

*Coming to Falmouth was a Groundbreaking Act*  
Kenny Nelson's Interview Transcript  
Collected and Edited<sup>1</sup> by Eliza Lambert

In Association with the Maine Jewish Museum  
and Documenting Maine Jewry

*"All the way [down Congress Street], there are only two pieces of land that have a garden out front. One is the Henry Longfellow house. The other was Etz Chaim synagogue. We said, "This is fantastic! What a symbol this is, that the Jews start out in Portland Maine, coming here from Eastern Europe. And here, they end up having the most, the greenest, the most beautiful front yard in all of Yankee-dom."*

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<sup>1</sup> Note to the reader: Narratives and transcripts have been recorded and compiled to show the slang and quirks of speech inherent in every narrator.

ELIZA LAMBERT: Do you, Kenny Nelson, agree to this interview?

KENNY NELSON: Yes.

EL: Thank you so much.

KN: We're at 213 Foreside Road, Falmouth, Maine. About two blocks from where I grew up.

EL: Really? No way. Which direction?

KN: A little further north, next to the fire station. We moved here to - our family, my father and mother and my then two older brothers, moved there in 1946. I was three.

EL: Really.

KN: We were the first Jews in Falmouth.

EL: What was that like?

KN: I was the only Jew, starting when I was five, in the Falmouth school system until the eighth grade. Gal by the name of Rhoda Anderson, whose father ran either the Associated Press, the United Press for the state of Maine, moved from New York and they moved to Falmouth. I had one other kid who was Jewish in the school system, and then she moved away. We grew up in, we were really the only Jews in the town. All that period. Today, it's quite a Jewish town, but it wasn't so then.

EL: What do you think has changed between then and now that has made it more of a Jewish town?

KN: Jews have moved here.

EL: Yeah. (laughs)

KN: There was, there was a period of time as the Jewish Community was a very urban community, like most Jewish communities elsewhere. To live out in the gentile suburbs was not common. But my father was from Rumford, Maine where there were not, there were only eight or nine Jewish families in the years in that he lived there. My mother and father were always very comfortable. My mother grew up in an Orthodox household in Bangor. They were groundbreakers to go to places where they were, they may be the only Jews. Always very comfortable with making new friends, or trying to make new friends. Coming to Falmouth was a groundbreaking act.

EL: What was it like for you to be the only Jewish person in many situations?

KN: World War II changed gentile attitudes. Not because of the Holocaust - though I'm sure it had some impact. But when people are away at war for three, four, five years, a time, and they're away at war irregardless of their social position, when these people came back in 1945 and '46. They had been in foxholes with Jews and Catholics, where religion was of no consequence. Survival was of consequence. The social mores, when they came back, had a very different emphasis. Being from the right side of the tracks, with the right pedigree, didn't matter anywheres as much as it did before the war. When I grew up here, whereas in my father's era, would have been anti-Semitic indeed, most of the houses in Falmouth and Cape Elizabeth, they [there] were very commonly deed restrictions against selling to Jews, right in the deeds. All the hotels in Maine at that time had restrictions, that you couldn't go to most of the hotels in Maine, those summer hotels, if you were Jewish. You were not welcome. The code words were, in their ads, they would say, "Churches Nearby." That would be the code words that if you were Jewish, you're not welcome. But after World War II, people had a lot of makin' up to do, as far as time. They lost a big part of their lives. It changed very very rapidly. Falmouth became, I remember, my mother was the first, she was the first Jewish member of the Falmouth Foreside Garden Club. My father was, got, was a member of the local Masonic Lodge. It was very unusual. But people put down the prejudices after World War II. The Jews had a different agenda themselves. The Jewish community was interested in social issues rather than religious issues. That was my take on it. 'Course the Conservative congregation got going here in 1949. It was the fourth or fifth effort to have Conservative Judaism in Portland. They had all previously failed because the Orthodox controlled everything. By 1949, they were ready for a new synagogue. That was the beginning of a change in the Jewish agenda, I would say, in the greater Portland. It was a very interesting time to be Jewish.

EL: What year were you born?

KN: 1943.

EL: Alright. So you were not involved in World War II personally.

KN: No.

