

*The Cohen Family of Biddeford, Maine*  
*The Memories of Beatrice Cohen Espovich*

*Carole Kolker: I would like to start by talking about your family — your parents and your grandparents. How did it happen that you grew up in Biddeford, Maine?*

**Beatrice Espovich:** OK. My parents were married in 1912. My father, when he came to this country, when he left Ellis Island, he went to be with a brother in Rumford, Maine, who was in the bottling business. He made soft drinks. And my father was young then and not married, and he learned the business.

My grandfather came to this country, and he was a very learned man. At first, he applied for a job as a Hebrew teacher in Bangor, Maine, where my mother lived. And I don't know whether she was on the committee or what, but that's where they [mother and father] met. And they fell in love, and they were married in 1912. My father already had two years of the bottling business under his belt. So they came to Biddeford, where I believe there was a bottling plant for sale. And they bought it. And they were followed by my grandfather and grandmother, who came to Biddeford. And we didn't live that far away from them. And that was about the earliest and richest memory I have, is of my beautiful, beautiful grandparents.

My grandfather was extremely handsome, and my grandmother was beautiful. And while their English was limited, they engendered a great deal of respect among the non-Jews. They always carried themselves with dignity. And he became the Hebrew school teacher and the lay reader of our little tiny synagogue there, which they always referred to as “the shul.” I thought they were wonderful.



**Minnie Leah Cohen**



**Max Cohen**

They would come to visit us once a week, and always say they never brought anything, and their pockets would be bulging. If they spent a dollar for candy, you had enough to flood the city, because everything was five for a cent, then, and ten for a cent. His Hebrew school was in his dining room, and I once walked in there unexpectedly. And all the children's heads were bowed. And my grandmother had told them that if they were very conscientious and worked hard, the angel would reward them. So I walked in as she was dropping - I don't know if it was a penny or a nickel, in front of each child. She saw me. Oh, my God, she was so upset. So she swore me to secrecy. I don't think I ever told my brothers that it was not an angel who came. It was a different form of an angel.

Now my mother's family: My mother, I don't know the exact year that she came. But she was separated from her mother aboard ship in Antwerp because she had trachoma in her eyes, and she was not allowed to go on. She says she had no way of reaching her mother to say anything. Her mother didn't know what happened to her daughter. And the HIAS, it was an international Hebrew aid society; [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] placed my mother in a home, where she stayed probably six or seven months as a maid. She knew nothing about the language, nothing about the customs. My mother grew up in a very orthodox environment. She was sixteen. And she told me that, if she had any maturity or wasn't so frightened as a child, that she could have had a wonderful experience. But she was too scared to move. And it took her six months, and she was cured. And she came to the United States and was reunited with her family in Bangor, Maine. My mother was one of thirteen children. And I think, when she was in Bangor, there may have been four left, five left. Many died in Europe. And my mother's mother lived with us six months a year. I remember her clearly. She had a wig, a sheitel. She always sat in a corner with a large, voluminous skirt, and had no interest in us at all. I don't remember her ever being affectionate. I only knew that she would come after Pesach and would go back before Rosh Hashanah, because my mother's sister lived next door to a little synagogue in Bangor. So my memories of her are very dim. And I feel that she was unhappy. I



Ziata Rasel Robinson

had a feeling, as an immigrant, she didn't like being uprooted from Europe, because she did nothing to extend herself. She didn't try to be part of the household, or the children, or the family. My father, her son-in-law, worshipped her. And in years to come she would wander off, and my mother would call my father, and he'd come home. And he was in the tonic business, and the summer was his busiest time of the year. He would rush home, and he would go from field to field until he found her. And he'd bring her home — I remember that, lovingly — and would say to my mother, "Celia, take her to bed. Have her lie down now." And that was the essence of my father. He was a wonderful, wonderful man. Anyway, they came to Biddeford.

**CK:** *Where were they coming from in Europe? Do you know?*

**BE:** Yes. My mother came from a place called Dersuniskio. And it was a little shtetl outside of Kovno [Lithuania]. My father came from Vilna [Lithuania]. I don't know the name of the shtetl. I know that he was not brought up in Vilna.

**CK:** *And their parents came to the United States?*

**BE:** My father's parents and my mother's mother. My grandmother had children who had come prior to that and settled in Bangor.

**CK:** *Did they ever talk about why they were leaving Europe?*

**BE:** To all of our deep regret, neither of my parents discussed anything about Europe. It was plain to me that life was hard, and there were pogroms. I used to hear my mother say that. They were just so glad to be in this country that they really thought they were in paradise.

**CK:** *How would they express something like that?*

**BE:** Oh. Seven of us would be sitting around the dining room table studying at night. And if we threw a pencil or an eraser, we would have to listen to this litany. "You kids don't know how lucky you are. I was never in a public library in my life. I was not allowed to pick up a newspaper and read it. And you have nothing to worry about except study. So study and stop fooling around." We wouldn't be fooling around. We'd be sitting there for hours studying. But every now and then we'd get a little silly. That's how we knew about that. And my mother used to say, "You're in a wonderful country. And you will go to college if I have to scrub floors." And I said, "Ma, I doubt you'll ever have to scrub floors." She said, "That's how important it is that you people be educated. I would never have this opportunity. I never had it. I would never have it. Look what you have in this country." They loved it. They reveled in it.

**CK:** *Did they talk about how they met?*

BE: Yes. They met when my grandfather came to Bangor to apply — I don't know if it was a teaching job or a — you know what a shochet is? But he came to apply, and he was accompanied by my father. My mother must have been on the committee. I don't know. But she was there when he came to apply for the job, which he didn't get. But that's how my father and mother met.

CK: *And your mother's maiden name?*

BE: Celia Robinson.

CK: *Do you know anything about when they left their homes, how they got the money to get here, whether they came steerage?*

BE: Oh, they came steerage. Oh yes. They didn't have any money. And my mother said that she was young. She was, by that time, maybe seventeen. And she met a man (laughs) onboard ship, and they were so unhappy they weren't going to the same city. He was going to Boston, and she was going to — some crazy name starting with "B" that she thought was Boston. And they separated, and that was the end of that. She always spoke about it, though. She let us know about it.

CK: *Why did they come to Bangor?*

BS: I don't know how it started. But my mother's three brothers landed in Bangor; and then a sister came who was married in Bangor. And then



Celia and Julius Cohen

my mother came, and she was married in Bangor. I don't know what they did there; they wouldn't speak about those early years. I used to beg my mother and my father. My father just said, "Beatrice, we're so lucky we're here. I don't want to think about it. I don't want to remember anything about it." That was all I knew. I know they came — not my mother, but my father — came to where he boarded steerage in a hay wagon. He and I think two brothers. They came in a hay wagon, and they were just terrified that they'd get caught.

CK: *So they were trying to escape.*

BE: They escaped, yes. Yes.

CK: *And did they come through Ellis Island?*

BE: Yes. And then they went to Portland, I think. And one finally ended up in Lowell [MA]. There were four brothers. And they just loved each other very, very deeply. And they would come to the cemetery once a year to visit the parents' graves and so forth. And I remembered how touched I was when my father would say goodbye to his brothers. They would weep. I used to see that. They just didn't want to be away from one another. And they were together as much as they could be.

CK: *Did anyone in the family, in the Cohen family, stay in Europe, that you knew of? Or the Robinsons?*

BE: No. My mother and her mother were the last to leave.

CK: *Well, I think we'll get back to your grandparents, because they did move down to Biddeford. And this is when your grandfather was teaching.*

BE: He was what was known as a rebbe, not a rabbi.

CK: *Do you know what he did when he was in Europe, what kind of work he did?*

BE: They never would say. There was something about a miller in a flour mill. I don't know. I just don't know. I have no idea.

CK: *And what skills did your father have when he came here?*

BE: Well, he bought the business. I don't know if he bought it or paid it out. I don't what happened. And he did that all his life. He was very happy in that business.

CK: *And he came here in 1912.*

BE: He came in 1910 and then married in 1912.

CK: *So he was working already and met your mother, and they got married in Bangor, and came down to Biddeford and bought an existing business?*

BE: Yes. They named it the York Bottling Company. I don't know if that's what they bought — I just don't know.

CK: *And do you know where they lived at that time?*

BE: Sure. When they moved to Biddeford? They moved to a little street called Harvey Street. Upstairs was a family by the name of Murphy. And Mrs. Murphy could not speak Yiddish. And my mother was pretty limited, in those years, in her English. But they bonded for life. Not that I ever saw her. Then they moved. We moved to a nice house

on Pool Street, and, I guess, out of the seven, five of us were probably born on Pool Street. I was born on Harvey Street. I know that.

**CK:** *Do you know how they were able to get the money to buy this bottling company?*

**BE:** I don't know. I don't know whether they bought it and just paid it out as they went along. I don't know.

**CK:** *And it wasn't with any family member?*

**BE:** No, no, no.

**CK:** *Where were your grandparents living in Biddeford?*

**BE:** On 85 Alfred Street.

**CK:** *Jay heard of Casco Bottling, in Portland and asked if there's any relationship?*

**BE:** The Casco Bottling Company? Yes. That was my mother's niece and her husband on that. Their name was Mike and Lil Levy. I think his name was Mike.

**CK:** *Was it a coincidence that two people in the family were in the bottling business?*

**BE:** I don't know. I have no idea how that happened. Because that was many years later, because Lil Levy, at those years, was still a young girl, very young girl.

