's most renowned Bach player today. I'm mixing things up here with regard to the time element.

**Margery:** That's all right. We can always go back and catch up.

**Esther:** Yes. I would like to tell you that it was strange how my interests shifted at this time. I was known as a musician. People in the community knew that I played. They would call me about different things. Then after I was on radio, they would call me about different things, even where to buy a piano or what kind of piano. It was always in my life. I kept the two pianos, the dual pianos. When we moved to a large house, we had it built so that there was plenty of room for the two pianos. My neighbor right across the street was a very fine pianist. She came over and asked me if she could play with me because she had a sister who used to do dual piano. We gave one concert for . . . I think it was for Brandeis [University National Women’s Committee] . . . at the [High Museum of Art]. So I played with her for a while. But Harriet . . . the girl that I played with at first . . . she dropped out on account of arthritis . . . she had it in a bad form. Today she is semi-invalid. She's been in a wheelchair for a long time now. But mine attacked my fingers and my toes, strangely. I had it in other parts, but I just lost the tactile sense and I couldn't stretch anymore. I just didn't feel secure. I knew that I wouldn't play anymore. I taught my granddaughter, who was a very good pianist. I taught for a couple of years, as a matter of fact, because I had taken pedagogy, and I wanted to be sure that I used it for a while. I never did have a really talented student. One day I had a student who simply never perfected any piece in the couple of years that I taught. First I would put a green pencil mark. Then I would put a purple pencil mark. Finally, I decided that she was just wasting her time. It was foolish probably, but I told her [mother] that she was wasting her time, the child's time, and her money, that perhaps [the child] would do better if she studied dancing or maybe took up a sport. That mother never spoke to me again. So I found out something. You cannot tell any parent the truth about their children. I was careful after that. Whenever I could drop someone that I thought was just wasting his time or her time because my class was small, very small. I somehow or other managed to find a reason. Little by little I weeded out until I just had just a few pupils. One of them did go on to Juilliard and became quite a good pianist . . . married very soon after. She was not Orthodox. She married an Orthodox man. They had one child after another. She dropped her music completely. That made me feel that teaching music was not for
me. I put a great deal of energy into it. I really liked to teach. But if you don't have a talented student, I think it's a waste of time.

**Margery:** When your talented student disappoints you, it's probably very frustrating,

**Esther:** Yes. I had a very close friend who didn't agree with me at all. That was the only thing we always disagreed on. She said, “It's good training. It’s good discipline. No matter how badly they do it, it's still good for them to take lessons.” I said, “Let somebody else teach them.”

**Margery:** You charged for these lessons?

**Esther:** Yes.

**Margery:** What did you do with that money? How did you . . .

**Esther:** My husband said for every dollar I made, he had to pay 50 cents or 70 cents in taxes. We laughed about it all the time. But I believed in that little slogan you often hear, “You get what you pay for.” I knew that if I did this for free that it would not be good. So I always gave away the money. But I didn't make enough to talk about, really.

**Margery:** We're close to the end of the tape. I think we're at a good stopping place, so if we can say good-bye.

**Esther:** The main part of my story is about Planned Parenthood.

**Margery:** Can we save that until next time?

**Esther:** Yes, surely.

<End of Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1 >

**Margery:** This is the second interview with Esther Taylor at her home on July 30, 1986. It's for the American Jewish Committee and the Council of Jewish Women’s Oral History Project, Jewish Women of Achievement. Margery Diamond [is the] interviewer. Esther, I know you've got something else you want to say today. You’ve got it all written down, so we're going to hear it and ask you some questions along the way.

**Esther:** That's fine. I'm glad to see you today again. There were a few things I wanted to say when you left, because these were some intervening years. I thought it was important to say a little bit about my own personal health because during the first three decades of marriage I had two serious surgical operations. But I recovered quickly and was in general good health. But in the Fifties I developed two physical handicaps: degenerated vertebrae in the neck and
osteoarthritis in the fingers and the toes. What it means . . . when you're a pianist and you can't use your fingers . . . not only do they hurt, but the tactile sense is lost.

**Margery:** That must have been devastating.

**Esther:** It was. By this time, my original partner, who was Harriet Hirsch, and was well-known in Atlanta in the musical community, had already had rheumatoid arthritis, and she couldn't play. I continued playing, less often, with another pianist. I also continued some projects with the Music Club that I spoke about before. Another thing which gave me a great deal of pleasure was that I taught my granddaughter, who in two years played a recital in our living room which included the first movement of the Mozart *Concerto.*[^55] I played the other part, the orchestral part, on the other piano.

**Margery:** I know you were proud.

**Esther:** As a matter of fact, she is playing to this day. She’s now in her early thirties . . . [she] became, I thought, a pretty good musician. Almost every summer, starting quite a few years ago, when most of the organizations are not having their regular meetings . . . I know there's always some planning sessions, but they don't have their regular meetings . . . I would travel, sometimes with my husband if he wanted to go and if he was free . . . at other times with a friend. I took trips which included parts of every country except Australia.

**Margery:** Did you plan these trips all by yourself?

**Esther:** Yes, I did.

**Margery:** [You] told other people where they were going, or how did that work?

**Esther:** No. In some cases, I traveled with another person, but it was always a planned trip. When I went with my husband . . . we made two trips to Israel. One was with a group and one we went on our own, where we flew from one place to the next. We did it different ways.

**Margery:** I want to interrupt you one minute because that reminds me about something that I wanted to ask you. You mentioned that when you went to Juilliard for the summers that your husband would come up and join you, and then you would take trips from there. What were some of those trips like?

**Esther:** Those were part of those that I said when I went to almost every part of the world. We covered some of North America, too. When I was at Juilliard, we took trips from there. One year I was in Canada, where I was studying French. We went up the St. Lawrence River . . . then

[^55]: Mozart wrote 27 concertos for piano and orchestra.
another time to Alaska. So whenever I was at a place that was en route to some other place that we could go, we did that. But the long trips that we made... really what I consider the big trips were to the Near East, to the Far East, to Africa. Yes, that was an important trip. My husband wouldn't go there. The [Caribbean islands]... south of the United States, and then to South America.

**Margery:** You said your husband wouldn't go to Africa. Do you know what his reasons were?

**Esther:** Yes. For one thing, he just didn't care about seeing the animals and the countryside and the kinds of the things that you go to see Africa for. I was very interested. I've always been interested in the overpopulation question and also the Negro question. I just wanted to see what it was like.

**Margery:** What did you see there that affected your life dramatically?

**Esther:** The same thing that I think I will talk about a little later because of other developments, shall I say. I had been discussing the population explosion for a long time with a friend who lives in New York. She was a devoted volunteer of Planned Parenthood and an ardent feminist... with emphasis on family planning. She was very disappointed that a large city like Atlanta didn't have a Planned Parenthood affiliate. She encouraged me over and over again, every time I went to New York and saw her, to initiate one. She gave me brochures and some scientific pamphlets.

**Margery:** Is her name important in Planned Parenthood?

**Esther:** No, not at all, because New York is a tremendous city and she was just one of many. New York is where it started and where the most... not only the important affiliates are... but even abortion clinics in New York... also a very large center where they do work for infertile women. It's a very important part of their work there. They were the ones who started the insemination and all of the new procedures with regard to helping infertile women have children.

**Margery:** This is rather a personal question. I'm going to ask you, knowing that it's personal. I know you just had one child. Was infertility something that affected your life?

**Esther:** No. I had a hysterectomy.

**Margery:** So that was...

**Esther:** That was it.

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56 Planned Parenthood is a non-profit that provides reproductive, maternal, and child health services, including cancer screening, HIV screening, contraception, and abortion.
Margery: That was permanent?

Esther: Yes. That was it. That was one of those pieces of surgery that I told you about. I want to go back to her [though] because she really was very important . . . writing to me in between times and sending me the literature, as I told you. I really became so interested. But I just didn't think I would be successful at all with starting something that others had tried to start here and had no success at all. I didn't think I knew enough people. Also I knew it took a lot of money. I just waited. Finally, I think it was in the very early Sixties, I discussed the matter with Herbert. He, like the others, said it would be extremely difficult and possibly he thought it was just an idea of mine and that I really couldn't put it over. But he did say if I was determined to try, he would supply the seed money to begin it.

Margery: That's quite supportive.

Esther: That's all I needed. So I wrote to National Planned Parenthood and asked if they expected to send a representative or director for the South, which was still completely undeveloped with regard to family planning. When and if they did, I told them I would initiate the program and I would have the seed money and get the volunteers. I would devote all of my energies to establishing an affiliate. I realized that meant that I would have to give up some other things, but I was really obsessed with the idea. They responded quickly, and they asked me to . . . I think they said to take a few first steps. I've forgotten exactly what they said.

Margery: You sounded like you were ready to start the whole thing in finished form.

Esther: Because you see they have to give you permission to open a Planned Parenthood. [They] give you a great many restrictions and requirements. From the library, the first thing I did was to find the names of all the women's organizations which had service-type organizations. I didn't include the garden club groups and women's church groups. I wrote what I considered was a pretty good letter which I confess was written in the style of a mystery story. I asked them to come to a meeting—I think I called it a ‘mini-lunch’—to hear something extraordinary, very new and unusual. I thought that might bring them. To my surprise, about 40 women showed up. I really didn't expect that many.

Margery: Did they know . . .

Esther: They didn't know.

Margery: . . . that it was for Planned Parenthood?
Esther: No, they had no idea. It was just a personal invitation. Some were not the presidents . . . some that they appointed to come in their place. The man who came down . . .

Margery: Let me stop you one minute. Who were some of the organizations that were represented among those 40 women?

Esther: The organizations . . . as I said, I took the names from the library. They were service organizations like the Girl Scouts [of America] and that sort of thing . . . everything where girls or women were involved. We didn't have battered women's associations in those days, but there were enough. By the way, there were some church women's groups, the members of which I knew. I had already spoken to them.

Margery: Were they also black and white?

Esther: They were mostly all white. For instance, one of the people who last year gave us $500 was an ex-president of the Music Club. She said, “I'll help you. I can give you the name of a doctor who will help you a great deal.” Incidentally—I think I have to put this in—that same doctor became the national president of the Gynecological Association of the United States. It was either last year or the year before. Her name is Luella Klein, and she is the head of the gynecology department at Emory. That was the name of the person that she gave me. She said, “I'm sure that she will be of help to you.” She came on the board. She went with me to see . . . let me go back to the 40 women.

Margery: Go back to the 40 women.

Esther: Yes. The man that came down was Russell Richardson . . . they expected that if this got started that they would open up an office and start trying to get some affiliates in the Southeast . . . when he got through with his speech, we had a show of hands as to whether they agreed that we needed a Planned Parenthood in Atlanta. I think it was unanimous. They didn't promise anything, but they agreed that we needed to have it. There were a few people there that I knew. I thought that I could depend on them to be volunteers. Do you know that it was amazing how few people even had heard of Planned Parenthood in Atlanta? I had friends who were interested in social service of all kinds . . . members of the [National] Council of Jewish

57 Founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Lowe, Girl Scouts of America is a youth organization that aims to empower girls and help teach values such as honesty, fairness, courage, compassion, character, and citizenship through various activities. Membership is organized by grade level.
58 Dr. Luella Klein is the director of maternal and infant care at Emory University School of Medicine.
Women. They’re certainly people who have had good backgrounds. They’ve gone to college, and most of them know what's going on. Very few of them were aware of it. They were, for the most part, at that time, mostly Atlanta people. They had not started coming in in droves from New York and Chicago [Illinois] and all the other places.

Margery: Why do you think Atlanta was so unaware of Planned Parenthood?