EL: Did it impact you since you were growing up -

KN: It impact me in this sense. Portland was not only a great and important ship-building community - South Portland side was entirely ship building along the whole waterfront. There were over ten thousand people building ships there, I think that's an accurate number. It was also the headquarters of the fleets. Several fleets. And we had a very active military base. If you were born in 1943, as I was, by the time you were two, three years old, everywhere you went was, had a World War II influence. I can remember what is now called Martin Points Health Care, that was the Marine hospital. I remember as a very little boy, my mother was a volunteer

there during the war, and then after the war, because that's where Marines who had been injured were sent for rehabilitation. We spent a lot of time there. Likewise, over on the other side of Portland in Cape Elizabeth, on the Cape Elizabeth line is Fort Williams where Portland Headlight is - that was a very active military base. We would drive over on Sundays - this was organized by the Jewish community center - and we would pick up a soldier almost every Sunday I can remember, and bring them home to have a Sunday meal with us at our house on Foreside Road. The war was very much, the war and it's aftermath, was much a part of growing up but what occurred is that the war was over, and the people left, and the ship-building stopped. Portland's bottom fell out of it over time and it became a difficult, economically, a very difficult place until probably the '80s when there was the rejuvena - the '70s and '80s were the rejuvenation of Portland. The war was very much on our, in our lives growing up.

EL: Could you talk to me about what growing up Jewish meant for you?

KN: Well, I think it meant, other than having an obligation to go to Hebrew School three days a week, and for me that meant I commuted, because I lived in Falmouth. I remember a couple of times, I remember, one of the non-Jewish mothers would give me a ride, a woman whose family reputation was that they were anti-Semitic. I think it was years later before I appreciated the irony. She took a shine to me, and she would drive me, 'cuz she would pick her daughter up at the Pine Road School, and she would sometimes drive me to Hebrew school if my mother couldn't do it. It was years later before I put two and two together. 'Cuz here's a woman that the Jews are absolutely certain she's vigorously anti-Semitic. She's taking me to Hebrew school and explaining to her daughta' - who I remember, even as a little kid, was a very good looking girl, so I think I hung onto every word - explaining that these were Jewish people and that she was doing a service to my mother by taking me to Hebrew School in Portland. That was the part of being Jewish was, it was a trans - it was trans-generational in this sense: I was of that era when people went and grew up with their entire social structure being based on being Jewish, having no close non-Jewish friends, having all of our social activities occur, in my case, at the Jewish community center on Cumberland Avenue, and during that period of developing friendships. It was easier for me, because I lived in Falmouth, so all the kids I went to public school with, there weren't any Jews. The kids who came back in my house afterwards, they were not Jewish. When I went to their house, it was the same thing. It became easier for me. But it was a period of time in which we spent a lot of our consciousness thinking about, "What is the role of being Jewish, when you're in an increasingly not only non-Jewish world, but a world that is, in fits and starts, hospitable to Jewish people to participate? You have to understand that that, everything from the '30s to the '60s, these, anti-Semitism as a practice was very accepted. It wasn't, and what I mean by that, hospitals had no conscious about saying Jewish doctors did or did not have hospital privileges. Even in Boston, if you were at Mass General, if you were a Jewish doctor you had to fight for hospital privileges. Otherwise you had to have... All the law firms were segregated. There weren't any Jewish lawyers at non-Jewish law firms. That's why they began to have

Jewish law firms because that was your choice as a lawyer. None of the major businesses in Portland, whether it's the newspapers or the shipyards, they had no Jewish employees. You couldn't be a Jewish executive. That was the world that went to war. The world that came home from war began to break those barriers down. Slowly. Slowly. I think my dad was the first member of the Portland Country Club, and when he was asked to join, it came because he was chairman of the United Fund, campaigned for the greater Portland very successfully. He met, he made a lot of friends in that civic endeavor. He was asked to join the country club, and he said, "I will join, but I'm going to make nominations of other Jewish people and I don't want to be a token. I'm expecting my nominations will be respected. And they were. But that was the groundbreaking era, so in many ways it was very invigorating. We were not a religious family, though we went to the services and so forth as required. But my mother was particular, grew up in a very Orthodox household, and my mother was, I would say, she probably was a non-believer, religiously. But she was very Jewish culturally, and she accepted... I don't think she believed in God. I think she believed that life was a process by which humans determine whether or not it was going to be successful. My father was more traditional in his belief. But he - my father believed that every problem that existed, God had created a solution for it, and it was man's job to find those solutions, whether it was a medical issue, or a social conflict. He really believed that it wasn't through prayer that people made good lives and did good things. In fact, he was quite adamant that it wasn't, that prayer was like goin' up for air. What made the difference was what you did as a human being.