**CK:** *You've talked a little bit about your relationship with your grandmother and grandfather. What was your relationship with them? What do you remember about the times?*

**BE:** Oh, I remember them vividly. They were a very handsome couple, really beautiful. My grandfather was very dark, with white beard and white hair. And my grandmother was just beautiful, very stately, very beautiful. I have pictures of them in the bedroom. And they were just a gorgeous couple. And I remember them warmly, lovingly. Every Thursday afternoon my grandfather — gee, I'd forgotten all about that — would shampoo his beard and his hair. And I would run like the devil out of school to get down there because he allowed me to brush it. He'd wait until I just got there, and then he'd be just wiping his hair with a towel. And I'd sit on his lap and brush it. I thought that was the most heavenly thing that could happen. I loved them very much. And they loved me.

**CK:** *Did you spend much time at their house?*

**BE:** Yes, I did. They were a few miles. But they were not far from the school I went to. And, you know, in those years community life was different. Number one, the Jews in Biddeford all lived near the shul, because nobody walked. And that's why my mother and father found

that living on Pool Street, which was a beautiful area, was too far for Hebrew school, and even public school. So I remember vividly that we would go up after supper. I guess we rode up. I don't know. And we'd sit on what they used to call the stoop, the front steps. And everyone — all the Jewish people in that little area would all congregate. And we'd have a wonderful time. The kids got to know each other, and the families really bonded. And it was an interesting time.

And growing up in Biddeford, I felt very welcome. I did well — I loved school, anyway. And I did well in school. And my brother Sam was — euch — he was a whiz. I do not recall his ever opening a book. And he graduated, as I did. I worked my head off, and he just flipped through. He had such a retentive memory. And my sister Annetta, number three, was a very good student. I wouldn't say she was a brilliant student, but she was a very good student. My brother Bernard, number four — My mother and father were always in school because he was always play tricks on the teachers, would put dead rats in the drawer. He was a hellion.

So, when he grew up, and he went to high school, of course he was wonderful in sciences, but he hated all the liberal arts. So he didn't do well. But in those years, whether you were academically suited or not, if you had the money, you could go to college. They would at least take you, and you may not survive, but they would accept you. And my father drove all that way, over those country roads, to the University of Maine and rode my brother Bernard. He said, "I'm not going. I'm going in the shoe shop with all my friends." My father said, "Over my dead body will you work in a shoe factory. You're going to school." So, he just said, "I'm not going." And the day came when he had to go. My father — we all witnessed it — took him by the scruff of his neck and said, "You say goodbye to Ma and say goodbye to your brothers and sisters." And he threw him in the car and took him to school, all the way. Now it's nothing, in those years it was a long ride. And he found his niche. He excelled. He was very bright, very bright. And in college he did do mainly scientific courses. He didn't have to take a lot of liberal arts. And he was head of his fraternity. He had a wonderful academic career.

When he came home from London during World War II — he'd been living in an underground for close to three years — he came back

totally crippled with arthritis, totally. So he went to see a doctor because he couldn't keep on. He was in constant pain. And the doctor said, "Bernard, you have to go to school in Phoenix, Arizona under the GI Bill. Not going to cost you. Go." And he came home straight, healthy, pain free and, to my knowledge, never suffered from arthritis again. So he got a degree in Spanish or something. I don't know what he did there. None of us cared. He was there, and he was studying, and he got a master's in something or other. And he did well.

**CK:** *Had he finished school in Maine?*

**BE:** Yes, at the University of Maine.

**CK:** *And what had he studied there?*

**BE:** Mainly the sciences, mainly sciences.

**CK:** *What did he want to do?*

**BE:** Well, he wanted to work in the scientific factory, a plant of some kind. But you know he couldn't get in because he was Jewish. So he applied and begged and screamed and — He said he would be a sweeper in a factory if he could — He knew he had the capabilities, if he could just get in. And he did work in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I don't remember — In some plant - after college. And then came back to work in the family business.

My father's gift to his daughters and his sons on their thirteenth birthday was, you went into his office and you learned to check cases going out — every case was worth a dollar. It had to coincide with exactly the way the slips read. And when my father became ill, I knew the business, my brother knew the business. And we ran it for a while. And then when all my brothers went overseas, I ran it. I drove Mack trucks. I used to go to the barrooms for orders. And one day a gentleman came in, and he said, "Miss Cohen." They all spoke broken French-English, with a French accent. Every English word had the French accent to it. And said, "We have decided that we don't want you coming in the barrooms." I said, "Why not? Nobody's bothered. I go in, get my order, and go out." And he said, "We're all very uncomfortable." I said, "Well, what would you have me do? I need your business." We were rationed for everything, and we were barely getting by because we were so severely rationed. And he said, "We think if when your carload of beer comes in on the track, we think you should call us. We will come right down with our cars or our pick-up trucks and pick up what we need." It was a cash business in Maine; the Alcohol and Beverage Commission said it had to be cash. So, that's what I did. And I would go to the nearest poolroom — because



anybody healthy was in the service — and we would go down to the track, and they would come. I'd pick some guy at the poolroom and take him down. He would unload, and they'd unload in their trucks. And in an average of two hours the whole thing was sold. It was really a wonderful experience.



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**CK:** *Where*

**BE:**

She was home. I just don't know how it all came about. She took over when I left.

**CK:** *Did she and her husband move to Biddeford?*

**BE:** No. They moved to Portland.

**CK:** *So your sister stayed in Portland and they were in the bottling company.*

**BE:** No, no. As soon as the war was over they went back to Portland where he had been an optometrist. My sister Charlotte, coincidentally, married a man from Bangor [Irving Broder], and lived in Bangor. And had her three daughters there, three very, very lovely girls. Oh, they were wonderful girls. And my youngest brother Lester, who also

graduated the University of Maine, he married a girl up there, and he's been in Bangor ever since.

George was the quieter member of the family. He was very quiet. Now, in retrospect, I think he may have had dyslexia. But who ever heard—I was the one who always used to just scream at him, "Why are you so lazy? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" The rest of us were good students. And he was not as academically inclined as the rest of us. And I think of it regretfully. He left the business, and he went to work for a cosmetic firm, I think. And he married this very sweet girl. They were ideally suited. And they have three children. They have both died now. But they have three lovely children. My brother, I would say, of all of us, I think was the happiest man I ever knew. Well, we're happy but he didn't worry about anything.

**CK:** *I understand from Jay there was a period of time that George lived with your mother's sister?*

**BE:** Well, George and Charlotte were perhaps a year apart. And my mother was overwhelmed. And my Aunt Becky came down and said, "This is altogether too much." Let me take George. I think Lester and Charlotte are a year apart also. Remember, they had seven children in ten years. So we're all the same age. And it was very hard because, when they became ill and died, they all went at once. And, you know, I wonder all the time, why was I left? I can understand why the baby in the family was allowed. But me, I'm ninety-one-years- old. It's ridiculous, actually. But, I'm here.

But my brother Bernard, first. My father got a call from the Hebrew School teacher. "How is Bernard?" "Bernard's fine. Why?" "Well, I thought he was sick. He hasn't been to chadar all week." He says, "He hasn't?" So Bernard arrived. "Where have you been, Bernard?" "I just got out of chadar, Pa. You know what time we get out." He said, "I will not tolerate your lying." My father never hit one of his children, ever. He had a wonderful way with them. He could get the best out of each child. And he did slap Bernard hard. And we all were there. And he said, "I don't want any of my children ever lying to me again." But to speak of the times when Bernard was a kid, he was a hellion. He used to climb up on the trees. And one day — he was a little boy — he fell. And he was unconscious. My mother got me, and she picked him up, and we ran around the corner to the grocery store. And Mr. Nadeau, a French man, ran the store. It was noontime, and it was filled with people. And he said, "What is it?" And she said, "Mr.

Nadeu, you've got to get me to the hospital. My husband's on the road somewhere today." He told everybody to leave. I was there. And he took us to the hospital. Bernard had a concussion. And he stayed every minute until my mother said — We knew he would be all right. But she said, "I'm staying with him. Bea, you go home with Mr. Nadeau." Can you imagine that happening today? That's why I have pleasant memories of Biddeford. My sisters couldn't wait to leave. I liked it. I was happy there.

**CK:** *You mentioned that when you were working the business that the people spoke French. And I was wondering about your grandparents. Did they speak English?*

**BE:** Limited, very limited English. I don't think they spoke much.

**CK:** *And your parents — ?*

**BE:** Spoke English.

**CK:** *And how did they learn English?*

**BE:** Well, my father went to night school, he said. And when he first was in the business, he went with horse and team. And in those years they had huge billboards in the middle of the fields. And he would stop — big letters — and he would write down the syllables. That's how he learned. My mother couldn't read or write English. My father could read and write — I guess he learned through business. I don't know how he learned. But when I was in the first grade I got every children's disease known. And the teacher, Miss Murphy — Mrs. Murphy's daughter, from Harvey Street — said to my mother, "I know she can go in the second grade, but she's been out of school too much this year. So my mother did say, "Would you come down here and give her private lessons?" And Miss Murphy did. And my mother set up this table under a huge apple tree, and *she* laboriously learned to sign *her* name. And every time I saw her sign it, even though it was years later, and she'd signed it a million times, she thought it out just the way Miss Murphy taught her.