Esther: The whole South was backward in this region mainly I think because of the doctors. Many of the gynecologists, especially, would feel that the patients would go to Planned Parenthood and they would lose their patients, not realizing that there were thousands of people out there who never went to a doctor, who didn't have the money to go to a doctor and pay even those fees, which were much less than they are today. Most of who had never even gone to a doctor before they conceived or even when they had their babies. They went to Grady Hospital, which is a charity organization. To get into Grady, you have to have a card. Many times you have to wait nearly a whole day before you're seen, and it's very complicated. So those even who wanted to go, didn't, because they couldn't get off from work. It was a complicated situation then. Grady Hospital was not as well organized with regard to their funding then as it is now. It was not nearly as large, and didn't have all the accommodations it has now. Now Grady Hospital has a family planning department. But at that time, it just simply wasn't known, and it wasn't advertised in any way. As a matter of fact, I went to see different people. I'll tell you all of the people that I went to . . . one of them was the county director of health. His name was Dr. Hackney [sp]. He was the only one who gave me a negative answer. Now, he was opposed to giving family planning advice in the county hospital. But the truth of the matter was [that] nobody knew it, and the only people who came to those county hospitals . . . I think there were something like 12 in the city . . . came for the social diseases, gonorrhea and so forth, or for tuberculosis or lung examinations. I never heard of anybody who went to the clinic for family planning. I doubt if they even had a person for gynecology in those departments. So when I went to see him, I didn't get an answer at all, even though I knew Dr. Hackney and he used to send prescriptions to my husband when he was his druggist. On the other hand, I went to see the

59 An organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.

60 Grady Memorial Hospital is the largest hospital in Georgia, and the fifth-largest public hospital in the United States. It is considered one of premier public hospitals in the Southeast.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Governor [of Georgia] with this doctor, Dr. Luella Klein, because I felt I needed somebody who was professional. I was still ignorant on that part.

**Margery:** Who had the right vocabulary?

**Esther:** Right. I went to see the mayor [and] the county commissioners. There were three county commissioners. The editor of the *Journal-Constitution*. Who else did I go to see? One of the legislators who later became Governor at the Capitol, and who was absolutely for us and then helped us when we began to have more clinics. All of these people...

**Margery:** Who would that be?

**Esther:** All that they did was to be very courteous. They didn't promise anything. The only thing that I can say about it was that they knew that the time had come, and if there was anything at all that we could do to show how important it was, show some results, that eventually they would really be with us. The editor of the *Journal-Constitution* told us that as soon as we had some news... if we really started a Planned Parenthood affiliate and we had offices... that if it was news, he would certainly publish it. So that was what I guess they called ‘getting started.’

**Margery:** That was a break.

**Esther:** Then I didn't know exactly what the next step was. Mr. Richardson was here to give me some advice, because I was really unaware of exactly the things I should do. The idea of having the women here was my first idea. Then I thought we really ought to send out some letters to the general public. How do you get names to the general public? I didn't really know what to do. I asked around, and I was able to get certain groups... I amassed a list of 50,000 names... 15 volunteers who promised to come here twice every week... to come to my house. I gave them a little mini-lunch in our house... had the letter printed. One of our Jewish entrepreneurs who had a paper factory, the Goldwassers, gave me the stationery so I wasn't using up any money. I was trying to save that money as much as possible, so all we had to pay was for the printing. The girls stuffed the envelopes, addressed the envelopes, put on the stamps and then we mailed them.

**Margery:** Mailing that many letters is very expensive.

**Esther:** It wasn't really. It was amazing how we kept the cost down. Actually it was just the printing and the stamps. In those days, it wasn't 22 cents. It was 5 cents a letter. Anyhow, I

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61 Esther started Planned Parenthood in 1965. Carl E. Sanders was Governor from 1963-1967.
62 The Mayor of Atlanta was Ivan Allen, Jr. from 1962-1970.
wanted to tell you this because I myself, each time something happened, I thought, “What's the next step?” I really didn't know which way to go. Little by little . . . I was reading and I was corresponding with a few people in New York, and asking questions . . . it's surprising, no matter who you talk to, you can always find out something. I heard from one of my black friends that the Negro Theological . . . Seminary had three or four buildings, nice buildings, in a certain part of town where there were many low-income people, mostly all black, and that there was a great possibility that we could get them to give us some free space in one of their buildings. It was no trouble at all.

**Margery:** That's exciting.

**Esther:** They said not only would they give us the space, but they would put in . . . the plumbing. We had to have a dressing room and a few things like that. They gave us a whole floor. So all we had to buy were the things that the doctor had to use . . . the medical implements and the examining table. We started with that . . . with the free rent, and we had flyers printed. We engaged two black women for a very nominal cost—who were ex-teachers . . . so they believed in this. They were almost working . . . I would say for half of what they would normally get . . . to go to all of the houses in the neighborhood with these flyers and let them know that we had a Planned Parenthood family planning clinic where they would have pap tests, pap smears, breast examinations, a person to interview them to find out what . . . first to show a picture of the various kinds of contraceptives . . . then for the doctor to determine which contraceptive would be best for them. If possible, they tried to get the husband in to listen. Sometimes the husbands were there. They were unemployed or perhaps were gone. They did this for a number of weeks. By the time the place was ready . . . by the way, three of the walls were brick inside and it was drab. So I bought a few very nice paintings by a local painter. One was a beautiful Negro girl, and another was a flower picture. We did everything we could to make the place look inviting, because it was not really the kind of attractive place, I would think, for a person to come. But I think we did a pretty good job. By the time it was open, people started coming in immediately. We had it [at] night because we knew that most of those women worked in the daytime. If their husband was at home with the children or if they didn't have [to] lose a day's work, they'd be more likely to come. It just simply worked out fine. We were very much encouraged. Then the biggest job came next, and that was to raise money. We certainly weren't satisfied with just one

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63 This might possibly be Gammon Theological Seminary.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
location in one place. That was one thing I really detested. But I was lucky in another respect. I had called the recent president... she had just gone out of office of the Junior League.64 I asked her to lunch. In fact, she came with another person. The other person wasn't too interested, but she was very interested—[she] said that she would help us. I and she were going out—she knew a lot of wealthy people. I knew some of my husband's business friends and some few other people that we had already given funds to and I felt I could go to them. Between us, we raised nearly $20,000. I didn't believe it. In fact, a few people that I went to that I expected $1,000 [from], I got $100. A few that I went to that I expected $100, gave $1,000. It was unbelievable how I never seemed to guess. I could tell you some really interesting stories about one in particular. I'm not going to because it really doesn't matter.

Margery: That's the story I want to hear, but don't give me any names. Tell me the story.

Esther: The story is one [that]... a man who is the executor of a big estate, one of the biggest groups of stores here in Atlanta... My son had... who is a civil engineer... made extraordinary plans for a bomb shelter under his house. At that time, everybody was talking about the possibility of war. This man heard about it, and he came to my son. He wondered if he would let him have the plans and help him to get it done on his house. I don't know whether he did the right thing or not, but he did. He not only gave him the plans, but he helped him work it out and helped him build the shelter. When I asked him if I could come to see him, I got an effusive answer, “Yes, Mrs. Taylor, I'd be so glad to see you.” When I came in, he shook hands and he said he was so glad I came. I told him the story, and he wrote me out a check for $100. He could easily have given me $10,000. So I say you can never tell when you ask a person what the response will be.

Margery: Tell me about the time you got $1,000 when you hardly expected anything.

Esther: I think that's really too long, because I really want to tell you...

Margery: We've got all the time in the world. Tell me that one.

Esther: I think really that's so unimportant. I think the most important thing is that we raised enough money to open up two new clinics. Naturally, we engaged our doctors by the hour. We didn't have one supervisor because they were in different places. So we had to have doctors who would come just certain hours. That was difficult because we always had to send supplies to

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64 Junior Leagues are education and charitable women's organizations aimed at improving their communities through voluntarism and building their members' civil leadership skills through training. It is an international organization with 293 different chapters. The Junior League of Atlanta was founded in 1916.
these places. Naturally, we could be open just certain hours. Our hope was that eventually we would have a downtown clinic . . . one large clinic . . . because everybody, even the poorest of the poor, had to come downtown once in a while. If they were on pills, we gave those pills for three months. We knew that if we could ever get to a downtown clinic . . . pay the rents . . . then we wouldn't have to have these short-hour clinics all over town. Unfortunately, it took a while to do that. Downtown rents in a building in the proper location where there's the conveyance . . . at that time, we didn't have MARTA. We had quite a number of problems . . . but we finally did get a downtown location. We had a full-time clinician . . . a doctor . . . a full time RN [Registered Nurse], and an assistant and a social worker. I suppose the best way to finish this story because it would take me so long to tell you the things that one had to do . . . for example, I knew that the wealth in this city was not involved at all. I first began by asking a friend who was a member of the Rotary Club to see if I could speak there. Since he was rather important there, and they always look for speakers for their monthly meeting . . . they rarely had a woman . . . most of the time they were businessmen. But somehow or other, I got into this club. I made the speech, and surprise of surprise, they called another Rotary Club and said, “If you want a good speaker about a new subject, I can recommend one.” Before I knew it, I was speaking to Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs. I got a number of invitations. Then I thought, “Why don't I go to the Jewish women's organizations.” I went to a few of the church women's groups. That wasn't so good. I could see why. They had their own mission; they had their own needs. They were afraid that some of their volunteers would be lost. I could see that I didn't get the responses there. So there were only three that I went to. I was able to get an invitation to the Council of Christian Churches meeting. But they told me only 10 minutes, and my speech was 30 minutes.

Margery: What did you do?

Esther: I took it because I thought they were important. I can't say that they paid a great deal of attention. It was very different. It was a completely differently atmosphere in that group from

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65 MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) is the principal rapid-transit system in Atlanta and the eighth-largest in the United States. It was formed in 1971 strictly as a bus system, and it now has 48 miles of rail track and 38 train stations.
66 International service organization whose stated purpose is to bring together business and professional leaders in order to provide humanitarian services, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world. It is a secular organization with about 1.2 million members worldwide.
67 Kiwanis International is an international, coeducational service club founded in 1915. It is a volunteer-led organization dedicated to building better communities, children and youth.
68 The American Council of Christian Churches was founded in 1941.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
all of the other groups. They were so relaxed. I couldn't really tell that they were listening. But in 10 minutes you can't say what you can say in 30 minutes. You can't really develop the subject. But I was glad to get it. After that, as I said, I thought I would try some of the women's organizations. I started with the [National] Council [of Jewish Women]. I called and asked for it. . . . said I wanted to be the speaker for the occasion. I figured if I was good enough for Rotary Club, I ought to be good enough for Council of Jewish Women. The president said, “I'm sorry, but you can have five minutes.” I said, “Thank you, but no thank you. I couldn't possibly tell the story I had to tell in five minutes.” From that time on, I never asked any Jewish women's organizations because I understood that they needed as many volunteers and they had a specific mission. This really didn't belong in that kind of an organization . . . [I realized] that I would have to do this person by person by person. So I never spoke to any of the Jewish organizations. But I continued to go to the meetings . . . one meeting for each group during the year . . . usually the annual meeting. I continued to support them, every year sending a little more so that I could make up for the fact that I really wasn't doing anything for the Jewish organizations. But as I said before, I just felt that this was the most important thing that I had ever done because no one else was willing to do it. I suppose that's important. During these years, it was interesting . . . people were coming in from all parts of the country. The South, especially Atlanta, was beginning to get people from various parts. The women who were coming in were all well-educated. Council had what I think was probably . . . some of the best minds of young women in Atlanta, just like the League of Women Voters. They had a small group. There were so many fine young people . . . to take over. I thought, “I'm played out. They have much better ideas. I'm no good there. There's no reason for me to come to meetings. I might as well go where there isn't someone.” This was my whole philosophy. I just thought, “I'm not needed.” As a matter of fact, I didn't even think that the other few elderly persons had anything to contribute. We were all getting to be in our sixties. We couldn't get around as well. Some of them couldn't drive—they had to be taken. I don't think these young people would pay very much attention to their ideas or their experience, because everything was new and different. I don't really think that a person who becomes . . . especially because of the changes in these last 50 years . . . that because a person has had a lot of experience, it doesn't mean too much. First of all, memory isn't very good about important things.

Margery: I'm going to need to interrupt you because our tape is almost at a stopping point. I
would love to take the next side of the tape when we finish this to talk about some of the changes and some of the differences that you see as to then and as to now. So I'm going to put a stop here. We’ll take a break and be back in just a minute.

**Esther:** That will be fine.

<End of Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

**Margery:** You just have so much wonderful information to share that we're going to just enjoy the next little 45 minutes. Then I'll come back, so don't worry about not getting to everything. Just relax and enjoy.

**Esther:** It’s much too detailed. In fact, I think I’ve spoken about myself too much already.

**Margery:** No, no. We were talking about Planned Parenthood and about your involvement on your fundraising effort.

**Esther:** After the first time that we moved downtown, the space became too small. We had to take a part of the second floor, and we were getting more and more clients or patients. I really think they're patients rather than clients. We needed desperately to have a big place. The United Way<sup>69</sup> told us that if we would come into their building, they would give us the space at a very nominal sum . . . the same amount that we were paying in the other place, but we would have to make all of the improvements, everything . . . the walls between all of the rooms, the air-conditioning, the plumbing, the painting, everything. That would take a good deal of money. So by this time, we had what I thought was a genius on our board who had made applications to the United States government for funding. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to move into the first downtown building. We got money from the Title X<sup>70</sup> and Title XX<sup>71</sup>. All of this was designated for family planning, health and contraceptive services, nothing for outreach and advocacy. For that reason, we had to go out to get members and some private contributors . . . private donors. I didn't know exactly who to ask to do that. That is a job that was sort of meant

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69 United Way is a national system of volunteers, contributors and local charities helping people in their own communities.