EL: And how do you define yourself? While you answer this, I'm going to make sure it's running alright, but feel free to keep talking. your mom wasn't religious, and your dad was more cultural, how do you see yourself? Okay, go on.

KN: I was the first in my family - I think this is true - and the first among my close friends to marry a non-Jewish woman. I always had non-Jewish girlfriends. I was interested in the intellectual curiosity of Judaism, in the sense of, "Try and understand the rules of right and wrong behavior." Not in religious adherence, but in behavior, social behavior. I enjoy, I think I enjoy, and I know this is hardly unique with me, I know this to be true, that a lot of us just enjoy the religious services for the music, for the melody, for the comfort. The idea that you can walk in, in Florence, Italy, to a synagogue and the same music is going, you know the same words. You may not be able to say, "How do you do?" But you can go to the Torah and make the blessing, and it'll be universally understood. That is a very comforting and warming sense of belonging to wherever your travels take you, wherever your life takes you. That's the kind of - When I go Saturday morning to minyan, I'm not there because I believe in the story or I believe in the religious tenants, the religious requirements. I'm there because I find a comfort in being among people who've had a similar background and an experience. Now Portland, when I grew up, I was one of the very very few of my age who inter-married. Today, I think the statistic is about 62% of greater Portland people who identify as Jewish have intermarried. It is, in fact, one of the largest intermarried communities in the United States, as a percentage. I

became, by accident, typical of the people here. My involvement in the J.C.A. for the last ten or twelve years, and Center Day Camp all my life, which started out as non-sectarian after World War II. The argument that I have made for years to the J.C.A. is that you have to focus on the non-Jewish part of all these families, because they are tomorrows Jews. If you're in the business of fundraising, you have to be hospitable to inter-married families and understand when inter-married couples put their heads down on the pillow at night and talk about what charities they're going to give money too, that is a negotiation. You have to understand it as such. If you're always going to leave the non-Jewish spouse out of those discussions, you're gonna find out that you're gonna get a lot less money, as a charity.

EL: What was it like early on when you were dating gentile girls? How did your family react?

KN: I think that there was concern that this might not lead to good results. But particularly once my family, once I got serious with Mary Nelson, who was then Mary Pennell from Seattle. My parents were so taken by her, that it, my father just said, I remember him saying when it was clear we were going to get married, my father said to Mary, "The only thing that I would request of you, if you can do it, is it would be more comfortable for me and my friends if you had a home wedding rather than a church wedding so that it was clear that this was a joint marriage and it was not one in which Judaism was being snuffed out." Mary said, "I'd be thrilled to do that, which is what we did in Seattle." I think my parents, I remember going to my grandmother and saying, "Now," - called her Nanny - I said, "Mary and I are going to get married. How do you feel about that?" She says, "Get me an airplane ticket." I think that people define some of these issues by what they think of the people you've introduced them to. If it's all theoretical, then people might be more reluctant, but by that time, I think that my family was much more open to - I think Mary's family was, her family was less certain that it was, the Jews they knew were quite isolated, and they were very worried that she would have an isolated life. Didn't work out that way.

EL: (laughs) That's so interesting. I guess my question would be, in that it seems like you had many forays into a gentile world, so to speak, in that you were the only Jew in a lot of your schooling experiences and then you were dating gentile girls -

KN: But I was always active in the Jewish community. I was president of the U.S.Y. group. I was very active in being a Jew, but I regarded that as not a mutually exclusive - that was the kind of house I grew up in too. There was a lot of respect in our household for people who had accomplished things. Whatever those things were. Most of my mother's and father's friends who stayed on as long-term friends, they were, they were people who had a - that it wasn't enough to be observant, to be a good person. That wasn't the ground rules. I remember once saying to my mother, "What'd she think of so-and-so? Isn't he a nice fellow?" I said. She said to me, "Well, he never killed anybody." Those were her code words. It took me awhile to figure it out. My mother would never say something bad about somebody, but if she hadn't

seen that person do some good for some other person, her answer, "He never killed anybody." That was sort of, the bell whether, the, "Take another look. He's a little bit self-centered."