**CK:** *Were they able to read the local paper?*

**BE:** Oh, my father read it every night. My mother read it to a degree. But she got a paper called *The Morgen Journal*, [*The first Yiddish daily morning newspaper, established in New York in 1901, by Jacob Saphirstein*] the Morning Journal, from New York every day. And they had serials of love stories that were heartbroken. I had an aunt who would come every day. And I was there, before Passover — before Mixmasters — my aunt was beating a sponge cake, and my mother was reading, and they were crying. I watched my aunt's tears fall into the sponge cake. I never had sponge cake again the rest of my life. I just wouldn't do it.

**CK:** *Which aunt was this?*

**BE:** That was my mother's brother's wife [Lena Robinson]. And my uncle [Joe Robinson] would come every Saturday night after services. And he would do the Havdalah in my house every week. So I came, I think, from a very enriching background. I try to have a kosher house. It's very difficult with these girls. I told them I don't want meat brought in. I will give them anything they want here. They like their specialties. And they bring in – What is that beef, that crinkly – ? You know those strips.

**CK:** *Bacon?*

**BE:** Bacon and egg sandwiches. And I go into my refrigerator. My God. There's a seafood chowder sitting there. I don't know what to do. I tried and tried. So I finally went to the rabbi and said, "What do I do, Rabbi? What do I do?" And he said, "There's nothing you can do, Bea. You can't cook. You can't get up any more to do these things. Make sure you eat what you think is proper and you have to close your eyes to the rest. What else can you do? You can only do your best." So while I consider myself running a kosher house, my house is far from kosher now. Not my doing. Every day is another soap opera. I said to Jay, "How can I get bored?" One is getting married. One's having a child out of wedlock. You cannot imagine the stories. And they live from check to check. And if the check is one day late, you should see the hysterics here. I'm sorry. The checks are written out on Monday night, if I'm lucky, if she shows up tonight. See, since I can't see too well now, I have a woman who only pays the staff. Everything else goes out to Jay, everything.

**CK:** *Did your grandparents or parents learn French?*

**BE:** No. They were Jewish aristocrats. Everything else was beneath them. You know what a Galitzianer is? They come from Galacia in Poland. And according to my parents, who had this snobbish attitude, God knows why or where, the Galitzianers were not as cultured as the Lithuanian Jews – they decided. One thing, I was not supposed to marry a non-Jew, of course. I was to keep a kosher house, of course. But never bring home a Galitzianer. I met some great guys. I didn't know they were Galitzianers. My mother says, "So where did you come from in Europe?" If they ever said Galacia, "Out." That was the end. They had strange snobberies.

**CK:** *Did they have a social life in Biddeford?*

**BE:** Very much.

**CK:** *Could you talk about that?*

BE: My father moved us all up — sold that house — and we moved up very close to our grammar school, to Oak Street. We were very close to the shul. We could walk, you see. So my mother and father would not have to be disgraced by their children riding to and from services. It was a very close community. Main Street downtown was all Jewish businessmen. There's not one left, I think, now. And our little orthodox shul, strangely enough, is on Bacon Street. I thought that was the funniest thing.

My father was president of the Talmud Torah, the Hebrew school, for many years. My mother was very active in Hadassah. She was, I think, membership chairman for years and years. And they went to shul often. And in our shul, in those years, there was a mikvah. So it was very ironic that when we went to shul for Yom Kippur, my mother would light all the yartzeit lights for everyone in the family, and because you didn't dare leave them, they would ring the mikvah. I used to think it was so strange. So God forbid if anything should happen, the water in the mikvah would save a disaster. It's really so funny. (laughter)

CK: *It sounds as if life revolved around the shul.*

BE: Hadassah. My mother was absolutely the forerunner of the PTA. Instead of behavior it was deportment. And God forbid, if you got a B or a C in deportment, my mother would put her little babushka on and go right to the school. My brother Bernard was in a lot of trouble. He turned out to be elegant — only God's miracle. That's all I can say. And Mr. Cowan said, "I don't know what we're going to do about Bernard." That's when they found the rat in the desk. "I just don't know. You know, Mrs. Cohen, I've tried everything. Frankly, the only thing that'll help that boy would be a thrashing. He's got to know, if he does it again, he'll get another thrashing." So my mother said, "I won't do it. My husband wouldn't do it. Shall I sign that you can do it?" So she did. And he got it. And it was the most incredible thing. My father found out. He didn't know my mother signed for it. And he said to my mother, "I'm going to school, and I'm going to see Mr. Cowen." My mother said, "Stay where you are. I told him he could do it." He never got into trouble again. But he hated that man with a vengeance. Now, I spoke out of turn. So I was in the office quite often. So Mr. Cowan, said to me — the principal, "Beatrice, I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I think you're a good student. You're an A student. But you won't behave yourself. You talk out of turn." So he said, "I have a plan." And he got me books on

Shakespeare for children. I was maybe seven- eight-years-old. I would read the book. I would have to go in and give him a complete book report. And he stimulated my interest in reading. When I lost my eyesight— Books on tape are wonderful, but it's not like sitting down and reading a book. And I miss that. Anyway, he decided that since I was speaking out of turn, he would teach me how to speak correctly. He was an elocution teacher. Do you know what those were in those days? And he would drill me: "O Captain! My Captain!" Oh, I was in every Armistice Day, every school assembly. I had to get up and speak. So I loved him with a passion. I felt everything I did in reading I owed to him. His name was Mr. Cowan, Arthur Cowan

He was some officer in the Army. And you were out there every day doing physical ed with him and— Anyway, I was no longer being sent for speaking out of turn, but I always was reading. He never let up on the books. And they were mostly classics. And they were down to my level. You know, they weren't college classics. And I was a little girl. Anyway, when I went to high school, I always made the finals for the public speaking contest. That was a big thing in those years. But I was always a wreck. He was a stern man, except when I'd catch him off guard, and he'd be the sweetest guy in the world. He'd be sitting there looking at me, sternly. And I thought, "Oh, my God. I've got to do this recitation, and he's here." I'd have given anything. But I had to do it. I never won. I never came out first. But I once came third. I once came second. But he was right there.

When he died, my brother Bernard called me. I have to tell you, he was overjoyed. He never forgot the thrashing. He behaved after that. But he never forgot it. I don't think he ever knew that my mother gave Mr. Cowan permission. I was crying because Mr. Cowan died, and he was saying, "The happiest day of my whole life." I said, "Bernard, how can you say that?" "I don't know why you loved him. I hated him." But he really did a lot for me.

Oh, and he said that he wanted me to study with this woman, Mrs. O'Neil, a very elderly woman. And I went once a week, and she'd give me stuff to read and gestures and so forth. I was with her for about a year. She was very good. I liked her a lot. But my poor father— You know, it was music lessons. We all had piano, violin. Bernard played the trombone. And how he did it, I don't know. You know? We all lived through the Depression. God knows what they

gave up for their seven kids. I think of it all the time. How did they do it? How did they do it? And my mother could take a piece of meat — a pound of meat and have plenty of meat for the whole family. How she did it, I just don't know.

And Thanksgiving, when I was at my niece Karen's — that's Annetta's daughter — and she had twenty-one people, all my great nieces and nephews. They would have been my mother and father's great-great-nieces and nephews. All accomplished. All college graduates. All very productive. Not a lazy bone among them. Handsome, each and every one, right down the line. And I always say, "Ma and Pa, I hope you're looking down. I hope that you see what happened, what came out of your seven kids."

**CK:** *You're talking about the closeness of the families. Were there any Robinsons in Biddeford?*

**BE:** Yes, My mother's brother and his family. That's the woman who used to cry while she was beating up the sponge cake. Joe and Lena Robinson. And their children were Sam and David. They lived in Saco, Maine. And they had to come across a waterfall — you know, a bridge, and it was a good five miles. They came every day. But every night my mother would say, "Boys, you've got to take Uncle Joe and Aunt Lena home, and put in a couple of cases of tonic." Because at that point, my father had built a plant next to the house, and they lived two flights up. And my brothers said, "Ma!" "Take the tonic for your uncle and aunt." And they did. When my father died my mother became — he died in his fifties, fifty-seven, I think, and my mother was ten years younger than he was, and she had seven kids. I was not yet married. None of us was married yet. And things were better economically. We'd come through the Depression - 1931, 1932. Prohibition was repealed. [The 21st Amendment was ratified in 1933.] And so that's when my father went into the wholesale beer and tonic business. When my brother Sam took over, it was wholesale beer and wine.

My mother and father's grandchildren and great-grandchildren are such loving, wonderful young people. When I was at Karen's Thanksgiving, really my eyes filled with tears. And I thought, "God, I hope Ma and Pa can see this." Everyone educated. Everyone working. Nobody lazy in the whole group. And I say my mother and father drove this into us, and that how important family is. And there was a time, many years ago, when my mother and members of her family

had a dispute. Did that stop me from being sent to my aunt in Newport, Maine, for vacation or their kids coming to us? The elders weren't speaking, but they were shipping kids. We were all shipped around. And I did that with Jay. Jay flew up to Bangor — I was with him — when he was two-and-a-half, I would say. And then, when he was at least six, he was on the bus going up there. My niece Janet — who was the most difficult of Charlotte's three children, a wonderful, goodhearted girl — and my sister sent her to me with her report card and, "Bea, you straighten her out." So I looked at the report card. It was all A's, B's. She was very smart. Well, the department was C. A little note, "Speaks out of turn. Disrupts the class." So I said, "Well, why don't I go up — I have all my report cards." And I picked out my report card, I look on the back: "Disrupts the class. Was sent to Mr. Cowan's office. Speaks out of turn." I came down, and I said, "I would have sworn I had it. I have no idea what I did with it, Janet." I did not dare show that report card to her. Janet's the baby. Now what else do you want to know?