70 Title X, officially Public Law 91-572, was enacted under President Richard Nixon in 1970. It is the only existing federal grants program that is complete devoted to providing comprehensive family planning and other related preventive health services to individuals. It grants funds to a network of community-based clinics that provide contraceptive services, related counseling, and other preventive healthcare services.

71 Title XX is a Social Security law uses grants to encourage each state to furnish services directed at the goals of economic self-sufficiency, preventing neglect and exploitation of children and adults unable to protect their own interests, and providing for community- and home-based care.
for me because at this time I was not driving and I was at home a great deal. I thought probably I knew more people because I had so many people coming to the recitals, so that they knew me even if I didn't know them . . . that perhaps I would be the best person to try to get donors and some private people for members. The office had some other monies [so] that they were able to send certain kinds of literature. But for this kind of thing, they just didn't have any other funds. Every year now for some years, I didn't consider myself the chairman of membership. I just . . . on my own, with my own stationery and my own handwritten letter . . . which I had in some cases Xeroxed [copied], I sent letters to sometimes 50, sometimes 100 people. I got very good results. I would say that I'd gotten at least 300 [to] 350 members in the last four, five, six years, who regularly send in their membership checks. Naturally, out of those we have gotten some who have foundations, so that we've gotten large amounts. Since the word gets around, we've had some people give us stocks. Last year—I think it was last year or maybe the year before—a lady gave us stocks that valued I think something up to about $8,000. We had printed . . . made a computer arrangement . . . had the forms printed with 100 questions, all of which had to do with health and services for women. All they have to do is to call a telephone number and they get a computer answer. They can call as many times as they wish and as often as they wish.

Margery: Questions about family planning?

Esther: Any kind of health question. I'll have to show it to you so that you can see. There are 100 questions. It has to do with almost any phase of health. It even asks, “Must I see a doctor for this?” or “What happens when the pill gives me a certain effect?” The answer is there.

Margery: So those pamphlets are distributed?

Esther: Those pamphlets are distributed to doctors' offices . . . to the many associations that we have on this other list that we have printed which shows how many organizations we have sent letters and this [unintelligible] to. There's something like . . . I wish I had a copy of it, but I left them all at the office yesterday because I just sent out some letters. I think there were altogether . . . it included everything you can think of . . . the prisons, the battered women's groups . . . even for that matter, some of the senior citizens' groups because, after all, they have children and grandchildren and they needed to sometimes answer questions. It's something I would say that . . . just guessing [as] I didn't count them . . . I would say about 75 different groups . . . 50 to 75 groups that we have had contacts, sent speakers, movies and/or literature. These are pamphlets which I am putting in this week with a letter in which I'm not asking
directly for membership. I'm simply explaining what I think is necessary to explain. “This is a short message with information which you will not find in the newspaper. The large downtown Planned Parenthood Clinic which provides contraceptives and varied health services in metro Atlanta is funded by the United States government and the United Way. Advocacy, information and education is funded by memberships and private donors. I'm enclosing two samples to indicate a few of ways we do outreach and advocacy. It is vital in order to reach those who cannot afford private MD [medical] services. Later, I shall send you a membership envelope and you can decide if these services merit your support. With thanks, I am . . .” Then next week . . . these letters have been mailed . . . next week, again with my name on the back . . . not Planned Parenthood because they're liable to throw it in the wastebasket as they do with dozens of other things that they get . . . my name is on the envelope . . . I have my own stationery . . . they will get an envelope with an enclosed Planned Parenthood envelope in which the dues are mentioned. On the outside our logo is, “Every child should be a wanted child.” Then the dues . . . starting from $35 down to $15 or any amount that they can give. I usually get . . . it depends. Some years, especially at the beginning when I knew most of the people to whom I wrote, I got something like 60 percent . . .

Margery: That's phenomenal.

Esther: . . . which is phenomenal. Then as time went on . . . after about two or three years . . . I began to write to people that I didn't know so closely but that knew me. I began to get about 40 percent. Last year, I got only 25 percent.

Margery: But that's still an incredible percentage when you're soliciting for funds.

Esther: So this year I decided, instead of asking straight out, I'm writing mostly to people that are not only middle-upper class, but some very wealthy people whose names I've gotten off of the brochures that I get from the organizations that we support. I'm trying my best to get to the president, the treasurer, the secretary, and the people who know that we support them. In this way, it may be that there will be of a little more interest because we're supporting them and I think that they should support us.

Margery: I think that's fair.

Esther: So this is about all I want to say about Planned Parenthood . . . except for one thing, and that is that my husband has been really the greatest help because when we were ready to move into the large United Way building, we got the estimates for something like $90,000. My

Transcript IC: OHC10715
husband, in his business, had a man who does his work. We got the work done for a little less than $80,000. Then we got . . . an estimate for drawing the plans for $6,000. My husband got his architect to do it on weekends. He was very happy to get $1,000, so we gave him the $1,000. We saved that $6,000. My husband worked with the contractor. He not only did all of the work but there were extra things like shelves and putting up the draperies and many things like that . . . he did all of that extra. So he really has been a great help all the way through.

Margery: He's been your major contributor.

Esther: Yes, he is the major contributor, there's no doubt about it. I don't want to go into this too far, but I would like to say a few words about the most recent years, in which I think . . .

Margery: Can we stop one minute before we do that?

Esther: Yes.

Margery: Because I have a few questions about the Planned Parenthood years. I spoke to one of your grandchildren, who happens to be a friend of my son's. He said, “Ask Grandma about the time that she spoke to a group of women and held in her hands something that was a contraceptive that they had never seen and didn't know what it was.” I want you to tell me about that time. Do you remember?

Esther: That was a joke that I started one of my speeches with. There was a baby who was born, and it didn't cry. The doctor slapped him as usual, and he still didn't cry. He laughed. The doctor says, “This is strange. I've never seen a baby born that laughed.” He tried to prize the baby's hand open. He got it open. What do you suppose he found? The pill. I guess that's what she must have meant. That's the only story I can think of.

Margery: She said something about a diaphragm.

Esther: I don't remember that one. I always had to have some something . . . once I taught a class years ago for Hadassah in public speaking. I had a few . . . I guess you'd call them little beginning statements . . . something to get the listeners interested and put in a good mood. You nearly always have to say something personal. You always have to thank them. Then especially if you have a good joke that has something to do with what you're going to talk about, it's a good idea for speechmaking. So that's one of those that I used. When I spoke to a very . . . what I call important Rotary Club . . . I by that time was gray-headed. I became gray quite early. What I said then was that after I got a very beautiful introduction . . . I said that I felt that it was particularly gratifying to me to think that a group of young, good-looking men would listen to a lady who
had gray hair. It’s something that is . . . just almost anything to get started. I don't know why it is, but I think this must have been the thing that appealed to my grandson. I also wanted to say a little bit about making speeches. We have had various speakers for our annual meetings, and for the most part we have not had to pay them. One of them that I was able to get and felt that we were lucky to get was ‘Dear Abby.’ For Dear Abby, we thought we would really . . . since she didn't charge anything, only her expenses to come here . . . Colony House was just opening. It was very popular and was the first large building of that kind at that time. It's been some years ago. I have a picture here with a letter to us in one of those books that you saw.

**Margery:** You have a letter from Dear Abby?

**Esther:** Yes, “Dear Esther” with her picture on it. It's a very flattering letter. Anyhow, we had a dinner for our board before. Then we had a reception in the grand ballroom downstairs with the most exquisite pastries. We charged the great amount of $3 to come to that. It was not a very large audience. We did have some important people there, like the editor of the [Journal-Constitution] because the paper carries ‘Dear Abby.’ What shall I say about her? You've seen her, I'm sure, nearly everybody has seen her on television. I introduced her . . . I don't recall exactly . . . but she has . . . I think something like 1,000 [syndications] . . . if I'm not mistaken. It's in papers all over the world. I thought that she would just bring the house down . . . that she would have people all over the city. But her picture got in the paper the next day. This has happened to us over and over again in newspapers. If we ever get something in, it comes in the day after. We send it in in plenty of time. I don't know whether it's deliberate or whether it just happens that they just don't get it in in time. That is one of our disappointments . . . that we do not get the kind of public relations that we should. We have had some things on television. I myself was able to get a few things on television, but they would come in off hours . . . times when very few people were listening. Thus far, even though we think we've gone a long ways and we have as many patients as we can take care of . . . our publicity is poor. I still think that the only way that we will get members is writing to each one. If every member on our board were to do what I'm doing, we would have a real large roster of membership. We could get all the money we needed for advocacy.

**Margery:** How has the response of the black community been to your effort?

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72 “Dear Abby” is the name of a newspaper and radio advice column founded in 1956 by Pauline Phillips, under the pen name Abigail Van Buren. In 1987 it was still being carried on by her daughter, Jeanne Phillips.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Esther: I went to see one of the black millionaires . . . two, as a matter of fact. One started in those years doing concrete work, then started developing big developments and buildings and so forth. He’s a multimillionaire. He was then. He was one of the first that I went to. He did not respond at all. Then I went to a lady, who also was known to be a millionairess, who had a series of . . . I can't think of the word . . . where they take dead people. What do you call that?

Margery: Funeral homes?

Esther: Funeral homes, yes. I guess that's something I don't want to think about.

Margery: No, none of us do.

Esther: She was in a wheelchair. She came to a luncheon for Mrs. Pillsbury of the Pillsbury Companies,\(^73\) with somebody bringing her in a wheelchair. Mrs. Pillsbury spoke. When she came, we certainly expected her to be a donor. We never got anything from her. So we really have given up on asking the black community to do very much for us. We have just a few who are in the middle class . . . people like teachers, people who are working in some social service organizations. We employ . . . practically our whole staff is black. At one time, we had a black president. Today, we have a Jewish rabbi who is the president. Rabbi [Phillip] Kranz\(^74\) is now our president. He came from Baltimore [Maryland], where he was very active with Planned Parenthood. In the national, I would say that three-fourths of the people there are Jewish people. In most of the large cities, Jewish people take a really active part in Planned Parenthood. In Atlanta, for some reason . . . I guess I haven't really . . . developed it in the right way . . . but I always felt as though the groups here were so involved and felt that they had to do the things for the Jewish causes and issues, and that that came first . . . that I would be maybe imposing on them. So I didn’t ask Rabbi Kranz. He was on our board. When his name was brought up as president, no one could have been more surprised. I didn't know what his past was. I didn't know that he had been president. He was not vocal at all during the board meetings . . . [he] said very little. But someone there found out about him, and he was willing to take the presidency. He’s making a good president, but he isn't doing any proselytizing or anything like that. I don't think he's asked any of his members. I don't think he would do that. But just the very fact that he took the presidency was good enough for me. I’m glad to know . . .

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\(^73\) Pillsbury Company is a brand name company that makes dry, refrigerated, and frozen baking products. It was founded in 1872 and was the first company in the United States to use steel rollers to process grain.

\(^74\) Rabbi Phillip Kranz was the senior rabbi at Temple Sinai from 1980 until 2006. Prior to that, he served as rabbi of the Chicago Sinai Congregation. He continues to serve the Atlanta Jewish community today.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Margery: That's a strong statement.

Esther: ... that we have one person in Atlanta other than myself that's Jewish that has been interested. The other one was a man who married a non-Jewess. His mother was a non-Jew but his father was a Jew. His name was Dr. Levine [sp]. He was largely responsible for the applications for money, because he was a genius really . . . not only a bright mind, but he was capable and worked with us until his death by cancer about . . . three or four years ago. Herbert and I gave Planned Parenthood $1,000 in his memory so that they would put his name on our boardroom so he could be remembered, because he was really responsible for those applications. It's not easy to get that kind of money from the United States government, especially in those days.

Margery: Right. It takes the know-how.