EL: My question was actually going to be, did you experience any anti-Semitism growing up, or throughout your life?

KN: All the time. It was, I always think of, the - I used to have a pal. He's still a good friend of mine, we haven't seen each other much, from school, Stanley Sclar, he lives up in the Augusta area. Stanley was the toughest of the Jews. Nobody was tougher. He wasn't very tall, 5'6", 5'7", but he could lift weights, he was tough. Great fighter. One day, I was, we were walking in the door at Deering High School. I went to Deering High School, I commuted from here by hitchhiking to school. I'm walkin' in the back door, and there was a guy named - I can't remember his last name - but he was a pronounced anti-Semite, very tough guy. As I walked in, wearing my Macabee jacket with my Jewish insignia on it, he goes, (makes phlegm noise, as though preparing to spit). Sclar was next to me, and Sclar puts his hand on the guys chest, says, "I wouldn't do that, if I were you." That was a typical kind of thing that you'd have - today you'd call it bullying - that was pretty common. We had our fraternities, Jewish fraternities, because we weren't welcome into the other clubs, the non-Jewish clubs. The girls had their own sororities, that were entirely Jewish because they weren't welcome into the high school. You grew up with these segregated social structures, and that's why the school activities became so important. Because there was no prejudice on the athletic teams, there was no prejudice on the clubs, the school clubs. I'm thinking of photography and writing and so forth, band. The social clubs were very limited, and what happened was they fell apart after my era, because we all went on to colleges or wherever we went, and all the fraternities had to give up those same discriminating. When I got to Bowdoin, I was, fraternity had never had any Jews in it, except when I arrived, there was a Jewish kid in my fraternity who was a senior and I was a freshman. He was the first. That awful, over the next few years, it fell apart. The discrimination that we felt growing up was, we were defined by our Jewishness. When you went to somebody's house who wasn't Jewish, you knew the conversation was, "Oh, I'm having Kenny over. You know, he's Jewish, he's a good guy." Or, "I'd like to invite him to my birthday party, is that okay?" It was all - I suppose, similar today, to what black people go through that their blackness defines who they are. When we were growing up, your Jewishness defined who you were.

EL: Do you look back at that time, and how do you think Maine has changed the most, since, as you were saying, being defined by your Jewishness, to where it is today?

KN: That's a good question. I think that Maine has almost always been in the bottom economic tier in the United - in total society for 250 years. There's only been three periods of time - I think this is accurate - there's only been three periods of time, running about ten years and each time, when Maine's overall economy even got to

the national average. Midpoint. They were all real-estate-boom-related. They all lasted for about ten years, and then Maine dropped again. The problem that Jewish families have had in Maine has always been, except for those brief interludes, that if you high-aspiring family, and you are seeking to make a economically upper-income opportunity, you're seeking to pursue that, Maine has a lot fewer opportunities than a Boston would have, than a New York would have, especially a California. In growing up, almost none of my friends, almost none of them, came back to Maine. My Jewish friends. It was even less for my brothers. That doesn't mean that these people didn't end up buying summer houses in Maine and coming here in the summer and having an island or... It simply means that where they make their livelihoods is elsewhere. I think that the number of Jewish families that are willing to live a rural, modest income life, is relatively small. During my growing up. I don't know whether that has changed a lot. I see a lot of people coming back, but they're coming back with economic means. Coming back in their 50s or 60s or 70s. They're spending some time here. But there weren't the economic opportunities that there are in different places. That's why places like Jackson Laboratories are important. There's only so many jobs they provide.

EL: Could you talk to me about - I loved your story about Etz Chaim and your contribution there - could you talk to me about how that particular area has changed and what you ended up contributing to it?