The other two are: Sherry is a lawyer, and went to Wellesley and Bolt Hall Law School. Cindy went to Brandeis and then went to BU for physical and occupational therapy. She is now a teacher of autistic children. And Janet is a computer whiz. My brother used to call me. "Bea, come up here. "Why Lester?" "Janet drives that car like a bat out — She's going to kill herself. Come up here." I say, "Hey, I'm not coming up." She's got a mother and father. I'm not coming up,

**CK:** *There are seven of you in this household. How did you get along?*

**BE:** Well, we got along well, for the most part. I was a little resentful. I was the oldest. Every fall we had to go to Mr. Green's Shoe Store on Main Street in Biddeford. I had all the kids, and they had to be outfitted with boots and rubbers and shoes. I hated that. But I had to do it. Then, because I was the oldest I could never go to the movies by myself. So one day Sam and I had to take Annetta. We didn't want to, but we had to. My mother said, "You have to take her." So we took her. And it was snowing, and there were drifts. We buried her in a snowdrift and went on our way. The man abutting that snowdrift heard this yelling. And he knew us. And there was Annetta — called my mother. Did we get it when we got home. We had a wonderful afternoon. We went to the movies. We went out for ice cream. We didn't know if she was dead or alive. Didn't matter, frankly. We just were intent upon — We got along. We fought a lot.

**CK:** *What kind of things would you fight over?*



**BE:** I don't know. We were all different kinds of personalities. It was hard. I remember when my father was so sick with his heart problems. I was driving him to the barbershop one day, and I said, "Pa, do you think seven kids was more than you could take, physically?" He said, "Not at all, Bea." He said, "If Ma was stronger, I really wanted twelve kids. I love kids." So that was that. He was a wonderful man.



The Cohen Family, 1970

Bernard , Sam , Beartrice Espovich, Annetta Kornetsky Israel,  
Charlotte Broder, Lester, George

**CK:** *You've talked a lot about your father, very lovingly. Of course we're talking from the Twenty-first century— I'm wondering how you saw their parental roles.*

**BE:** My father was firm. And he wanted obedience. He really did. He had to, with seven kids. My mother, I thought, was tougher. But my brothers worshipped my mother. They were there when my father died and saw what she had to go through. My brother and I were running the business - my brother Sam. Oh, my God. And we fought. My father left what was then a fortune, an insurance policy with my mother as the beneficiary, for \$10,000. And when we'd come in, and we'd be fighting and scrapping over something in the business, my mother'd say, "I don't need you kids. I'm secure." Ten lousy thousand dollars. "And if you can't get along, go find other jobs." Well, we

weren't about to leave her. We couldn't do it. But she stood there; she was a general. My mother dealt with an iron hand.

**CK:** *You were just saying that your mother favored Lester and Charlotte.*

**BE:** Because my father had died, and they were the babies. And she always referred to them as "yesoyem." That's orphans, I think. We were OK, but they had to be given a lot of love and attention. I don't know. They were fourteen and thirteen, I was twenty-four. There were a lot of things I didn't like, but I never said anything. I wouldn't; I wouldn't hurt either my father or my mother. And because I was the oldest, I think her demands on me were greater than the others, and on Sam, we two. But Sam didn't mind. Sam worshipped the ground she walked on, as did my other brothers, and my sisters. And I admired her for handling — She wasn't tough at all. She was very diabetic, very sick all the time. But she showed us an iron hand. And nobody crossed her, nobody, including me. Nobody crossed her. We all felt she was only in her forties; she was left alone with the seven kids. The good thing about it, she thought she was an heiress of (laughter) tremendous money or something. So that gave her a lot of confidence, that money. I don't think she ever used a dime of it.

**CK:** *So you said your father was stern, but loving.*

**BE:** My mother was stern. My mother, I'd say, "Ma, are you sure?" and she'd bang the table and said, "Definittle." I said, "Ma, how many times have I asked you to say 'definitely?'" "Definittle." Or I'd say, "Ma, can we go to the movies?" or something. "We'll see." "We'll see," was no. I'd say, "Well, Ma —" "We'll see." The time would come and go. And it meant no.

**CK:** *And how about the dynamic between the two of them.*

**BE:** Oh, very good. If it were not good, who would know?

**CK:** *Did she defer to him? She was such a strong woman.*

**BE:** I think she did, when he was alive, to a great extent. I always said she was the forerunner of the PTA. She was always in school, always in school.

**CK:** *You've kind of touched on this, but I'm wondering - you had a large household with seven children. Usually there are chores or responsibilities delegated to the children.*

**BE:** Well, no, because I went to work right after high school. From freshman through my senior year I worked for a lawyer every afternoon, a lawyer and a realtor, for the sum of \$7.50 a week, because it was in the height of the Depression. Nobody had any money, nobody. And because of that I never saw any jealousy between families at all. The only time I think there was jealousy was one girl

went to Brandeis, one girl went to Wellesley, I went to BU. I think that caused a lot of tension among the families. But nothing else, nobody had anything.

**CK:** *Did you help your mother in the home, when you were growing up?*

**BE:** My mother had a woman, Mrs. Metcalf, who lived across the street, who came in every single day. Made up the beds, washed the dishes, swept, and she'd leave in two or three hours, and my mother would do all the cooking. There was a lot of cooking, you know. There were nine of us for every meal. Everybody came home for lunch in those days.

**CK:** *Let's talk about holiday time in your home. When you think back on the holidays, which one stands out?*

**BE:** Yom Tov. Well, we all got dressed up for Pesach, my mother, my father, the seven kids. We all got outfitted for Pesach, and we went to shul. We all stayed out of school for every holiday, even the two days of Pesach. Two days of Rosh Hashanah. Everybody did. I didn't know until I came here that not all Jews were kosher. I was shocked. I was in shock. I couldn't believe it. How do they do this. They go to temple, they do this, they don't keep kosher? By keeping kosher, I don't think they ate lobsters and stuff. They just didn't have kosher meat. It was too expensive.

**CK:** *What did you do on Friday nights? Was that a special night in the home?*

**BE:** We had Shabbes dinner. It would be soup and knaydlach, and whatever knaydlach are in English, dumplings. And always chicken, tzimmes. And Friday nights, before we went to bed, my mother would put in a big pot of meat and beans. I don't know how she seasoned it. Baked beans. When you woke up in the morning to that aroma, it was sheer heaven. And when we came home from shul, if you went to shul—

When I worked, of course, not only did I work in the afternoons, weekends, I would work at Fishman store. It was like a — not a Kresge — a little department store, and that was run by some Jews from out of town. But in every window of every shop, "Help wanted. Must speak French." So we all spoke a jargon. But when I worked in Fishman's, I didn't speak French too well. I was learning good French; I wasn't about to ruin it with this terrible dialect they spoke — just terrible French. And, you know, those kids who went to high school with me, who excelled in everything else, couldn't pass French,

because it was like learning a foreign language. And when they came home they were ridiculed. So they dropped out of the classes.

**CK:** *Was your mother a good cook? Did she have some special recipes?*

**BE:** Yes, she used to bake and cook. My two sisters were better at that than I. They used to watch her a lot. I didn't care much about that.

**CK:** *Do you have a favorite recipe of hers?*

**BE:** I don't know if you know what gribenes are. Do you?

Well, a couple of months ago I decided I had to have gribenes. I made a panful. I was so sick for days. Oh, was I miserable. That's the end of my gribenes making. My sister Charlotte was an excellent cook. She baked a lot. My mother baked all her challa. On Sunday mornings my father would pile us in the car and go to Portland where there was a Jewish bakery, and he'd buy bagels and rolls. Do you know what tsibele kuchen are? You know, flat bread with onions. We'd have that. Meantime, my mother had baked a storm all week.

**CK:** *And what kind of things did she bake?*

**BE:** She made struedel. She made honey cake. What else did she make? She made that onion - we call it tsibele kuchen. And she made very good bread. My father would make pumpernickel. And he'd clean a herring spotlessly; chop the head off, and make a tunnel, and put that in the oven. Oh, my God. To this day, I'd walk miles for a bite of it. Rye bread mainly, like pumpernickel. And he'd put a tunnel right in the middle and put the herring in and then cover it with all the dough. That was so good.

**CK:** *You said you were going to tell me a story about your father and his brothers.*

**BE:** His brother Louis lived in Rumford, Maine. And they finally had enough Jews there for a little minyan. And they decided they were going to observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They rented some kind of space. And on the other side of that room, people were having a wedding or something, and it was very distracting. So my uncle came to Biddeford, and he said to my father, Julius, "We've got to have, in Rumford — we've got to have a shul, however small." They went from — Biddeford was the southern part of Maine — all the way up to Holton, Presque Isle, Machias. These are all things bordering Canada. And they'd get five dollars here, five dollars there. He went, and he said that they had to have a shul. And they didn't then have enough people to finance it. They came home with enough money that they built a tiny shul. But at least they were by themselves. I don't think anyone is in Rumford now that's Jewish. I doubt it. And they used it as a shul until my uncle died. I don't know what

happened to the rest of the Jews. See, even here [Newburyport, MA] none of Jay's friends are back; only one, because he was in the family business. And that's what happened in Rumford. The few Jews they had, when they died out, their children didn't come back. And that happens here a lot. Haverhill used to be a big shoe industry city. It was a huge industry there, and many of the factories were owned by Jews, and their children went into the business. And then when the shoe industry was wiped out, those boys aren't there any more either. So.