Esther: You have to know how, and he did it for us. Once when I was supposed to go up and see Senator [Herman] Talmadge, I didn't feel adequate to the job. I knew if Dr. Levine [sp] went up, he would make a much better presentation. I asked him if he would go in my place, and he did. He was a great loss to us. But another thing is that the past, presidents in every case have not been active, and that's unusual. We have had just a very few . . . a few have passed. Don't forget that from 1964 to 1986—that's 22 years—some of those people were already in their sixties then, so they are either in nursing homes, or they've passed. So now we have a completely new board. They're mostly young people. There again, I feel the same as I did for the Jewish organizations. They are young people. They're going to do it their way. There are new ways. I have very little to say. I go to the meetings, but I'm not really involved in the same way because I think these young people have the best ideas. They take chances which I wouldn't take. They asked somebody to come down here to speak and they'd pay them good money out of this hard money that we raised. I don't believe in that, but they do, and evidently they think it's important. If it passes the board, I don't say anything. So I go to the meetings and once in a while say a word or two, but not much. I would like, if we have the time, to tell you something that is also very personal, but it is important in the sense that I just about three or four years ago realized that I would soon be 80, and my husband would soon be 90. I wanted to do something that would be permanent. We didn't know but that in a very few years we wouldn't be here, and the things that

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75 Herman Talmadge was Governor of Georgia twice but spent most of his public service in the U.S. Senate, serving from 1957 to 1981. He was a Democrat.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
we believed in, the causes that we believed in, might just simply not receive what we think they should receive. Our children have taken a little different course, and that's normal. Our son and daughter-in-law are greatly interested in modern art and our grandchildren also have different interests. We wanted to make sure that these organizations would have something forever. So we decided to do our Last Will and Testament over. They have enough money and good professions to get along fine without our having to leave it to them. We didn't want to . . . specify one organization and leave out another, in case it went out of business or whatever the changes were. So we decided to establish a Foundation and put in a certain amount through the Federation of Jewish Charities, and for the capital to stay there and the interest to be used. We chose 14 organizations: 10 Jewish and four non-Jewish. The four non-Jewish were ones that we always supported. Now, that's besides the regular things that we would always have to do in large amounts like the Jewish drive for the United Jewish Federation and for the [Jewish] Home and for the United Way . . . things of that kind. As long as we're living, we will take care of that. But we weren't sure about these others as far as our children were concerned. So we started this Foundation, and we are also adding to it. In this way, unless our whole world changes . . .

Margery: Which you never know.

Esther: . . . we never know whether it will be . . . because of nature or because of revolution or whatever . . . this will go on permanently. I think that's about the best thing that we can do at this time, because my husband now is losing his hearing. I have a number of . . . they're not very serious physiological changes, but naturally at this age . . . I'm 81 and he's 91. Our time is limited. So we thought that was the best way for us to remain interested while we are living and also do something for the future. That's really about all I can say. I think I've said too much already about myself.

Margery: We've just begun to talk. I've done a lot of listening. I think we've got about 15 minutes or a little more left for today. I think that what I'd like to do is just kind of back up a little bit and ask some things, not in any order, not in any sequence, and not worry about dates, names or places. Let's just talk about some comparisons, some things about what it was like then, a long, long, long time ago, and what those things are like now. One of the things that you mentioned in the first interview was the trip to Washington [D.C.] for the war.

76 The Federation of Jewish Charities was founded in 1911.
77 Probably the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.
78 Now the Breman Jewish Home in Atlanta, Georgia.
Esther: Cause and Cure of War. You mentioned meeting Eleanor Roosevelt . . . that that was the highlight. What were some of the interactions or your feelings that you remember? It doesn't have to be verbatim. What does that bring back?

Esther: I think that Mrs. Roosevelt was one of the greatest women that we have had in this age. She combatted many . . . you could call them weaknesses. First of all, her voice . . . she had a screechy voice when she first started. When she came over the air, it was “Eeeehhh” <mimicking>. It was like a person that really had no background at all. She learned how to use her voice. She was in the forefront of every fine, new movement of the time. I think most people idolized her. When we met her . . . this may sound impossible for so many people . . . after all, this was delegates from the whole United States, and all of us passed [her]. She put her arms around each person as she spoke. She put her hands around your hips and spoke to you personally as though she knew you for 30 seconds or a minute and some even more, if someone had the audacity to ask her questions. I thought to myself, “Here is the most understanding, the warmest personality that I've ever met.” Incidentally, she had rings on her fingers. You know later on how everybody used to wear rings. I thought that was so strange. No big diamonds. They were little tiny . . . maybe a few little rubies, or just a plain gold ring . . . I thought that was so strange for her to have these. So evidently someone had given her these things, and they were just special occasions or something like that. Now, that's a strange thing to say about someone, but she certainly was never considered in the same light that we think of our present Madame President's wife [Nancy Reagan], in her finery and fine clothes and all that. But she still had rings on her fingers, and she was still a female in every sense of the word.

Margery: Do you think that you would compare yourself with Eleanor Roosevelt?

Esther: Heavens no!

Margery: What you've been able to do in our community has certainly been on the forefront of each of these organizations we've talked about.

Esther: No, I wouldn't dare. I wouldn't dare.

Margery: What do you think made her such a great woman?

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79 The National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War was begun in 1924 by nine national women’s organizations. The National Council of Jewish Women was one of the nine founding organizations. Carrie Chapman Catt was their leader. Their purpose was to lobby the United States to join the World Court. The first conference was in Washington, D.C. in January 1925 and thereafter conferences were held annually until 1941, when the sixteenth conference was cancelled due to lack of funds.

80 Nancy Reagan was married to President Ronald Reagan, who served from 1981-1989
Esther: Her feeling for the people [in] need. That was long before the civil rights . . . long before that time. So she didn't express herself on that issue. But the Cause and Cure of War . . . that was right after the Big War [World War I]. Naturally, she was interested in anything that had to do with peace. She was not . . . women's issues hadn't come to the forefront at that time . . . it was much later. Every time she spoke, wherever she went, she received great applause. I think she was greatly loved because everyone felt that she was interested in people, and particularly people in need. I don't know that I felt that way about any other President's wife during my lifetime.

Margery: I want to go back a little bit before that as well, and ask you about the decision to go to Paris [France]. How [did] you make that decision and what [was] life was like then for you?

Esther: I didn't mention to you that I had hay fever quite badly for many years. I was allergic to the grasses and the trees that grow in this area. I had itching of the nose, nose running, eyes running. Every summer I would try to go to some place near here so that Herbert could come on weekends when Mark was little . . . where they didn't have these same trees and grass. Then when Mark was in camp, I was able to go to New York. I didn't have it there at all. There weren't any trees or grass there. That was one of the reasons I kept going. Herbert would always come up in the mid-part of the season. Then at the end we would go somewhere from New York. Paris was a completely different thing. When I gave up the music . . . my best facility was my ears. I loved French. When we were in Israel, I had already had some French. I had taken some French lessons at Emory and some private lessons. When we arrived there, we went to one of the . . . you see what happens to me? . . . I can't think of the word. I use it a thousand times, where they have the social group living.

Margery: Like absorption?

Esther: No.

Margery: Commune?

Esther: It's like a commune, but they call it something else in Hebrew. I know Hebrew, but I just can't think of the word.

Margery: Kibbutz.81

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81 ‘Kibbutz’ means ‘gathering, clustering’ in Hebrew. It is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture. They began as utopian communities that combined socialism and Zionism.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Esther: The *kibbutzim*, yes. I didn't sleep very much last night. You can tell that. We went to a *kibbutz*. They were all Moroccan Jews, and all they could speak was French. We had no one in our group [who] could say a word or could understand them, and they couldn't understand us. I was the one who was able to translate and speak with them. I thought to myself, “Isn't this a great thing, no matter where you go, you can find people who can speak French.” I've had the same experience when I was down in Haiti and various places. French always seemed to be something . . . even when I was in Holland once and I was on the train going to . . . I think from there I went to Warsaw, Poland. I've forgotten because we made three or four trips and we went in different directions. This time, I was alone and on a bus trip. Herbert will not ride a bus. I told him that I wanted to go through Russia. I wanted to see what the whole place was like. Flying from one city to the other doesn't tell you very much about what the country is like. So I started by myself and met the group in Warsaw, Poland. I was on the plane. I was sitting next to a man [who] was going there to teach. What was he going to teach? French. The whole trip, we conversed in French. I began to think [that] I ought to really learn how to speak this language well. The best place is to live in Paris for a while. If you live in a place for six or eight weeks and you have to speak French all the time . . .

Margery: You get a lot of practice.

Esther: That's the way to learn it. Just going to class and getting an hour, it's just not enough. I thought . . . in a city like Paris, I'd already learned . . . I'd been there before . . . that there were no trees and no grass. I said, “I believe it would be a good idea for me to go to Paris. You come in the middle of the season and we'll go somewhere for a long weekend. I can skip class, for four or five days. Then at the end of the season, from there we'll go on to Israel.” I studied French at the Sorbonne. It was interesting. I had many interesting experiences there, but I certainly didn't like Paris for so many reasons. It seemed to me that Parisians hated Americans. They thought that money just grows on the streets here. I don't care who you spoke with, including the people that I was living with, they really thought that all you had to do was just to go out on the streets and pick it up. The lady that I was with . . . I came with a particular kind of raincoat. She said, “When you leave, I'd like for you to leave me that.” When I bought tickets for the theater [I] bought them for her and for her husband. I bought gifts. But when I asked if her son would take me down with my suitcase for a weekend so that I could go take just a short trip for the weekend to the wine country and to see some of the old, old castles . . . the taxis there don't come to your
house. You go to the corner. She said, “He can't leave the house. He is studying for the
baccalauréat.” She wouldn't allow him to go out of the house after all these things. She was
a nice Jewish lady who was working for the Alliance Israélite, even though most of her family
had already intermarried. She still did that. Everybody I met . . . there was no one I met, really,
that seemed to want to do anything for you or seemed to be willing to help you even to find a
place if you asked for a direction.

Margery: No Southern hospitality in Paris?

Esther: It was different from anything I have ever known when I was away from home. Even
in New York [City, New York] if you ask somebody where to go, they'll turn around and say, “It's
two blocks down,” and so forth. It was just a strange experience. One night I tried to get a taxi,
because I had a date to meet somebody at a hotel. Every taxi that I flagged down, after they
stopped at a corner or a light or something, they'd say it was five o'clock, and that's the time they
had to go . . . that was time up. They went to their station at five o'clock. Finally I walked a
number of blocks and I got a bus. When I got on the bus . . . in those days we wore stoles in
French he said, “You have no business being on a bus. You take a taxi,” instead of telling me
how to get to the Ritz Hotel. There were things that you just couldn't believe. Once I was in a
taxi. I didn't know where I was going. I told him where, and he bawled me out because it was
just around the corner a couple of blocks. They have to get in line. Naturally, I took him out of
line to make this short trip so that he couldn't get a good tip. Once, a taxi had an accident [and]
bumped into someone. I was in the taxi. The two drivers began to yell at each other, each one
saying that the other one was in the wrong. I was afraid . . . I didn't know . . . I thought they may
take me to court, like they do here. So I left a little money in [the cab] and I ran. I got out quickly
because I just didn't know whether I would be involved. Later I found out they never go to court.
All they do is just have a long discussion and they go on their way. But just any number of things
happened. So I didn't really enjoy my stay. Finally, I heard from Herbert. His mother was 96
years old. She was getting to be so very weak, it looked like she was not going to last, and he

82 The baccalauréat, also called ‘le bac,’ is an academic qualification exam French students take at the end of their
secondary education. It is required to get your diploma and pursue studies at a university.
83 The Alliance israélite universelle is a Paris-based international Jewish organization founded in 1860 to safeguard
the human rights of Jews around the world.
84 A stole is a long scarf or shawl, often made of fur, women wore around their shoulders to keep warm.
85 Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company is a line of luxury hotels started in Europe and came to North America in 1911.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
was afraid to leave. So I just cut my stay short. I took one week in Spain, since I was already there. [I] didn't know if I would get back . . . and came home.

**Margery:** Did you find traveling alone to be different for a woman?

**Esther:** It was easy in those days. It wasn't like it is today at all. Nothing in those days was like it is today. A woman could travel very easily. All you had to do was to put on gloves and a hat, maybe, and nobody would think of talking with you, no man would speak with you. As a matter of fact, I had a few interesting experiences. One weekend I decided I would go to Bruges, which is just a few hours from Paris where they make these wonderful laces. It's just a different kind of place almost from anything around, in Belgium or anywhere else. The seats on the train, as you know, face each other in Europe, and there was a man across from me . . . very nice-looking man. Naturally I expected that he was French. Facing each other for an hour, it seems so peculiar for us not to say a word. So finally I opened up, and in French I asked him was he a native, did he live in Bruges or in Paris. I suppose he could tell immediately that I was an American. He said, "You can speak English if you like." I thought, "Perhaps he would prefer speaking English." So I told him who I was and where I was from. He says, "Atlanta? I go to Atlanta all the time." He said, "I work for Coca-Cola in their European department. I come to Coca-Cola very often." He says, "Just last week, I was in Mrs. [unintelligible] home where she had a party." I said, "Mrs. [unintelligible]?" . . . [unintelligible]. I was playing piano with [unintelligible] at the time. That was before her husband died. Her husband was one of the vice-presidents in Coca-Cola.