KN: Well, it's hard to visual the Portland - when you look at the Portland today, the greater Portland of today, I think it's fifty years into landmarks now, being a factor in the preservation. Look at the Portland of the 1960s. All the way from Middle Street to the Waterfront, all those streets, Plum Street, Union Street, all those streets were boarded up. These were buildings that had been abandoned. Key Bank Plaza, where that is today, used to be the Falmouth Hotel. It was almost boarded up. When you look today, you look at a community that has seen the architectural value of preservation. Why did that happen? Because Portland after the great fire, was it 1866 or -

EL: Around then, yeah.

KN: After the great fire, the speculation was it would take thirty to forty years to rebuild Portland. It was rebuilt in ten years. In those ten years, there were more architects per capita in Portland, Maine than there was in any other city in America. They ended up rebuilding Portland to a stunning visual. It wasn't ethnic money. It wasn't an ethnic opportunity. But that, those bones were visually extremely inviting. What happened in Portland also happened in Boston. It wasn't only Portland that had this Renaissance, starting in late 70s, early 70s. Boston also had it. Driven, in part, by tax policy. There was a thing called the Five Year historic write-off, which meant any fifty-year-old property, anywhere in America, could be restored and your investment could be recaptured with five years of depreciation. At the same time, income tax rates were very very high. Those deductions were worth a pile of money, and all of Boston, from Kenmore Square, next to Fenway Park, to Downtown, to

Arlington Street, all of that was restored in that 1970s. In Boston's case, it was used to provide housing for flight from the suburbs back to the city. In Portland's case, it was used to preserve the downtown commercial area for office purposes, primarily, in retail, just for the Old Port. That was a very, that was a very important transformation that gave today - people come to Portland and what they see is visually very appealing.

EL: Absolutely. I think that can also be said for Etz Chaim where you put in the garden. To get on tape, I would love it if you wouldn't mind talking to me again -

KN: One of the reasons we, I started to tell you, the reason there was an apartment house in front, in 1941 -

[phone rings]

KN: I'll let that ring.

EL: You can talk over it.

KN: In 1941 -

[phone rings, talks]

KN: I don't know who that is. In 1941, when they bought the front, when Etz Chaim bought the front building, the plan was to create gardens. But then the war started in December of '41. The war then lasted for the five years that it lasted. By 1946, 1947, much of the Portland Jewish community, as they came back from the war, were now moving out to the Woodfords area, which in 1949, the Temple Beth El had been built. There was this migration from Munjoy Hill, the Jews were leaving Munjoy hill in droves. Nothing ever happened to the front yard, and as you know, Etz Chaim got down to barely 10 people coming for services periodically, with no resident rabbi. When we got involved with the restoration of the building, which in part had been very much spearheaded by Judy Glickman, because Judy had come in and she was mesmerized by the old interior, before it was restored, where it had been brought down a ceiling, covering up the whole balcony. It was really a - she just had a sense that there was something important up overhead. Couldn't see any of that until five, six years ago, eight years ago. That was a drop ceiling, came all the way down in the sanctuary. The window was covered over with brick on the outside, the stained glass window to stop vandalers. There was eight or ten people who would come to services, that was it. The front yard, so when we started the restoration of the building, and needed to raise money to do that, it was my sister-in-law Meryl Nelson who, I was interested in raising money for the whole building, particularly the inside. She said, "No, we have to start with the outside, because that's what people will see, and if you don't make the outside attractive" - and it wasn't. That's how we got Dave Emery involved to plan it. Then we went out and we raised, we weren't going to borrow any money, we raised all the money. We had a

brehtaking plan that was beautifully executed, almost entirely by volunteers. But what we saw, as it began to take shape, was we realized, there were only to gardens in all of Congress Street, from the top of Munjoy Hill, from number one Congress Street to the old Sidney Davidson House , all the way to Saint John's Street. That's a long ways. You know where Saint Johns is, it's down by -

EL: Oh yeah, that's my neighborhood.

KN: All the way, there are only two pieces of land that have a garden out front. One is the Henry Longfellow house. The other was Etz Chaim synagogue. We looked at that, and we said, "This is fantastic! What a symbol this is, that the Jews start out in Portland Maine, occupyin a back lot, coming here from Eastern Europe. They have to walk through an alley to get to their house of worship. And here, after being in America since 1921, they end up having the most, the greenest, the most beautiful front yard in all of Yankee-dom." It was very, it was very emotional, because that land was telling the story of American, of Jews being Americanized.