**CK:** *Well, a family business is a strong pull. We were talking about the holidays, and you were telling me about some of the things your mother cooked. Did you celebrate Chanukah?*

**BE:** Chanukah you celebrated in lighting the menorah every night. I don't think we got gifts. When we got married, and we had our children, everybody sent each other's kids gifts. And here, all the gentile — the friends of Jay's would come by and watch us do the Chanukah lights. And then at Christmastime he would help them decorate the trees, things like that. But, yes, we observed it. We didn't celebrate it. We observed it.

**CK:** *What was the most important holiday that you did observe?*

**BE:** Oh, Pesach. Yom Kippur, of course. And Pesach and the Seder. I think Pesach was a big thing. Well, you know, in those days we changed every dish. Every piece of silverware was changed. And all your cooking utensils would be changed. Everything, for one week it was taken out. I did it in my house for years. I still change the dishes. But I don't make a big thing of it the way my mother and father did. It was a big thing. It was very important for them. And my grandfather was there, don't forget, and my grandmother. Oh, it was very important that it be done right.

**CK:** *And how about the Passover dinner? Where would that be held?*

**BE:** In my house. Oh, we didn't have, like they have today, a Seder in a synagogue. We'd do it here. The second night, I didn't go this year because I went to my niece Cindy's in Boston. And I just didn't have the energy to go each night, both nights.

**CK:** *And at home your mother would cook for the Seder?*

**BE:** We often had company.

**CK:** *Who would come for Seder?*

BE: Well, the family, very often, the other members of the family. The other interesting thing in my house — I want you to know about my mother. We had a meshulach. Do you know what a meshulach is? A meshulach is a gentleman who is really a collector of funds for yeshiva. And I don't know, to me they were like a set of hobos that left little messages everywhere. You never knew who they were. They'd rap on the door, they would come in, and my mother had a special bedroom for them. My poor brothers had to leave that bedroom for the night they were there. And she would have a bowl of water in the morning and glasses — In those days they washed their hands three times with water before they got out of bed. For breakfast they always had three eggs. Because if you had three eggs and one had a blood drop in it, that was not considered kosher, so they would have three. And ninety-nine times out of one hundred there was never anything wrong with any of the eggs. But that was the religious rule. And they would have tea and cocoa, my mother would make. Oh, my mother made excellent cocoa. And it was just well known.

My mother — I never forgot — once when a meshulach came, and he was exhausted, not feeling well, so my mother said, "Give me your receipts. I'll go collect." So she went up and down Main Street. You know, what they gave in those days, fifty cents, a dollar. It was the Depression. It was a searing experience, the Depression. One man gave her nothing. So she came home, and she gave the meshulach all the money. And he said, "What about this man?" And my mother said, "He refused." So we were shocked. How can anybody do that to our mother? But she never complained. She said, "Oh, we'll wait and see what happens to him." She would never curse anybody. But she believed so much in God being the great lawyer, the great judge, that he'll be taken care of in his own way. That's all she'd say. And my father, in the height of a summer, when every day counted in that bottling business — if the meshulach came by, and he was very tired, my father would say, "I'll do the business section. You go do the houses. I'll take care of the business section." And my father would leave work and collect for this man and give him the money. And when my father was president of the Talmud Torah, the Hebrew school, he took a lot of abuse. But he stood up for it. He was a very strong man. And he was very firm, and he never faltered, stood by his guns.

It's amazing how they would give up their time. And you know what they would collect, if they were lucky? Five dollars. And then, of course, you know what they would do? They'd go like into Newport, Maine, where my mother had a sister, the only Jewish family there, and they'd say, "I've just left your sister Celia, and she sends her love to you." Now, my mother hadn't even mentioned them. Then they'd go to Bangor, and they'd say, "I just left Mrs. Ginsburg in Newport. Oh, she sends such regards." That's how they would do it. They don't do that any more. I never see a meshulach. And when I moved here, my mother said, "If they come to your door, you have to take them in." And I did, for a while. You know, they stopped coming. I don't know. Or maybe they didn't do the homes anymore. Anyway, I didn't see any of them for a long time.

**CK:** *Where were they coming from?*

**BE:** Every yeshiva. There must be a hundred in New York City and Brooklyn. I still send money to Brooklyn, for all the yeshivas there. My mother left — Of course, she had no money. And she lived ten years after my father did. She died — He was ten years older. They were both fifty-six, fifty-seven. I don't know. They were always vague about their birthdays. I think, in Europe, I don't think they recognized birthdays. And I think, when they came to this country — I know my father gave himself a birthday for an insurance policy he wanted. He knew what year he was born. They would say the year of the big fire, the year of the flood. They didn't do anything very specific. So.

**CK:** *You talk about getting around town. Did your parents have a car? How early did they have a car?*

**BE:** Well, I don't know. We had a Buick with isinglass siding, you know — It's a plastic thing that you could open up, like a window. I don't know how he could afford a Buick, but we had a Buick. That was my father's thing. I think we always had Buicks, big, family size Buicks.

**CK:** *You did have a big family. I'm wondering if you ever took in any relatives at any time.*

**BE:** Landsleit. No. But those were landsleit.

**CK:** *And you've talked about Biddeford a lot. In general, how would you describe Biddeford, as a whole community? What was unique about Biddeford?*

**BE:** It was 90 percent Canadian French, 90 percent. And it was not the most high-level place in the world. It was small. Everybody knew everybody. In high school everybody worked very hard, all the kids,

Jews and — The good students in my classes worked very hard. They never sloughed off or anything. They worked hard. And I liked that you could walk to the movie theater. The Jewish community was like a family. Everybody was very friendly. They were mainly merchants downtown; one had a pawn shop, one had men's work clothes, Charlie Green had a big shoe store.

**CK:** *I have a list and this might be a good time to look at this. These are some shopkeepers, and I could perhaps jog your memory with some of these names. And maybe you'd like to comment on some of them. The clothiers were the Riemar. The Greens.*

**BE:** They were the shoe people. David Polakewich had a men's store. Hyman Polakewich had a women's store.

**CK:** *And is that where you would go shopping?*

**BE:** Absolutely. They had lovely things. There was a Raymond Polakewich. He was the son of Hyman Polakewich. And he stayed in the business. The Robinsons were my uncle and aunt. They had a men's store.

**CK:** *And Abraham Ross?*

**BE:** I know that he had a clothing store. How did you get all those names?

**CK:** *They were from Toby Nathanson and passed on to me.*

**BE:** Oh, she's lovely, a lovely, lovely girl.

**CK:** *And when you needed some new clothes?*

**BE:** We went to the Polakewiches. If you want cheap clothes, you know, to go to school or something, you went to a little department store like Fishman, who had very inexpensive clothes. But, yes, that's exactly where I shop.

**CK:** *How about your parents? Did they go shopping?*

**BE:** For the holidays, yes. My mother would go into Mr. Hyman Polakewich. He had a beautiful store. He had a son, Raymond in it later and a daughter Anne, and a son Ruben. My God, how do I remember those names? Ruben Polakewich. And they were successful. They were all lovely stores.

**CK:** *And this is all on Main Street?*

**BE:** All Main Street. It was all Jewish. Oh, and there was a Simensky's clothing store, women's store. And there was a Simensky jewelry store. Mr. Simensky, who ran the women's shop, his children, in later years, opened a jewelry store.

**CK:** *How about when you needed a pair of shoes?*

**BE:** Mr. Green, Charlie Green. Where else? You think we had a wide choice? That's what I said that I found tiring when I had to take the whole swarm of kids, my brothers and sisters, and we'd all land at



Green's Shoe Store. And Mr. Green, of course, would give me his undivided attention. Why not?

CK: *And then, where would you go to the grocery store?*

BE: We bought fish at Bibeau Fish Market, we bought meat at the kosher butcher in Portland, we bought bread at the kosher baker in Portland.

CK: *How about Julius Wilensky?*

BE: Oh, yeah, Julius Wilensky. I ought to call my brother Lester. He would know that.

CK: *Joe Schneider?*

BE: Joe Schneider? What kind of a store did he have?

CK: *I believe they're grocery stores. And Henry and Charlie Cohen?*

BE: That was a grocery. That was a market.

CK: *Did your mother ever send you to the store?*

BE: Always. We went to Bibeau's Market two or three times a week. And, you know, we were on Pool Street then, miles from the downtown, from Bibeau's Fish Market. And he once had the audacity to send me home with fish that was not absolutely fresh. And I had to walk all the way back. And I had to tell him everything my mother said, and which wasn't too complimentary. And as a result he never again gave us fish that was not absolutely fresh.

CK: *How did you feel about that?*

BE: Oh, I had to do it. How did I feel about it? It didn't like it. I don't know. You just did it. You never, in my era, argued with your parents. You know, I was brought up during the Depression. I had a very deep feeling that life was very hard for them. And I would never, never speak back to my father. But you knew that life was not easy for them, that we all had music lessons, I had elocution lessons. And how did they do it? I don't care if it was only fifty cents a lesson in those days. Look at what they gave up to do all of that for us. We were all aware of that. Not only our family, everybody was aware of it.