**Margery:** So you met a friend on that train?

**Esther:** Can you imagine? He had just been in Atlanta a week ago, and [unintelligible] had had a party for some of the members of Coca-Cola. When I came back and told her about it, she couldn't believe it. She said, "Imagine. If I had known you were going to be on the same train, why, I would have invited you." Little things like that were interesting.

**Margery:** That sort of leads me to another question. Did you find that people who weren't Jewish—this woman was not Jewish?

**Esther:** She was.

**Margery:** She was Jewish?

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86 The Coca-Cola Company is an American multinational beverage corporation headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. Its flagship product, Coca-Cola, was invented in 1886 by John Stith Pemberton and was purchased by Asa Griggs Candler in 1889.
Esther: She was. But I say, many in her family, most of her family had intermarried. One night she had some of her family there. Every one of them married a Catholic. She was the only one. She and her husband were the only ones . . .

Margery: Who remained Jewish?

Esther: Yes, remained Jewish. She took me to a sale one day at the Rothschild House for Israel, where the funds were for Israel. This was the only time she took me anywhere because she had a car and he had a car. The reason that I was there is that they had five children. Three of them were in England studying English, going to school, and so she had their room and a shower. I was able to rent and have my own shower. But it was so cold, I couldn't go in there.

Margery: You're talking about the lady that you stayed with in Paris?


Margery: Was Jewish?

Esther: Yes.

Margery: All of her children were Catholic?

Esther: No, not her children . . . her relatives. Yes, they had all intermarried . . . practically all of them had intermarried. So when she had a dinner one night, I had with her just breakfast and dinner. Lunch, of course, I had when I was at the Sorbonne. There was a restaurant right near there. But she was very active . . . by the way, he was the equivalent of the editor of our National Geographic. They had a large apartment, because they had five children. It was so noisy. The people upstairs didn't have rugs on the floor, and they were constantly moving chairs around. It was just as though it was right on top of your head. The people on this side of the apartments . . . these were old apartments, and the outside of these apartments were of stone, but the buildings, you could hear everything, as you can to this day here in Atlanta. It was very noisy, and it was extremely cold to take a shower there. In the spring when I first started there, it was so cold that I took a bath with my sweater on. I just washed a little piece at a time. It was really that cold. In the Sorbonne itself, which is a large building, which must have walls . . . the walls must be a couple of feet thick, it was like ice in that building. It was just as cold as though it was wintertime. That was in May.

<End of Tape 2, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 3, Side I>

87 National Geographic is the official magazine of the National Geographic Society, and has been published monthly since 1888. It mostly contains articles about geography, history and world culture.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
**Margery:** This is a third interview with Esther Taylor at her home on August 19. It's for the American Jewish Committee and Council of Jewish Women's Oral History Project, Jewish Women of Achievement. Margery Diamond [is the] interviewer. Esther, we've had two wonderful interviews where you've told me all about the organizations and the activities which you've been involved in over the past so many years . . . 81, is that right?

**Esther:** I'm 81 years old, but I wasn't involved until I was about 25.

**Margery:** Many years and many exciting, wonderful adventures. Now what I'd like is sort of a statement or some comments about how you came to be involved in the things that you chose, like Hadassah and Planned Parenthood and the other . . .

**Esther:** Musical things.

**Margery:** . . . and the music and the art.

**Esther:** I believe the best way to start an answer to this question is to say that I lived in a very small community, didn't travel in my early years, didn't have communication with the outer world, so to speak. [I] was not interested in anything very much other than what my parents told me to do: school and Hebrew school, or Hebrew teacher, and some music. My mother taught me to crochet and knit and many things which just seemed all that was important to me. But the reason that I became interested in Hadassah at a fairly early age is that we had a picture of [Theodor] Herzl in our dining room . . . a large, framed picture. I may have mentioned this before. We also had little boxes [Hebrew: pushkas] . . . we had one . . . every family had one . . . for charity. For example, on my birthday, I had to put something in the charity box instead of getting birthday presents. This birthday present idea came to me way after I was married, which was many years later. I really didn't know that you received birthday presents on your birthday. I thought on your birthday you had to be thankful and give something to others. So it was really more like a sense of obligation to the community or to people who were poor, or poorer than we were, because we weren't rich. I think that this sparked my interest to begin with.

When I went into Hadassah that was for . . . the Hadassah organization itself was formed by Henrietta Szold, [88] a very great woman, for the orphans that came into Israel. She actually started the movement. There's a long story connected with that. It seemed a very

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[88] Henrietta Szold founded Hadassah, as well as being a Zionist leader. She advocated for a larger role for women in Rabbinic Judaism, most famously by reciting Mourners' Kaddish for her parents when traditionally only men recited it.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
worthwhile organization. But I don't exactly remember how I came in. Probably I was asked by someone to join. Once I went to a meeting or two, it seemed interesting enough. It was very soon after our son was born and I had some good help. I attribute everything I've ever done to having somebody in my house that I could leave our one son with and feel comfortable. So I became interested there and worked, I would say, probably 15 years almost daily, became president just a few years actually after I joined, because there was no one else to take the job at that time. Hadassah in Atlanta is a very large group now. But at that time, I think we had just about barely 300 ladies in the organization. But we were very active. So that sparked my interest in Zionism.\footnote{Zionism is a movement which supports a Jewish national state in the territory defined as the Land of Israel. Although Zionism existed before the nineteenth century, in the 1890's Theodor Herzl popularized it and gave it a new urgency, as he believed that Jewish life in Europe was threatened and a State of Israel was needed. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and Zionism today is expressed as support for the continued existence of Israel.} I learned a good deal about what Israel was about and the fact that the Jews have always wanted a homeland, and they were always sent away from one country to the next. We know even in recent times what happened, and at that time we didn't have anything as horrible as the Holocaust, but in every country, practically, the Jews were thrown out. Even in England, there were a certain number of years in which Jews were not allowed to come in. So it was natural that I should follow that course. After that . . . did you want me to continue? I think I began to see some other aspects other than just this one of being interested in something of my own, of the people to which I belonged, not just the religion, but the humanitarian aspect.

Margery: Before we go to another organization or another train of thought, let me ask you a question about this. You mentioned that attribute your being able to go out in the world to the fact that you had very good household help that you could trust. How do you feel about the situation for young Jewish brides today and their choices that they have to make in household family roles?

Esther: The way things are today it's very different because I would say about 50 percent of the women that I know today who have young children, work, if not all day, a half-day. I always wonder how they can go to a 10 o'clock meeting in the morning or even an 8 o'clock meeting in the evening, and who is with the children. They manage it beautifully, and I'm not at all worried about when I see somebody come to that meeting that her children are being neglected, or that her husband is being neglected. I think it's a different age. It's a different time. As far as I'm concerned, I'm a feminist to the core. I believe that every woman should be trained to have a
profession or at least some method by which she can earn a living because morals have changed. . . everything has changed to such a degree in the last ten years. I don't think there's ever been an era anytime in history in which we've had such drastic changes . . . mostly, probably, in the role of the female.

**Margery:** What do you think about the female today who chooses to stay home and take that role of housewife and mother and not go and look for household help? How do you see that person?

**Esther:** I think that every person should do what she thinks best. If a person likes to be with her family and raise her children and not turn it over to someone else, that should certainly be her choice. I'm certainly a great believer in choice, or I wouldn't have been interested in Planned Parenthood. I believe each person has a right to make a choice for herself, particularly if she's an adult and is mature enough. I don't believe that youngsters should make their own choices. So that today things are very different because for one thing, we have all the modern conveniences. You can do up a dinner by going by the grocery store and getting frozen foods and cooked foods, and there are restaurants everywhere. One has to consider that to prepare a dinner for a family for, let's say, even two children and a husband and wife, if you had to start from scratch, as my mother did, it would take at least four or five hours. Today, you can put a fairly decent dinner together, with a deep freeze, in not more than an hour, and sometimes just a half-hour. I have a granddaughter, and she is a career woman. She is in her thirties, and she wants very much to have a family, but she has decided that first she is going to finish all of the schooling necessary to be able to make a good living, to live comfortably. She said to do that, what she means by ‘comfortably,’ is to have an excellent person to take care of her children when she goes back to work. She means by that to have not just somebody that can just cook or can just look after the house, but somebody who knows something about child care. So I think that we're just talking about two different worlds.

**Margery:** If you were born today, which world would you choose?

**Esther:** I don't really know, but I believe that I would choose Janet's [her granddaughter’s] world, if I had her talent. Her [talent] happens to be in a field where she already has her Master's degree in public relations, and she wants a Master's degree only from Harvard— that's the only place she wants to go—in business, an MB [Masters in Business]. So I encourage her to the last,
to the last note, almost. I believe in it. Maybe I'm partially responsible for the way she feels, because we've been very close.

Margery: So you think that women as well as men should make their own personal statement in the business world and the public world?

Esther: Absolutely. Furthermore, I think they're going to do it for a few reasons. One reason is that men are dying younger than women and many of them leave a good part of their fortune, sometimes nearly all of it, to women. So gradually, if you'll look at the statistics—I don't remember them, but I have read them—there are many, many more millionaire women . . . millionairesses . . . today than there were even five years ago. There are a great many more women in high positions than there were five years ago. This is increasing every year. We subscribe to a paper called the USA Today, and it gives these charts quite often. I don't remember them exactly, but I recall these statistics. They’re unbelievable, how many women are in high positions today. Now, the Negroes are trying to do the same thing. Unfortunately, they get nearly to the top, but never to the top, and that's what they're struggling for. In a way, this is similar.

Margery: The women's position is similar?

Esther: Yes. Because the Negro who is educated gets to have a position, but never the owner. He's never really at the top. He is not given, for example, as a lawyer, let's say . . . a lawyer has to be a partner in order to get the proceeds. In order to be a partner, his name has to be on the stationery. Then he has the kind . . . then he gets some percentage of the business. Otherwise, all he is just a member of the firm with a salary. The same thing goes in a bank. He might get to be one of the top-notch people there and make a very good salary, but he's never the vice-president of the bank or the executive vice-president of the bank. There are a few banks that are owned by black people, but that's just a minimum. That's just a very small percentage. The Negroes have more or less that same barrier to overcome. They have yet to get to the top places. It's the same way with women, I think. I never read this comparison between women and Negroes, but I sense it, because I see that women are—the same thing is happening. Now, when men leave their fortunes or their business to women . . . I know a number of cases of people that I know where the women take over and do a very good job. This is becoming, I think, more prevalent. I can't tell you what will happen in the next decade. In the next decade, the women may be the ones

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USA Today is a national daily newspaper founded in 1982.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
who are dying first because of the stress. But at the present time, we know from statistics that there are many, many more widows than widowers, and that women are coming into their own. Women for the first time in history are having equal opportunities for education. So when you go to a graduation now of any big school—what we call the important schools—you’ll see just about as many women as men, and they're not taking just art or music. They're taking all the different kind of courses, the science courses and the technology courses. So as far as I'm concerned, I would love to be a young person in this generation.

**Margery:** This generation would suit you better than your own?

**Esther:** Yes, very much better. I can't complain about mine, because I've had a good husband and what I think is a life which has given me some opportunities. But if I chose it . . . if I had a choice to be in that generation or this one, I think I would see that this generation has all the opportunities.