EL: Can you talk to me about that back alley? I know you told me, but I'd love to get it on tape.

KN: Originally, where Etz Chaim is, set back from the street, it was on line with rows of houses all the way out Congress Street that were behind the buildings that were facing Congress Street. The signature buildings were on the face of the street. But there was a second row of buildings all along Congress Street up until at least Longfellow Square. Those buildings, largely, were rooming houses. They were lower cost. They were dark because they were behind other buildings. Like Etz Chaim they were accessible only through alleyways. Our alley ways, the one for Etz Chaim, was twelve feet wide, it's on a city map and it goes up the right side, facing the building, up the right side, where the picket fence now is. Twelve feet wide, that was the way you got from India Street to Etz Chaim Synagogue. You walked through an alley. By buying in 1941, the apartment house, then Etz Chaim had a 267 Congress Street address. But all of Congress Street had that second row of buildings, and they were often used as rooming houses for single people who would move to the city during the industrial growth, when Portland was the commercial center, when downtown Portland was the commercial center. All those stores along Congress Center were largely haberdasheries, and women's haberdasheries, a lot of milliners, hat makers, or so forth - women, who lived in those row houses. That's Etz Chaim's history, was that building, Etz Chaim's building was six year, six apartment house, apartment house, before it was converted -

[phone rings, talks]

KN: The Maine Jewish Museum was given a box. You understand, the Maine Jewish Community Center, when it was founded, every week it produced a newsletter. The newsletter was a formally produced newspaper and professionally produced by volunteers. The Jewish community center, when it was on Cumberland Avenue,

wasn't unusual to have three or four hundred people in that building on a Sunday doing different things. Had a great theater group, produced their own, we'd call 'em, Broadway Productions. You know who Linda Lavin is? She was in a TV star, a thing called Alice.

EL: Oh! Sounds familiar.

KN: A lot of 'em. On Broadway. Ten or twelve big hits. Huge. One of the kids in the theater.

EL: How do you spell her last name?

KN: L-A-V-I-N.

EL: I'll look her up. How fun. What did you go to Bowdoin for? What did you study there?

KN: My brother Bruce, who you're going to interview, went to Bowdoin, class of '59. My brother Lenny and Andy went to Harding. I went to Bowdoin, and studied, I was an English major, but I got very interested in English Literature at Bowdoin. I got particularly interested in the American Jewish Novel, and wrote my senior thesis on the American - and developed a friendship with a then, well-known novelist, American novelist named Henry Roth, who'd written what turned out to be an iconic novel called, 'Call It Sleep.' I went from there, after I graduated, I decided I wanted to be a lawyer, which I didn't decide until I think it was my, probably the summer of my senior year. My father had gotten very sick, and I had left school in my sophomore year to go and work in the family business. At the end of that period of time, I was perfectly contented staying, working. My father had made a good recovery. To, I think, everybody's surprise. In those days, treated heart attacks very - heart attacks were often fatal and then you lived a, it was common to live a very sedentary life after a heart attack. My dad wasn't that way, but I was enjoying working for him and with him as he came back to work over a long period of time. I really doubted that I'd go back to college, and then one day I got a call from my brother Lenny, who was practicing law in downtown Portland. Says, "I'm gonna take you to lunch." Well, my brother Lenny had a reputation for being very frugal, so when he took me to lunch I said, "What should I order?" He says, "Have whatever you want." "Have whatever I want?" We're in George's Delicatessen and most you could go would be a dollar sixty-five. But I said, "Did Mother put you up to this lunch?" He said, "She did." He said, "The purpose of this lunch - " "To get me to go back to school." He says, "Yes. In part." I said, "What'd you mean, in part. What's that mean?" He said, "You don't have to go back to school in order to be successful in business. Lots of people don't have college degrees, successful in business." Which was more true then than now, of course. I said, "What's the purpose of going back to college, why should I go back to college if?" He said, "Well, you'll find it's the only time of your life, around four years, in which you can talk to people day and night, say whatever you want day and night, and it has no consequence. You're never going