CK: *You've mentioned the Depression several times.*

BE: Oh, it was so sad.

CK: *What was happening in Biddeford during the Depression?*

BE: Well, the mills weren't working. And, you know, it amuses me now. I read all about this anti-pollution stuff. They don't want smoke coming out of the factory chimneys. Well, when I was growing up, if there was no smoke coming out of those chimneys, there was no money. It meant that the only thing that existed for the mass population was not able to produce. So they were out of work. I remember the Depression with great sadness. It was a terrible time.

CK: *You were fifteen when the stock market crashed in 1929.*

BE: Yes. Well, we didn't have any stocks. (laughs) And the big thing was City Service. Whatever that was; I don't know what that was, to tell you the truth. But that was the main thing that crashed. And everybody who never had a stock in their life (laughs) was bemoaning the fact they lost so much money in City Service, my mother included. She never even knew what it was. But you had to be in step with — you had to find a reason for this terrible deprivation that went on. It was terrible. I had to leave college. My father's factory, the bottling business burned. Of course, nobody had adequate insurance.

CK: *Do you know what year that was?*

BE: Yes, I certainly do. It was on my Christmas vacation of 1931. Because I went back to school, and I knew it would be my last term. I cried — Auch! I lived with an aunt because my — actually, my mother's cousin, but we always called her Aunt Violet. And she charged me board and room, ten dollars a week. And at the end of the year I owed her forty dollars, I think. And I was so humiliated by that. But I came home, and I went to work, and the first thing I did was every week send her ten dollars until that bill was paid. She never pressed me for it. But I knew I owed it.

BE: Violet Wallack. She lived on Columbia Road in Dorchester, which in those years was a beautiful area, very near Franklin Park. And I lived with her for a year. I was in her house forever after that. She was so wonderful to me. Auch! She was so kind, and I just loved her. I loved her to her dying day. She used to come here to visit, and she'd repot my plants. And, oh, it'd take me a week to clean up all that mud out of my kitchen. She'd say, "But the plants are growing, aren't they, Bea?" "Yes, Aunt Violet, they are." But I loved her very much.

CK: *The fact that she was charging you, was that a sign of the times?*

BE: I never knew her until I went to school. You know, Boston University, in those years, would not take in Jews in their dormitories. So I had to have a place to stay. My mother called her cousin. And her cousin said, "Let her stay with us." She had plenty of room, a really nice house. And it was a double-decker, you know. And I stayed with her. She was just — she was a very wonderful influence in my life. And I've never forgotten her.

CK: *And you said you were so humiliated to owe her this money.*

BE: Well, you know, I was working after school, even at BU. But, you needed books, you needed paper, you needed to have lunch. Whatever I made wasn't enough. And my father didn't have anything.

They gave me, I think, in those years, \$1,000. And that had to cover everything. But a lot of kids came in by train. They couldn't afford to live in the city. And I didn't think it was anything terrible. I was happy in that house. I loved them all. They had a son seven years younger than I am, who just recently retired. I remember her banging on the door and saying, "Norman, you've got to eat. Norman, stop studying. Come down and eat." He was a totally brilliant— He went through four years of Harvard on scholarships, and then got married and was in the service. Then he came back and went back to the Harvard Business School, which he graduated as a Baker Scholar, first in his class. He has been very successful. We've always been close. And now his daughter lives in Portsmouth, and we're close with her. They're lovely, a lovely family.

I feel that I was extremely blessed, with my family. No matter what the differences were in the adults, we kids were not allowed to enter into that at all. And I look at my siblings with great respect. They have wonderful children. My brother Lester has a son [Scott] who's a pediatrician in Oakland, California, lives very near my son, and he's getting married soon. He's engaged to a wonderful girl. And the daughter, Cynthia, is married to a computer genius, who went to MIT, and Columbia for his masters. Those are Lester's kids. Charlotte's three girls, I told you, are wonderful girls [Cindy, Sherry, Janet]. Oh, I love them. My sister Annetta's daughter, Karen Levine, she is the most wonderful daughter I ever saw. When her mother was dying, I went into the hospital to see her. And her mother was not with it at all. And my niece Karen, who is fifty-seven, I think, now, was in bed, under the covers, holding her, knowing any breath could be her last breath. And she just held her. I just stood there, looked at them, burst into tears. And I just walked out. I couldn't bear it. And her brother [Steven] is a lawyer and a CPA in California, lives about five miles from Jay. My brother Bernard got married very late in life and had one son [Andrew], who went to Exeter and the University of Wisconsin and BU Law School and became a lawyer, and met a girl in his class whom he married. And they just moved to California. And they live in Berkeley five minutes from Jay. In fact, Jay and Scott, Lester's son, did a lot of work on the Internet before he came looking for a house. And they selected four houses. And they were all lovely, and he picked the one that he could best afford. And they're there with their baby. Oh.

**CK:** *So your nieces and nephews have stayed connected.*

BE: Now, Jay is an entirely different generation. Jay's sixty-one, my nephew that's getting married is forty-three, that means that Cynthia must be forty-four. I have nieces and nephews in Boston. But I have two nieces who do the High Holiday. They're the most wonderful two girls. They're cousins[Cindy Broder Singert and Karen Levine]. And in all truthfulness, when I bless the candles every Friday night, I thank God for my children. And I have a wonderful son. But I also thank God for my nieces and nephews. They are so nice, so good, so learned, such wonderful hostesses; very talented girls and boys. My nephew's getting married now to an environmentalist. And Cindy has a daughter at medical school, a son who graduated with a master's degree, did a five-year program at Emory in Atlanta, and has been working for two years or three and is going on to Harvard Business School next fall. When Cindy called me I called Jay. Don't you think Jay called his cousin right away and said, "Cindy, I am so thrilled." And Cindy called me back and said, "My cousin Jay, no wonder I love him. He called me this morning. And said, 'Mother called me about Jacob. I am thrilled.'" So there is a strong bond, even though he's a whole generation older than they are.

CK: *There are some other businesses here that we haven't visited in some way. I thought maybe you'd like to comment on them. I'm just going to mention them and you jump in. Isadore Shapiro.*

BE: Izzy Shapiro. He ran a gas station. He had a beautiful wife. What was her name? Oh, my God. They had a gorgeous daughter, who lives somewhere in Massachusetts. I remember him very well. He was a redheaded man with a very hot temper.

CK: *And is this where you took your car when there was a problem?*

BE: I think so. I didn't have a car in those days.

CK: *Samuel Osher?*

BE: Sam Osher. Samuel and Leah Osher ran a little hardware store in Biddeford, Maine. They had Harold Osher, who was a cardiologist, just retired. They had Marion Osher, the daughter, who went to Wellesley and Columbia Business School. She and her husband are president and vice president of the Golden West Corporation of California. There's their brother Barney. Harold, I think, was Phi Beta Kappa. Their brother Barney, Bernard Osher, who just gave \$1 million to Bates — he went to Bowdoin — \$1 million to Bowdoin, \$1 million to the University of Maine, and \$1 million to Colby, as scholarship gifts. And specified that, if there were applicants from Biddeford and Saco, he would like them to get consideration. And he's been out of Maine for years. He was my brother's closest friend. And when my brother

died, he just stood there. Oh. He just wept his heart out. And he said, "Bea, I'll have no reason to go back to Biddeford. There's nobody there left for me anymore." Oh, and they had a brother Alfred, who was a dentist.

**CK:** *And what did Barney Osher do?*

**BE:** He owned Butterfield and Butterfield with a man by the name of Rabin as his partner. And they just sold it to eBay, I think, 265 million dollars. And he retired. And Mr. Rabin is president of the Judah Magnus Museum in Berkeley. And Jay's on that board, and he and Mr. Rabin are very close friends.

**CK:** *And Barney was friendly with—*

**BE:** My brother Sam. We grew up with all the Oshers. My sister Charlotte – Harold Osher was in her class. And Alfred Osher, I think, was in Lester's class. You know, it was one big family in Biddeford.

**CK:** *OK, we're going to finish this list and then get back to life in Biddeford, because I don't think we've touched on everything. How about Aranovich?*

**BE:** Oh, the Aranoviches. They owned a hotel called the Columbia Hotel, in Biddeford. Water Street, I think. God. I haven't seen that place in a thousand years.

**CK:** *And Chaim Zaitlin?*

**BE:** Oh, yes. Chaim Zaitlin was a junk dealer. I went all through school with one of his sons, Joseph Zaitlin, who has a son, Samuel Zaitlin, who is a very important man in the state of Maine, and finances a Jewish film festival in Portland every year, that runs for over a week. He's a very fine man. I went to school from the first grade through high school with his father, Joseph.

**CK:** *I think you mentioned Leo Simensky.*

**BE:** Leo Simensky, was my brother's accountant. Father and brother Sam's accountant. And he was a very successful man. His sister, before she got married, was a piano teacher. I took lessons from her for a while. And I never would eat my mother's chicken soup. I never knew why I didn't like it. But I would go to Mrs. Simensky home. Blanche would give me a piano lesson. And I loved her chicken soup. So my mother actually called her and says, "What do you do? Bea will not eat my —" She says, "She loves the aroma, and it's the celery." So from then on my mother put gobs of celery (laughter) in, and I ate it. But Leo was also a very good friend.