**Margery:** What do you see as the key to success for women?

**Esther:** I couldn't answer a question like that at all, because each one of us has faults and then we have fine qualities, and sometimes the faults help us to get ahead. Sometimes a person who has the kind of personality that's very abrupt and direct in the kind of business that he has is better than if he was amiable and sociable and took time to talk with you and took time off to go to play golf and all that kind of thing. So I don't know what it takes. I think each person has different qualifications to do different things. One of the good things of this era is that people are given tests by the psychologists as to what their abilities are. We were very good friends of the Januses—Dr. [Sidney] and Mrs. [Leah] Janus. He was an industrial psychologist, and he tested every single person that went into the Delta Air[line] service. They never hired anybody unless they went through this test, which took a few hours, to find what their qualifications were. That is the part of our society which will make people do the work that they're qualified for, rather than just what their father did or what their father wants them to be. I have another very good example at home. I have a brother who had his Ph.D. First, he got his Bachelor's, and then he got his M.D. Then he got his Master's in psychology; then he got his Ph.D. in psychology. He then took special courses in . . . with a man whose name I forget who's very famous as a psychoanalyst. This was not the field for him at all. His whole personality changed. He was a

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91 Delta Air Lines is a major American airline, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. Founded in 1924, it is the oldest airline still operating in the United States.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
different person when he became this ‘god.’ He thought he was God. When he was younger, he was a dreamer. He was a completely different kind of person. But this is the field that he went into, and I don't think it suited him at all. I think it really hurt him, even though he had a measure of success in his field. But he did not have a measure of success with his family, with his wife, with his child. So he should have been tested. He never should have taken medicine, certainly not psychology.

Margery: So suitability as well as education is a key to success?

Esther: That's about the only way that I could describe it.

Margery: I was thinking in terms of whether you saw education as the way for women out of the roles that they had before.

Esther: Education is good for everything. I can't think of any field—even for morality—and that's far away from the subject that we're talking about. In every way, I think education is good because I think that ignorance is really the source of all the troubles that we have—everything.

Margery: You mentioned success with the family. Can you describe successful family life?

Esther: I think successful family life is when the wife and the husband, even though they're different in every way—which is the case in my case—my husband and I are very different, but they both give each other a certain amount of leeway to express themselves in their own way, not have to do what one or the other says, in other words, where the man is absolutely the dominant figure or the woman is the dominant figure. That they take the children . . . if they have a choice of how many children they're going to have, not have more children than they can support and give care to, and if they give enough time out of whatever it is that they do for their children so that they can be role models for their children. I think if the parents are what I consider morally good, ethically good, their feelings and their conduct is right, the children will do that. I know—everyone knows—that we've had good parents and yet some of the children have gone astray. That is due to peer pressure. That's due to the fact that we have the tremendous amount of imported drugs and that is due to our government. Our government could do something about that. I am certain they could do more than they're doing. Actually, they're just beginning. I don't know how far it will go. So many times, we cannot blame the parents for what happens to the children. But by and large, from what I have seen, and as you know, I have traveled and I have a lot of observations from various organizations. I know a lot of people, and I've corresponded with many people, because I've met them on trips and we've gotten to know each other—when
you go on a three-week trip with a group, you get to know people. I still correspond with some of those people that we took trips with 25 years ago, 30 years ago. I corresponded with a woman—now she must have died—every month, whom I met on a plane going from Paris to Madrid [Spain]. We became close friends. We went to the same places together from that trip on, all around and back to Paris. She visited me in Atlanta. She was an interpreter—she knew five languages—for the United Nations. Every time I went to New York, we had dinner together, and we were very close. Then she moved back to Geneva, Switzerland, and we wrote. When you know a lot of people in various countries and you've seen a great deal in the—I guess you would say—40 years that I've traveled, you begin to have a feeling of what happens in families. In other words, you know the families. So I know some families in Paris, because I lived there for a summer. I know some families in Quebec [Canada]. I lived there for a summer. I know families in Atlanta. I know families where our relatives live. So I have a fair perspective. It's not a great one, but it's enough for me to have seen that there are families that have had good homes and where both the mother and father were attentive and did all that they could do for their children, and something happened to maybe one of the three children. That is the environment [that] is responsible. We cannot help it if during the school days the children are at the mercy of their peers and this is the reason that things spread like they do in this country because we all are communicating everywhere. All the children are going to schools and other places. They're visiting. It's the automobile and the airplane that's made everything different in this country. Any average person . . . for example, my husband has a driver. He said to my husband when he engaged him, "Mr. Taylor, I'd love to take this job, but I've been promising my wife to take her on a boat trip on August 16." He said, "I can't take a job if I can't get that week off." So you see, everyone wants to travel and everyone does travel. That broadens perspective. It gives you a better view of what the world is like. It also gives you a better view of people in general. That is one of the things that is good and bad. We have a lot of accidents. It's very difficult to travel on our highways. But it has made people better acquainted with what goes on. In connection with that, one of the things that bothers me a great deal, more almost than anything else in our government, is that people, the right people, don't vote. That’s when I started becoming interested in government, legislation, and in the League of Women Voters.

Margery: Do you think that government is the answer for our drug problem and our drug culture?
Esther: Not at all. I just think government can do more than it has done. They are beginning to do it. They're going to have sanctions against the countries that import. They're going to put more people to watch out for these . . . actually, I call them criminals, the importers. I've also read that people who are under drugs are going to get it one way or another. But it has to start from the source. If it comes in and it's available, they'll get it. Government has not done enough to keep us from having these drugs brought in from all parts . . . from South America, from Colombia. It's coming in by boatloads. It's a very big ocean and it's a lot of trouble to keep them from coming in. But you can do something about Colombia and its imports. You have sanctions and do things to that government so that they take care of it on their side. We cannot possibly take care of it just on our side. That's why I think government is responsible.

Margery: In some communities, like in Europe or Switzerland, they don't have the drug problem that we do here in the United States. I am not as knowledgeable as you are but in things like pornography and all where it's legal, it's not so much of a problem as where it's illegal. I sometimes wonder how that fits with you.

Esther: I really don't know what the actual statistics are on this. But one of our problems is that we're so close to these South American countries. Europe doesn't have that. They grow these things in certain parts of the world. Naturally, it's going to come from that part of the world. A great deal of it . . . most of it may be coming just from those . . . as I said, the coastline is very big, and you just can't patrol a coastline like that. I just read in the paper this morning that nearly 5,000,000 illegal immigrants are in this country today . . . 4,700,000 people . . . illegal immigrants. If you have that many people coming in, imagine how much of these drugs can come in without anybody knowing it. What we have to do is one government has to do something to the other government. That's why I believe that that's the first way. It seems to me that for the first time, Mr. [Ronald] Reagan, whom I do not like in many ways, but evidently a great deal of pressure has been put on him. I do believe they are going to do something about it. Not that they'll ever eradicate it. I don't believe that. But they certainly can make it better than it was because they're picking up tremendous amounts of cocaine and of the other drugs now. Every day you read about some. It always has to do with one or two people at the top, and they're the ones who are not caught. It’s not an easy problem. I don't think it'll go away easily, but it can certainly be minimized.

92 President Ronald Reagan. He was president of the United States from 1981-1989. He was a Republican.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
Margery: Let me ask you a question about family life in Israel. You said you'd visited there many times and that affected some of your choices. You talked about Henrietta Szold and the orphans in Israel.

Esther: Actually, we were there . . . I believe it was just twice. It was just before the war\(^93\) . . . what was that . . . 1967 or 1968? Then we were there before that. Naturally, at the first time we saw all of the ruins along the wayside. We also saw the large areas, territories. Israel is a tiny little country. But whatever we saw was stones and rock and sand and hard dirt. The next time we came, everything . . . and no trees . . . the next time we came, which was about 10 or 15 years later, there were trees everywhere. There wasn't a sign of a plot of land that wasn't irrigated with the sprinklers going all the time, and vegetation. It was really like a miracle. We couldn't believe it. The Jewish National Fund\(^94\) is the fund that Jewish people from the whole world send to plant trees. They have planted millions of trees. The second time we came, the trees were, I would say, three-quarter growth. If you went there now, I imagine they'd be in full growth and there would be no more of these . . . it was just . . . you actually saw the people raking up the stones from the earth. It was just a stony, arid land, which is the way that Arab land looks when you go to that part of the country because I was there when we took the trip to the Arab countries . . . which we did. We were in Damascus [Syria]. We took a boat trip down . . . you couldn't get into Israel through their countries. So we took the boat trip from Athens [Greece] and went all the way down. We stopped in Alexandria [Egypt] and a few of the islands. Then we went all the way down to Lebanon. There you saw mountains which didn't have trees, and you something that could be grazing land, in other words, flat land that didn't have grass on it. You can stand at a point in Israel, as we did when we got off of the bus, and look down the valley, which is Jordan, and we saw a troop going by of Arabs with their camels and their goats. They are self-supporting with their goats for milk. They go from place to place wherever there's water because in that area, many of those places, they don't have rain. They have . . . rain even in Israel I think is just in January. I think in February it's dry. Two women came up that big hill, just like goats. I was telling my friend here that their hair looked as though it hadn't been washed . . . it was a lot of hair . . . for a century. You could just see the accumulated dirt in their hair. They started snatching our pocketbooks. The driver said, "Get on the bus quick. Get on the bus quick." So this whole

\(^93\) Probably the Six Day War, also known as the Third Arab-Israeli War, which occurred June 5-10, 1967.
\(^94\) The Jewish National Fund is a non-profit organization founded in 1901 to purchase land for Jewish settlement.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
area of Israel is surrounded by these Arabs who are allowed to have as many wives as they wish and who live in abject poverty except for the few multi-billionaires who control the territory. So you couldn't go there. I don't care what religion, what country you came from. I don't care what your background is. You couldn't go there without realizing that they have done a miracle over there. It's just miraculous, to have seen it like we did just at the beginning, and then to have seen it . . . and then, that was just in the Sixties . . . 1967, and that's 20 years ago. So I'm sure now it must be just like Five Points\textsuperscript{95} is here. The cars must be all over everywhere.

**Margery:** Let me ask how you feel things are going to go in the Middle East with the Arab-Israeli conflict.

**Esther:** I'm not optimistic at all. So I'd rather not talk about it because that's not the way to look at it. But I don't see how it's possible for them to get together. Thousands and thousands of acres of land all around, thousands of Arabs all around them, and this little tiny place in the center. I just don't see how it's possible for them to do anything but build enough machine guns and airplanes and all to try to protect themselves. That takes billions of dollars. I just don't know how long that will go on. I just cannot see that. By the way, if there was one brilliant leader of all of the Arabs, I could see where it would happen but the Arabs don't get along among themselves. You can make peace with this one and this one, as we did let's say with Egypt, and now there is another that is trying . . . he isn't having very much luck. Then all the others don't get along. Look what's happening in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{96} You have the Christians and the Arabs killing each other. They're absolutely killing each other out.

**Margery:** What do you think is the American-Jewish responsibility towards Israel?

**Esther:** I couldn't say what their responsibility is. I think it has to do with each individual. I think each individual has to decide whether they want to give of their means to help keep those people who had to go there because they had no other place to go. By the way, they don't have three or four wives, and they don't have six or seven children. They have one or two children. So with all these Arabs and with all the children the Arabs are going to multiply like rats, and the Jewish community is going to remain almost the same. There are very few—except for the Orthodox—and they're a minority. By the way, I'm not very happy about that, either.

\textsuperscript{95}Five Points refers to the downtown area of Atlanta. It is considered to be the center of town by locals. It was the central hub of Atlanta until the 1960s, when the economic and demographic center shifted north toward the suburbs. It was recently revitalized, mostly due to Georgia State University having a large presence in the area.

\textsuperscript{96}She is referring to the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990 and resulted in an estimated 120,000 casualties.
Margery: That was my next question.

Esther: Because with that Orthodox minority, they are really creating a tremendous amount of trouble, more trouble than their numbers call for. If you can't have peace right there among the Israelis, then it's just like a house divided against itself.

Margery: Their attitude is definitely not Planned Parenthood.

Esther: Their attitude is completely different. They’re ultra, ultra-Orthodox and they have some very strange ideas. It’s in that area that I became so very interested in a book by Will Durant. You may recall, if you're old enough, you will remember that about 40 or 50 years ago, Will Durant was the outstanding philosopher. He wrote 10 or 12 volumes of the history of the world. After that, he wrote a book called *The Lessons of History* with his wife, Ariel. I read that book, I guess twice. It's called *The Lessons of History*, and it's divided into many subjects. I read this book . . . about every ten years I read it again. There are things in here which he said—I guess this book is about 10 or 12 years old. I read them over and over and over again. I feel as though if this man says so and I agree with it, then maybe something that I think has some merit. Because he expresses in words that I could never express to give background of all the history that he knows. I think it's just a marvelous thing. If you'll give me the time, I'd like to read a few things that he has to say. The two things that I like the best in this book because they touch me. One is religion and history and the other is art and history. Do we have time?

Margery: We definitely . . . I was just looking at my clock. You have time to read a brief portion for the religion and history. Then we'll take a break.