to have to say the right thing or lose the client or lose the customer or be offensive to somebody. You can just think what you want to think, learn what you want to learn, and there's no penalty." I said, "I'm sure you think, is that enough of a reason, to go to college?" He said, "This is probably the only reason." Well, I thought that over, and it became so appealing to me, that was such an astute observation, because I hadn't been to college for a year, so I knew that he wasn't manufacturing an observation, it was one that I could relate to, I'd already been there, and that was exactly that I learned the first year. I did go back to school, and I am, let me just say to you, that when I had left I had gone into the Dean's office, to the Dean of Students. Told him my father was very sick and I was going to have to leave, to go to work, which I didn't know - The Dean said to me, I said to him, "If my father should get well, and I can come back, what, where do I reapply for admission. Because it could be a couple of years, I don't know." He says, "You don't reapply, you just send me a letter that you're coming back." I said, "I don't have to reapply?" He said to me, "Once in, you're always in. You're never out." I couldn't get over that. I said to him, "Did I hear what you just said?" He said, "You heard what I said. And by the way, you'll be back. You guys always come back." That was exactly what happened. That's when I decided that - I'd gone to summer school that summer, in Cambridge, and it was a very, it was a very eye-opening experience to be with students from all over the world at Harvard Summer School. When I got back to Bowdoin then, I got serious. That's when I got interesting in Literature, and then applying to Law School, which I did. Ended up in downtown Boston, got a job, in what was then a small Jewish law firm, fifteen lawyers, today five hundred and fifty lawyers downtown. Spent ten years there. I was a partner, early. Then I actually came back here.

EL: It's so wonderful that you live down the street from your childhood home. I do have to wrap it up now Is there any other thing you'd think to mention that you find particularly important or relevant in relation to this topic?

KN: Yes. I think I'd say to you, that if you want to have a grasp of what being Jewish was in greater Portland in the '40s, '50s and '60s, ending in the '70s, you have to study the history of the Jewish Community Center. It's all documented. It defined the life of thousands of Jews of this area. It was also part of the Jewish Community Center movement, and that was nation-wide. There were Jewish Community Centers across the country. They all began to look the same. How did Jews Americanize themselves in a manner that they retained their Judaism. That was the whole issue. The Portland Jewish Community was a very very vibrant, all volunteer-drive except for what separated Portland from other places was that it had an executive director that was paid to run it. The first one was a man named Norman Godfrey, who became iconic as a social worker, a great social worker. But you need to study that history, because it tells you more about the liberation of Jews who grew up here than any other social movement did.

EL: I guess my -

KN: You do have documents at the -

EL: Yeah.

KN: There's a box of -

EL: Documents that the Maine Jewish Museum should have.

KN: I know they have it, because some Saturdays when I'm sitting there, I'm pouring through the docu - I don't know where Gary put it. But it's the Jewish community center bulletins in there, about fifteen years old.

EL: I guess my last question would be how do you think the Maine Jewish Community has Americanized? And in what ways? It's a big question.

KN: It's a community, the Maine Jewish community, it's a community that can be found in two hundred countries around the world today. These are people who move from Portland, just like most of the people who are here today are from elsewhere, well most of the people who started out here are elsewhere, they're in somebody else's elsewhere. I think the way, I think that the people who grew up here in that period of time were taught very, learned a lot of Yankee values that they thought were Jewish, I guess. But they learned how to be courteous. They learned how to be good listeners. They learned how to get things executed. You want to do things, you do them. And they're largely non-complaining people. I think that - you know there's a doctorate, and it's uncertain whether it's accurate, but most of the great leaders came from small towns. Most of the great accomplishers come from small towns, social accomplish, meaning people who have to work with other people. When you try to figure out, a) is that true and b) why is it true? There's a great advantage to growing up in a place where you have an identity and responsibility. That's a big plus. You don't necessarily see it that way, when you're going through it, but it has, that was one of Portland's great contributions to the people who grew up in Munjoy Hill and might be living in Los Angeles, their children might be living in Los Angeles today. They learned how to get along effectively with other people, but not subordinate.