When my father died, we had a minyan in our house twice a day. My mother would make up little — I don't know what she'd do — little bulkie or something and coffee every morning, and we had a minyan. Well, Leo came for the whole eleven months. And it was in my mother's house, because they couldn't afford to heat the shul. So they brought a torah. My mother cleaned out — she had an old-fashioned china closet. We had the torah in there. And they had the minyan. This was minyan for my father. My brothers could not wait for the eleven months, so they'd be free. Well, Leo came to my mother. He was married, had just been married — four - five years, and his mother died. And his wife was not thrilled with the idea of having these men tramping every morning for a minyan, and every night. It wasn't her idea of the best way to use her home. He went to my mother, and he was in tears, and he said, "Mrs. Cohen, Fay really does not want to have the minyan in my house for my mother." See, she'd lived with her mother-in-law, and maybe — I don't know. I don't know what went on. "Could you do it for another year?" My mother didn't even bat an eyelash. She says, "I'll talk to my boys. I think we'll do it." She had a meeting with my brothers. They said, "No, no. We had enough. Eleven months. No more." "You have to do it. Leo came here faithfully." So again my mother's dining room was a shul, for another year, another eleven months.

CK: *What was customary when someone passed away?*

BE: That you say Kaddish for eleven months.

CK: *And was it unusual to have it take place in the home?*

BE: Very.

CK: *Was the synagogue usually available?*

BE: My father died in January. And that little roof — I honestly don't think they could afford to heat it. It would have to be heated all day, you see, because they'd come in the morning, and they'd come in the late afternoon.

CK: *So when someone passed away in another family, it might not be observed in their home.*

BE: I doubt it.

CK: *Who attended?*

BE: There was a full minyan every morning and every night. All the men from that little community came. They honored my father that way. They honored my mother that way. And my mother had the burden. I mean, she was always baking and had a huge coffee pot. And, she just did it, that's all. She and my aunt, they knew everything that was going on. They knew every little gossip in town, because the men

would come and tell her all the stuff. This one was having a problem with his kid, and this one wasn't doing so well, the daughter wasn't doing so well in school. They knew everything. And my aunt would come, and my mother would read the serial. And they'd weep over the injustice of the whole thing, whatever the serial was. And then they'd sit, and they'd talk. And I'd say, "Ma." In the Jewish faith, and this is true, the worst sin, the worst is gossip. The number one sin. "What are we gossiping? They came and told us. Did we go looking for them? I never went looking for them." No. Oh.

**CK:** *So you were calling your mother on this.*

**BE:** Aw, I used to hate it. I'd walk in, and they'd be both having a cup of tea. You know, and they drank tea — well, my mother didn't drink sugar — but with a lump of sugar between their teeth. That's how all the Jews in that era drank tea.

**CK:** *Do you know why?*

**BE:** I guess they didn't have any fine sugar. They just had lump sugar. Every one of them was the same. (laughter) Every one of them.

**CK:** *Would you say that your mother's house was a gathering place?*

**BE:** Yes. My mother had to walk — In those years, Dr. Joslen in Boston — When you were a diabetic you walked one hour after each meal. So my mother would take a walk. Let's say Shabbes. She'd take the walk, come home, and she'd lie down. When she'd wake up there'd be a gathering of Mrs. Polakewich, Mrs. Shapiro, Mrs. Rosenberg. My mother didn't eat their stuff. And they didn't want to eat my mother's because they didn't like it, it was sugar-free. So they would set up the table in my mother's dining room. They knew where the cups and the saucers were. And she'd wake up like a queen, and she'd join them. Every Shabbes.

And you know what was so wonderful about it. She'd come home after walking, she'd say, "They're all farmers." Oh, and my mother, another thing, she had a whole group of Polish people, who were farmers, in back of us. And my mother could speak a little Polish. In Europe they're bordered by so many countries that they pick up these languages. They're not correct. But she used to speak to those Polish ladies every morning. And she'd come home from her walk, and she'd say, "You know, Beatrice, there's a little girl up there, and she's going to graduate grammar school. Here's some money. Go buy her some handkerchiefs with lace." You know, in those years they used to tout the handkerchiefs all around. I'd go buy them. I'd never know who

they were for. We'd gift wrap them and give them, she'd give them. Then she came home one day. "You know, there's a girl way up —" She never knew their names. "Way up on West Street there's a girl." And West Street was so far from our house. "She's going to get married." So I said, "Oh." "So go downtown and buy her a pretty little dish, something." For five dollars, in those days, you got something pretty nice. And we'd gift wrap it. I never knew who they were. She'd take her walk. She'd give them —

At her funeral, we didn't know 60 percent of the people who were there. Our whole community was there, and a lot of friends from Portland and Lewiston. There were all these people. Honest to God, we didn't know who they were. And they told us that they would miss her. They used to talk to her every day over the fence, over this. Those were the people that we were buying gifts for. They were all there. Because she walked for years.

And you know why friends were so staunch in those years? My mother and her friends called each other by their "Mrs." — Cohen, Mrs. Shapiro, Mrs. Anybody. You never said Netty Shapiro. Her name was Netty. God, how do I remember that. Netty Shapiro. They called her Mrs. Cohen until the day she died. And they were very good friends. They were staunch. They came every Shabbes. They brought their own pastries. They didn't want my mother's pastries.

CK: *And were these the people that she was involved with in Hadassah or at the shul, the PTA?*

BE: Yes, sure, that was the core of their lives.

CK: *Did they ever get together on a more casual basis, did they play cards? Did your parents play cards?*

BE: My father had a pinochle club. And my father would sit; he was a huge man. — You've never met Jay, have you? Jay's a very large man. He's built just like my father. He's named for my father too. — And he would roll up his sleeves, and my mother had this big round oak dining room table, and they would play for pennies, all these Jewish men. And we would come by, and my father would slip us a penny, another penny. Oh, God, he was a remarkable man, really. He had his group, yeah, and card players. They would meet maybe once a month. He never had time in the summer and the spring because of the business thing. I remember now — now Ogunquit and Kennebunkport, all Jews, majority of the people who summer there. I remember when I would go with him when he would be getting his



orders, and he'd tell me not to leave the car, because they would know I was Jewish, and we weren't welcome. Now, my God, it's all Jews, everywhere you go.

**CK:** *Before we talk about anti-Semitism, you just told me you have a story about your sister Charlotte.*

**BE:** My mother had a fruit and produce man. They came by with their horse and wagons, and everything'd be there. And this man's name was Mr. Abelezitz. And my mother always had hot tea for them. And we looked out of the window, and the horse and team are gone. So we all went out, crazy, and we run all the way up — And there's my sister, Annetta — she must have been ten- years-old — singing away. Two horses, with the reins. "What are you doing? Are you crazy?" "Ma, I always wanted to drive a horse and team." And she did. I want that in there for Karen, because Karen's her daughter.

**CK:** *You were very close with Annetta?*

**BE:** Yes, we were all close. We fought, but we were close.

**CK:** *You were talking about going with your father to Kennebunkport and Ogunquit and the anti-Semitism. And I wanted to know what kind of anti-Semitism you might have experienced in Biddeford growing up.*

**BE:** Never. Only once. I had to leave the lawyer and the real estate man. I left, because the NRA came in and said minimum wage had to be \$12 a week. I was only getting \$7.50. So I went over to the Pepperell Mills. They had an opening. And my sister Annetta went in and took my job with Mr. Mahaney and Mr. McCloud. Then she graduated. And Charlotte worked for them. Mr. Mahaney, who was an all-American football star from Holy Cross, came to see my mother, and he says, "Mrs. Cohen, what do I do now? I've used up all your girls. Now where do I go? I don't want to go to an employment agency." My mother said, "Mr. Mahaney, that's your problem. I don't know what to tell you to do." That was the truth. (laughter) Oh, God.

**CK:** *So you referring to this lawyer—*

**BE:** Yes, so I went to the Pepperell Mills. And there I was met with hostility. I never knew why.

**CK:** *In what way?*

**BE:** They were unkind. They made me very uncomfortable. And it wasn't casual. It was deliberate. I wouldn't tell my father and mother. Because, you know, they were in the land of — It was a golden land of opportunity. And I didn't want them to know that. So I stayed. And I suffered.

**CK:** *What were you doing at the Pepperell Mills?*

**BE:** In the payroll department. And that's where I learned how important education is. I'd be in one department. They'd say, "Oh, say hello to my son for me," in such and such a department. The son would say, "Oh, say hello to my brother," in such and such a department. And it was all families, huge French families. At the age of sixteen they left school and they went in the mills. And it was tough, but I stood it. Then they repealed Prohibition, and my father was going to take in beer. And he said to me, "Bea, I need someone in the office I can trust. It'll be a much bigger business than I've had. And would you come in?" I said, "Pa, I'll be there next week. I'll give them a week's notice." I was so happy. I wanted out. Oh, they were mean. I don't know. They were mean.



Pepperell Mills

**CK:** *Who is "they"?*

**BE:** My coworkers. And the boss. I don't know why they hired me, knowing there'd be this hostility. That was the only thing — I left Biddeford when I had Jay when I was thirty-years-old. And that was the only time I knew of any hostility or anti-Semitism. I don't know if it was anti-Semitism. I don't know what it was. Oh, they were terrible to me. My brother Sam said in his thing — I think Jay sent it to you — how they used to run past the French churches because they would beat up the Jewish kids. And they told me that, and I have a copy of that. "What is he talking about?" So I called Lester. And my sister said, "Bea, that's the absolute truth. You remember the Saint André's Church we had to go by. They never touched us." You know, I never was aware of it, that they were out to be unkind or anything. Oh, they were bad.