Esther: That will be fine. This starts by saying, "Even the skeptical historian develops a humble respect for religion, since he sees it functioning and seemingly indispensable in every land and age. To the unhappy, the suffering, the bereaved, the old, it has brought supernatural comforts valued by millions of souls as more precious than any natural aid. It has helped parents and teachers to discipline the young. It has conferred meaning and dignity upon the lowliest existence and through its sacraments has made for stability by transforming human covenants into solemn relationships with God. ‘It has kept the poor,’ said Napoleon, ‘from murdering the rich, for since the natural inequality of men dooms many of us to poverty or defeat, destroy the hope and class war is intensified.’ Heaven and Utopia are buckets in a well. When one goes

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97 Will Durant was an American writer, historian and philosopher best known for *The Story of Civilization*, an 11-volume work published between 1935 and 1975.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
down, the other goes up. When religion declines, communism rose. Religion does not seem at first to have had any connection with morals." This is the part that I thought most interesting. He says that at the beginning, apparently, and then he echoes Petronius,⁹⁸ who echoed Lucretius/⁹⁹. You see, that goes way back into history. "It was fear that first made the Gods, fear of hidden forces in the earth, rivers, oceans, trees, winds and sky. Religion became the proprietary worship of those forces through offerings, sacrifice, incantation and prayer. Only when priests use these fears and rituals to support morality and law did religion become a force vital and rival to the state.” Then he goes into this in much more detail. But having read that, I did not take it upon myself to assume that he didn't believe in God. I didn't take it upon myself to believe that he doesn't believe in the Five Books— what's it called . . . the Pentateuch.¹⁰⁰ But I do believe, from what he says here, that he is very much a humanist, like I am. I can't believe in a God in heaven. I can't believe that I can pray to God and he'll give me something or not give me something. But I can believe as a humanist that if we had sufficient education and, under certain conditions, the fear of God and all the other things that makes for religion, would become less and less, and we would have more of a utopian world. I as a Jewess consider myself a Jew. I don't go to services. This happened in more recent years, of course. I'm very close friends of the rabbi and his wife, Reva and Harry Epstein.¹⁰¹ One day I said to him, "Rabbi,"—I still don't call him Harry, although we know each other very well—"how is it that you accept me and care for me so"—which I can see in the way Reva calls me all the time and the way we feel about each other—"when you have such a strong feeling in believing in God as a Jew and I do not?” So he reminded me of a story that I heard some time ago. I think everybody, nearly, has heard it, that a man who was very restless and didn't want to hear a long explanation of what is Judaism, came to Hillel.¹⁰² He said, "Tell me while I'm standing on one foot what is real religion. What is religion and God?" The answer was—"I don't know if I'm quoting it exactly, but the idea was, "Do unto your neighbor what you would have done to yourself. All the rest is commentary.” So I

⁹⁸ Petronius was a Roman courtier during the reign of Nero, and is generally believed to be the author of Satyricon, a satirical novel with strong character development (unusual for the time).
⁹⁹ Lucretius was a Roman poet and philosopher. His only known work is an epic philosophical poem called On the Nature of Things.
¹⁰⁰ The first five books of the Bible.
¹⁰¹ Rabbi Harry Epstein was the rabbi at Ahavath Achim congregation in Atlanta from 1928 to 1982.
¹⁰² Rabbi Hillel, also known as Hillel the Elder, was a famous Jewish leader, born circa 110 BCE. He is renowned as a sage and scholar, and founder of the House of Hillel school. He is associated with the development of the Mishnah and the Talmud.
said to the rabbi, "Then I believe that a great deal of what we read is commentary. I cannot go all the way. I don't know what it is. I know there's some great spirit that moves us. I know, too, that everything in this world counts for something, even from the little ant or the bee to the human being, but I'm not going to pray to God in heaven." We left it that way.

**Margery:** He probably has a very strong respect for you as a human being and as a humanist. You probably have a lot in common where that's concerned.

**Esther:** I think we do.

**Margery:** It's time for a break.

*<End of Tape 3, Side 1>*
*<Begin Tape 3, Side 2>*

**Margery:** Let's talk a little bit on this last part of the tape about your music experience and how you came to choose that.

**Esther:** I have to think a little bit about how I came to choose it. I did have a musical family in the sense that my father had a good voice and acted as the *chazzan*\(^{103}\) [cantor] when they didn't have one. I also had a brother who wanted to study the violin. This was the brother that was the Ph.D. that I told you about. He was not a good student at the beginning. My father said, "When you get better marks in high school" . . . it was mostly in geometry . . . “When you get better marks in high school, then I'll get you a violin.” Finally he got the violin and I think—I don't know—he used to fix the clocks in the neighborhood. [He] was able to get enough money to get a violin. Maybe my father helped him. I don't recall, because as I told you, I was so much younger and I wasn't involved too much. But my father, he was going . . . by this time, the time that I became really interested and wanted to get into music and do it a little more seriously . . . was playing by ear a good deal and had taken some lessons. I knew the rudiments. He didn't. He picked it up by himself. The violin, it's been called . . .

**Margery:** Very difficult.

**Esther:** . . . the most difficult of all. So he learned to play, but he didn't have too much time during the day so he would do it at night after bedtime. He'd take it to bed and would practice and learned to play the violin without a teacher. I thought, “If my brother can do that without a teacher, the least I can do is to work a little harder and do something with the piano.” That, I

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\(^{103}\) *chazzan* (cantor) is the official in charge of music or chants and leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
think, in the last tape I told you about how I started with one teacher and then another. I found out that my best sense was my ear. I learned more through my ear than I did through my eyes. There are some people who can read a page and remember it just from the print. I never could. But if I heard something, then I remembered it. To this day, it's that way. If I see something on the page, it makes no difference. If I read [and] if I don't say it out loud, I'll forget it. But if I say it out loud, I'll remember it. So naturally, music became a very great interest. I did study at Juilliard and I studied composition. I was interested and I played many records and went to concerts and all of that. Then in more recent years we began to be exposed to the modern music. I tried—I really did try—to like it. I would buy a Stravinsky\(^\text{104}\) record, and I would play it twice, a third time, fourth time. Somehow or other, at the end of the fourth time, I didn't know it any better—my ear-memory was no better at the end, because it was not melodic, and also because the harmonies were so confused from the way we were taught. We were taught by very strict rules as to what goes together in harmony. I found another thing which I think is interesting in my story, and that is when I went to a movie and there was a lot of violence in the movie or if there was excitement . . . I liked the music, which was the same kind of modern stuff that we hear . . . some of the kind of music which is now being taught in the big universities. Yale [University, New Haven, Connecticut] and all the major universities now having teachers who are teaching the new harmonies and are doing what we call modern music. I'm not talking about rock & roll and all that. I'm talking about the classical music.

**Margery:** I was going to say this is definitely different from rock & roll.

**Esther:** No, this is completely separate.

**Margery:** I'd like a statement about rock & roll from you, too.

**Esther:** That is not really my concern because it makes so much noise. I don't like anything that's very noisy. But the dissonance\(^\text{105}\) is also something which bothered me, even than just noise. If it's noise, I stop up my ears. But to listen to music by educated musicians and not be able to listen and have to stop up my ears bothered me very much. In fact, the lady that I played dual piano with has a son-in-law who is just studying composition and teaching it at one of the big universities. His wife is a fine pianist. She sent home a record of one of his compositions.

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\(^\text{104}\) Igor Stravinsky was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor. He is widely considered one of the most important and influential composers of the 20th century. He is well known for his ballets.

\(^\text{105}\) In music, dissonant chords are considered unstable, and are traditionally used as transitions between more consonant, stable chords.
When I heard it, I couldn't tell that it was music. To me it just didn't sound like anything, to my ear. It just doesn't register at all.

**Margery:** How do you think the computer age is going to affect your music?

**Esther:** Anyhow, when I read this book . . . I told you about how many things in this book appeal to me . . . I was delighted to read this in the chapter under government and history. In this, for some reason or other, it got on the subject of art. The reason is because he's speaking of what happens in a democracy. He starts off by saying, "Is democracy responsible for the current debasement of art? The debasement is not unquestioned. It is a matter of subjective judgment. Those of us who shudder at its excesses, its meaningless blotches of color, its collages of debris, its babels of cacophony"—which is all kinds of noises together, or in pictures, all kinds of crazy things together—"are doubtless imprisoned in our past and dull to the courage of experiment. The producers of such nonsense are appealing not to the general public, which scorns them as lunatics, degenerates or charlatans, but to gullible middle-class purchasers who are hypnotized by auctioneers and are thrilled by the new, however deformed." Now, this is about graphic art. "Democracy is responsible for this collapse only in the sense that it has not been able to develop standards and tastes to replace those with which the aristocracies once kept the imagination and individualism of artists within the bounds of intelligible communication, the illusion and the illumination of light and the harmony of parts in a logical sequence and a coherent whole. If art now seems to lose itself in bizararies"—bizarre things—"this is not only because it is vulgarized by mass suggestion or domination, but also because it has exhausted the possibilities of old schools and forms, and flounders for a time in the search for new patterns and styles, new rules and disciplines.” Now, after going through all that and saying that this cacophonies, this funny noises and all this, and how so many of us simply can't bring ourselves to listen to this new music, he says, "All deductions having been made, democracy has done less harm and more good than any other form of government.” This is under the chapter of government. "It gave to human existence a zest and camaraderie that outweighed its pitfalls and defects. It gave to thought and science and enterprise the freedom essential to their operation and growth. It broke down the walls of privilege and class, and in each generation it raised up ability from every rank and place.” This goes on and on in this way.

**Margery:** But this is what you told me is your philosophy?

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106 Discord, racket or turmoil.
Esther: This is my philosophy. I cannot learn it, I cannot understand it, and I can't enjoy it. To me, I could play a piece or hear a piece and it could make me cry or it could I feel like I was rising up in the air. This music, all it does is disturbs me. I keep wondering what will happen to this music: will it remain, or will something else be built on it that will, let's say, continue for decades? Whether it's something new and some of the young people are getting used to it. I call it cacophony. To me, it's just a lot of jumbling of notes. I've tried to study it, by the way. I actually went to a private teacher in New York when I went to Juilliard to take up some of this new music and also learn how to do the runs and kind of things that you have to do to play the popular things, and I just couldn't get it. I couldn't absorb it. I had to go way over on the East Side, and finally I gave it up. That doesn't take in the rock music and all that. All that is definitely ephemeral. It will last a certain length of time, and then there'll be change. There will be something else. For the young people, the more noise it makes, the better they like it, because everybody now wants a high. They always want to be in a state of great activity. The movies and television and everything is geared to this excitement. Everything has to be very exciting. If it isn't exciting, the kids don't like it. If everything else changes, then this will change. If we go through changes through technology or through war or through whatever, then music will change and art will change. It's unfortunate that I can't like this better, because our son and his wife, whom I adore, are collectors . . . true collectors. They spend a lot of time going to the auctions in New York and in Chicago [Illinois]. They admit that they're buying names because they know that these names can sell. So that they're not . . . sometimes they buy things which they think will have already had a beginning . . . a name which has already sold some pieces to the museums. They’ve already had offers of some of their pieces with substantial increase. I think that they are not buying something just to decorate. That's what I think. Maybe they think differently. They say they like it. It's hard for me to believe that they like some of the things they have. I accepted the French Impressionists immediately. That was no trouble at all. [Vincent] Van Gogh and the entire group of the five there that are all in France, all of them. It was no trouble at all. I accepted the Realists, the ones who drew pictures that didn't look exactly like

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107 The east side of Manhattan Island in New York City.
108 Impressionism was a nineteenth century art movement that began in Paris. Characteristics include short, visible brush strokes and heavy emphasis on the depiction of light and movement.
109 Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) was a Dutch Post-Impressionist painter.
110 “Realists” is the term used to describe a nineteenth century art movement to depict everyday life, rather than focusing on idealization.

Transcript IC: OHC10715
people that we knew, but when they were put together, they were like caricatures. I accepted some of those. But when they came to these Impressionists and Post-Impressionists,\textsuperscript{111} that's where I couldn't. I couldn't see how a Jackson Pollock\textsuperscript{112} could just throw paints together or pour them over on whatever it is, whether he does it on a canvas or paper or whatever, and then call that a painting that's worth $100,000. I just couldn't believe it. Yet, after he died, he has gotten, I think, as much as $100,000 for his paintings. I cannot believe to this day that [Joan] Miró,\textsuperscript{113} who paints things like a little dot up here and circle here and a square here, or some of those who do white on white and black on black—in Madrid [Spain], there were three gigantic rooms filled with these tremendous canvasses, black on black. That's all that was there. There were two or three different shades of black. They took up a whole wall in each room. I thought to myself, these people must be going crazy. Who wants to look at just black on black or white on white? So all of this, to me, it's just something that I can't comprehend. Yet I see what the universities are buying—not only the museums, but the universities. I was in Boston [Massachusetts] not long ago, and they had just bought some Post-Impressionist things, same names . . . a few of them, I'm familiar with that I thought were crazy when I saw them in Mark's house. I just don't know how to . . . I don't try any more to go to a lecture, because I don't get anything out of it. I did buy the book that the museum there had just printed with the Post-Modernists. I gave it to Mark and Judy. I looked through it. I looked at every picture. They were mostly in colors. I just simply didn't see anything there that I would want to invest even a small amount in, unless I thought, “This is a name and it's got to sell, in five years from now for five times what I paid for it.” I might do that. But I would be very skeptical. I wouldn't want to put very much in it. So this is strictly a matter of taste, and maybe it’s knowledge. [Neither] Mark nor Judy had any training in art, none whatsoever. That's our son and our daughter-in-law.

**Margery:** Sometimes our children do the things they do just to be rebellious.

**Esther:** I don't think that they're rebellious. I do believe that they think they have learned something about it that intrigues them. I think they're the kind of people who wouldn't do this just to show off. I think our son and Judy both are very intelligent. I think they're really buying as investments. That's my opinion. I think they'd be insulted if I said that to them, or maybe not. I

\textsuperscript{111} Post-Impressionism is the term used to describe the development of French art after 1910. Post-impressionists extended Impressionism while rejecting its limitations.

\textsuperscript{112} Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) was an American painter famous for his abstract artwork, especially his drip painting.

\textsuperscript{113} Joan Miró (1893-1983) was a Spanish artist famous for his surrealism in paintings and sculptures.
don't know what if ever anybody has asked him that. But I find it very strange. The music, the same way. I don't believe—I know in my lifetime I can't change into it. If I haven't gotten it yet, as I grow older I think I'll like it less, because by this time I've gotten to the place that I don't listen to a lot of music at all. When you're studying and you're memorizing, if you get up at night and your ear is what is predominant, the music keeps going in your mind. I don't care . . . unless you have some very serious problems, this is the first thing that goes around in my mind. If I go to a concert and it's something that's very beautiful and I remember the tune, I'll get up four or five times during the night, and that's what I'll be doing. That's the way I used to memorize. I used to could memorize a full Beethoven\textsuperscript{114} sonata between lessons. So now I don't want to hear music at night. I didn't know that anybody else was like that until I met somebody that told me the same thing.

Margery: So things have definitely changed over your lifetime?

Esther: Completely, completely.

Margery: Can we talk about how lifestyles and dating and getting along, the male and female issues, the sexual morality and the sex before marriage and all this? There are very few people of your generation that can even discuss sex. I thought that I might ask.

Esther: I can discuss it very well. As a matter of fact, I would say about 50 years ago—I go in decades, you see, at this time—a short time after I was married, about five or ten years, I guess—I call that a short time—I belonged to a little group of . . . I don't remember who they were even now. I just remember it very, very faintly. It was a book club. We'd read a book, which people are doing today, and then we'd discuss it. During that time, there was a judge—I wish I could remember his name . . . who came . . . in those days, they had sometimes a few speakers who used to make rounds all over the country. I've even forgotten the word that they used for this thing. It had a special term. Instead of the political speakers we have now, the subjects were general. This speaker, among the things that he talked about, were about the need for a different attitude by parents with regard to their children who were getting married very early and didn't have time to mature so that they would know if their marriage would be permanent or would be stabilized. At that time, we did not have pills and all the things that are available to women now for contraception. He said, "The way it seems to me it would be logical would be if a young man is going to college, cares very much for a girl who is going to college,

\textsuperscript{114} Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was a German composer. He wrote 32 piano sonatas.
each parent . . . if they were to have a trial marriage, and the boy's father and mother would support him, and the girl's father would support her. They would have a trial marriage with the objective of not having children until they consummated the marriage, then we would have a better society.” That was the first time I'd ever heard anything like that. There weren't questions and answers, as I recall. I don't think so. But when I went to this meeting of the book club, I said, "That is what I think makes sense because people . . . the young college age, certainly even before that . . . is the time of romance. It's the time when especially the male has a sexual need that expresses itself in such a way that he really cannot control it, so he has to go to a whorehouse or find some way . . . some outlet.” I said, "Religious ideas are spread so that masturbation is . . . they tell a boy that he'll go crazy if he masturbates, when that's perfectly natural . . . ” I don't know if I used those words, but it was something like that.

**Margery:** Probably 50 years ago, you didn’t . . .

**Esther:** I didn't use the word, that's right. You're right. But anyhow, I said, "The natural processes at that time are not allowed to him, so he has to either do something that is against the rule, which makes him immoral, because he tells a lie. His parents don't know it. He can get a girl into a lot of trouble. It seems to me it's so much better if . . . they had condoms in those days . . . they did have—people who could afford it could always go to a doctor and have the pessary¹¹⁵ put in. That's what women who had small families for the most part did. They have a little pessary that they put in the vagina…

**Margery:** I've never heard of that.

**Esther:** You've never heard of a pessary?

**Margery:** Like the original IUD?¹¹⁶

**Esther:** No, that's a completely different thing. This actually is like a little cup and it closes up in a certain place.

**Margery:** Like a diaphragm?¹¹⁷

**Esther:** A diaphragm. I just misnamed it. But I think it has been called ‘pessary.’ They had diaphragms, but only the rich. So naturally, the families were eight and ten children. The reason

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¹¹⁵ A pessary is a medical device inserted into the vagina either to provide structural support, or as a method of delivering medication.

¹¹⁶ An intrauterine device (IUD) is a small, often “T” shaped device often containing copper, which is inserted into the uterus as a form of long-acting, reversible contraception.

¹¹⁷ A diaphragm is a soft latex or silicone dome with a spring molded into the rim which creates a seal against the walls of the vagina to prevent impregnation.
they were only eight and ten is because the mother would nurse as long as she possibly could. If she nursed for as much as two years, the baby didn't come until the third year you see. So she could get by during her fertile period before she had menopause with eight or nine children. If she didn't nurse, then she had them every ten months. Anyhow, I said, "I think this would be a great idea," they jumped on me. I don't think I've ever had a group of people act like they did. They thought I was crazy.

**Margery:** You didn't see anything wrong with sex before marriage, and they did?

**Esther:** They thought it was most awful thing for me to believe that a girl and a boy could have a trial marriage and not really marry. They said, "How can you believe in such a thing?" It just seemed preposterous to them. To me it was the most natural and best thing that I could think of. It's only natural that when I found out about Planned Parenthood that, at last, I found . . . at least we have some semblance of giving a woman the choice and the right not to have a baby when she doesn't want a baby. It gives the man a chance to have sex so that he can do it without lying. It seemed to me the only way that we would have a decent world. I truly thought in my own mind that if there were no babies born who weren't cared for, in other words, that people had just the number of children they wanted, that we would eliminate misery . . . we would eliminate poverty. That would eliminate crime. That would eliminate . . . and I began to think of all the things that it would do, and I thought, “Gee, that would be a wonderful world.”

**Margery:** So you can stop all the problems of the world?

**Esther:** I just thought it would solve everything. I do almost to this day. I think it's the most basic thing there is for the world to have. I think if even those poor black people over there who are starving, all those poor Arabs, and there are plenty of them, and then plenty of others all over the world, if they didn't have eight or ten children to feed and they couldn't take care of them, if they had one or two children, they could probably get along very well and have food and have some advantages for the children, if they just had a very ordinary job and didn't make what we call a good salary or a good income.

**Margery:** Let me get back to the sex before marriage issue, because as I said before, it's rare that you can even talk about it with a woman your age. My mother thinks that all her children were immaculately conceived and we can't even talk about it . . . not quite that bad, but the mores of today where men and women do live together without being married, is that something that you're comfortable with?
**Esther:** Absolutely. I think that girls that marry early, and boys especially that marry early, cannot possibly knew what marriage is like. As soon as the sex thing is over, as soon as that is over, they are always different. I don't care how much alike they are there are such differences that in nine cases out of ten, as you see what's happening with the divorces. Now that women can make a living, earn a living, we're having—what is it—two out of five or three out of five divorces? They're not all marrying early, either. Here's your young lady right here who has been engaged three or four times but hasn't married because she said after she found out what it was like, she knew that it wouldn't work. It's absurd, really, for young people not to have the privilege of being together and finding out what they're like and then having the privilege of parting . . . only that they won't have children. Now, when it comes to children, that's a different thing, if they haven't got sense enough to keep from having children. Then they've got to stay together.

**Margery:** Is this sexual revolution really all that different? Were people really denying themselves the right to be together sexually 50 years ago?

**Esther:** Yes. Yes. There's no doubt about it. There's no doubt about it. In Atlanta, we had in the Jewish group, which is the one I was most familiar with, knowing the families, there were a few girls and they were considered bad girls, because there were salesmen that used to come in town, and they'd date the salesmen. Everybody knew that if they dated the salesmen, they were bad girls.

**Margery:** Which meant that they had sex?

**Esther:** That meant that they had sex. I had any number of boyfriends. I was never kissed, not one time. Finally, a man that was about 12 years older than I, a doctor already—because as I said I was growing up so fast and I was having dates—and he tried to kiss me, and I slapped him. There was just no such thing among—I'm sure that some of this existed, but it wasn't commonplace. We didn't even wear lipstick in those days. If we wore lipstick, we did it in hiding. The first time that women's bras came out with the pointed size of the breast, I know a half a dozen of women, each one of them had the same experience . . . their husband said, "I'm not going out tonight with you with that on. You go take it off." Yes.

**Margery:** They felt that was immoral?

**Esther:** Yes. I remember wearing something so tight, because I was large-breasted, that when I would take it off at night, I'd have a big gash, and it hurt my shoulders to the extent that that's
where I began to have arthritis right away. I have a big gash in both of my shoulders because we wore our brassieres . . . and my pictures will show you I was absolutely flat. I had these big breasts. When I started wearing these brassieres . . . even today, I can't bear this tight thing around the bottom. This whole area, these ribs, my ribcage . . . I have arthritis in my ribcage. They're just as sore as they can be because I used to wear that tight band around. When these brassieres first came out, I never will forget, I told my friend . . . I had two close friends at that time here . . . I said, "My husband didn't want to go out with me because I had on a new bra." She said, "So did mine." The other one said, "So did mine." As we met . . . every one of the husbands, "What's that you've got on?" It was that much of a change. It was the difference between just very flat, and then suddenly they saw these breasts. It was unbelievable . . . the whole style of women's clothes. Now what's strange is that men's clothes haven't changed very much, except for bathing suits.

Margery: I know.

Esther: They all wore covered bathing suits, and now they wear just trunks. But women's clothes have changed in such a way that you would never be able to recognize a person in the way they dressed.

Margery: You can almost tell what year it is by the kind of clothes they wear.

Esther: By the kind of clothes they wear. On the other hand, I remember in the days of the colonialism in the South, the women used to wear very low-cut dresses. But that was only the very wealthy people who had, I guess, special dispensation from God. You never saw that in the average society. They didn't wear those real low-cut dresses. You saw the queens and the duchesses and all . . . sometimes you'd see them in their portraits. But you didn't see women wearing those kinds of clothes in those days. So the changes have been so great during my lifetime. This is something that is not on this particular subject, but my father was living with us after my mother died for a short time before he died. She died at the age 51 and he at 54. He smoked incessantly and he had cancer. My mother died of a kidney ailment. So he came to live with us. At that time, we had just the earphones and the radio. I was helping Herbert at the store. I would come home in the evening. He couldn't wait for me to come in to tell me of the wonders, of the great wonders . . . he heard Chicago that day . . . he heard a program from . . . New York . . . he heard a wonderful program. He heard a program from Miami [Florida]. It must have been a pretty radio with the earphones. He thought it was just the most remarkable thing. Now, imagine,
just 50 years ago or so that a man who was fairly worldly because my father used to go to New
York to buy, and so he traveled some, thought that that was just about the greatest thing that ever
happened. That was the radio.

Margery: I think we've had a wonderful conversation today. We're getting fairly close to the
end. I know you said 4 o'clock was your limit, so I'm going to put a stop right here. Thank you so
much for everything.

<End of Tape 3, Side 2>