**CK:** *And in school?*

**BE:** Oh, no. Absolutely not. If we did well, we were given every honorable grade. Absolutely not. We were certainly treated as equals. All that mattered there were four honors. Ruth Shapiro was a valedictorian. Regina, she was a Polish girl, got second. I got third. Carl Schneider, he was the son of Joe Schneider. He got fourth. We were four. We got all the top honors at the graduation.

**CK:** *And it's such a minority in the community. Were you aware of being Jewish or of this other group?*

**BE:** No. Not at all. I wasn't. Maybe things were going on. I wasn't aware. But I was very happy.

- CK: *Other than this one incident with your father when you were on the road, was there ever a time when your father or mother spoke of the fact that you were Jewish and—*
- BE: No. But you know what they did do, the mothers. Came time for the prom, the junior prom I guess it was, and my mother didn't want me to go with any non-Jewish boy to the prom. That was universal. And the boys weren't to take non-Jewish girls. So the mothers decided the best thing to do would be to call all the mothers. And Arthur Stern took me to the prom. We were classmates. And Carl Schneider took Ruth Shapiro to the prom. And somebody else took Tina Simensky to the prom. We all had dates.
- CK: *And this was arranged behind your back, so to speak?*
- BE: That's the way it was.
- CK: *There are two other names that you haven't mentioned, the Spills.*
- BE: Simon was a lawyer and a superior court judge. And Louis was a lawyer. And Louis was one of my classmates, all through school. The parents' names are not listed there?
- CK: *No. This is just a list of Jewish professionals who were in Biddeford.*
- BE: Dr. Morris Ross?
- CK: *Was he your doctor?*
- BE: He was a children's doctor, I think. Dr. Carl Haas. Have you got him? They were from Europe.
- CK: *Morrill Shapiro?*
- BE: Morrill Shapiro was a doctor, came from Biddeford. He was the son of Sam and Netty Shapiro. And he was a doctor, in Portland.
- CK: *And are these people in your generation? They were quite a successful generation of—*
- BE: We were pounded. We had to get an education. And we had to do well. And we did well. We were scared not to. My son told me that when he goes up to Berkeley to study in the library on Sunday, it's just loaded with Asians. And he speaks to all of them. And they are absolutely what we were. They're not that way now. They have to do well, or they'll lose the scholarships. Their father's and mother's have suffered a great deal to help them go to school and everything. And they can't disappoint the parents. And Jay told me about the conversation. I said, "Jay, I could play a record back, if I had it. It would be us."

**CK:** *What were the expectations for the boys and for the girls of your generation?*

**BE:** Well, we all went to school either to be teachers or to be — not just stenographers. Good secretaries. There were a lot of industries. And my friend Anne Stack turned ninety this week, and was secretary to the president of the Saco-Lowell Shops. Ruth Shapiro had the top job in the office — the administration of the Pepperell Mills. My sister was a dental assistant to a top dentist, Dr. Moran, Dr. Paul Moran. You tell me how I remember those names. I haven't thought of them in a million years.

**CK:** *What was the message in the home for the girls, in general? You could probably just speak about your home?*

**BE:** Well, no, in general. Do well. Marry Jewish boys. Date only Jewish boys. Marry only — because he was stationed in Biddeford. That's how I met him. And it was the American dream. My husband was well educated, and he was a lawyer. And he became a judge. And my mother and father must be bursting with naches up there, even though my husband's been dead a long time.

**CK:** *Was the message any different for your brothers? The expectations?*

**BE:** Oh, yes.

**CK:** *How were they different?*

**BE:** Well, I was to do as well as I could with my education. It was mainly business-oriented stuff. The boys had to make a living. That's what the theme was. The girls are going to get married anyway. The boys have to make a living. Well, you've got to go to school.

**CK:** *What kinds of "livings" were expected of them?*

**BE:** Whatever they did. Whether they were tailors, executives, whatever.

**CK:** *So when you say go to school—*

**BE:** College. College, college. And professional school.

**CK:** *Was that an expectation? These were hard times and —*

**BE:** It didn't matter. Times were terrible. And there was no hope that you could get as far as you'd like to go. That happened to me. But I went to Portland. They had a satellite school out there for a year-and-a-half, nights. And I got enough accreditation to be a — What do they call a two-year certificate? An Associate. And that's as much as I could hope to do. My brother Bernard went to school. My brother Lester went to school. My brother George just didn't do well academically. My sister Annetta became a dental assistant. My sister Charlotte graduated very high in her class at Westbrook College. In those years it was a junior college. And she did very well. And she got a \$500

scholarship. And it was not to be returned. It was a scholarship, not a loan. And the day before she got married she went up to the school with a check for \$500 and said to the dean — it was even written up in their newsletter, "You helped me, and I'm doing well, and I want to give you this money so to help another student." They took it.

**CK:** *We've touched on a lot of what went on in Biddeford, but I want to focus on you and your school days, as far back as you can remember. Where you went to grammar school?*

**BE:** The Emory Grammar School.

**CK:** *What was Emory school like for you?*

**BE:** I loved it. I loved school. And I was treated very fairly, in fact, too much so. That's why I was always in the principal's office. But I loved school. I liked the teachers. I loved the whole environment. I couldn't wait, in the summer, to go back. And I thought I would have become a teacher. But I just couldn't.

**CK:** *And where did you go to high school? And how close were they to your home?*

**BE:** Biddeford High School. Oh, within walking distance. That's why we moved to Oak Street from Pool Street. Because it was so close to the shul and close to the school.

**CK:** *And how would you go to school? Would you walk with your siblings, or did you walk with your friends?*

**BE:** Well, as I walked along, I'd meet Louis Spill or any one of those — Tina Simensky — And we would just go to school, and chat. And I liked school.

**CK:** *And how about your favorite subject?*

**BE:** My favorite subjects. Due to Mr. Cowan, anything that required reading. I was very interested in the English courses in high school. I had wonderful teachers. I had a Madame Bergeron who was my French teacher. And when I took placements at BU, I was put into the sophomore class in French. It was a small school, but we got an excellent education, excellent.

**CK:** *How many people were in this class?*

**BE:** Gee, my class, I know it wasn't one hundred.

**CK:** *And your favorite teacher?*

**BE:** My favorite teacher in grammar school was — I don't know, I liked them all. But in high school my favorite teacher was Madame Bergeron and Adelaide Leyen, who was my English teacher. And she drilled and drilled and drilled. Parsing those sentences, boy. And I did love the fact that Mr. Cowan would put me in all these programs.

And only as I got older I knew how much I liked him. Oh, I revered him. But I also could recollect now how much he liked me, to put all that time into me. And confer with the elocution teacher and make sure I knew the proper gestures and the proper tones. And he followed me all through high school.

**CK:** *Were you active in any sports?*

**BE:** No, I was not in sports. I was in all the plays and speaking contests. But no sports, no. No Jewish people in those days, they wouldn't allow their children to be athletes. That's something that would be awful.

**CK:** *Now, I have two notes. There's a Betty Smith story.*

**BE:** Oh, my God. Where did you get that? (laughs) I don't know how you do these lists. The Chautauqua came to Biddeford. You know what the Chautauqua is? Well, the Chautauqua was a religious group, fundamentally. But they would come into a town, and they would do speaking things, like little speaking contests. Anyway, they were having a music appreciation contest of classical music. And I had a teacher in high school — grammar school and high school, Miss Crowley. And she started us, believe me, at a young age. And I loved the music. And I excelled at it. I won a lot of prizes. I read or I heard the Chautauqua was having a music appreciation contest on the Sabbath. Oh my God, my mother would kill me. So I couldn't use my own name. She'd read it, and she'd be furious with me. And I wanted to enter it. They didn't know who I was. I said my name was Betty Smith. And I won first prize. Next night, my mother says, I think, "Gee, Bea. Do you know a Betty Smith who won first prize?" "Ma, I have no idea who that is." And my father'd say, "Wasn't that amazing that the Chautauqua comes in, and they run a music appreciation — and Betty Smith won first prize." Five dollar gold piece, I want you to know. So I just said I didn't know who it was. My aunt took me to a jeweler, and she put a casing around it with a little loop. I wore it around my neck, when you couldn't wear money at one point. So I had my father's watch chain, and I just took it to a jeweler and stuck it on there. But I have it. It's in the bank. That's the Betty Smith story.

**CK:** *That's the end of the story?*

**BE:** Far as I know.

**CK:** *Your parents didn't know?*

**BE:** No, no, no, no. You know, I had a cousin Sam Robinson, the son of my uncle and aunt, who used to come over every day. Sam Robinson was a big guy and an excellent football player. But his parents would kill him — on the Sabbath. So he took the name of Kelly Robinson. And

he became a big football star. How do you like that one? And his mother and father never suspected. "Do you know any Robinsons in town? I thought we were the only Robinsons. There's a Kelly Robinson." "I don't know. How would I know?" He'd pretend. We all protected him with our dying breaths. So that's how he became a big football star.

**CK:** *How common was this?*

**BE:** Not common. As far as I know, he and I were the only ones who did that.

**CK:** *What was it like growing up in Biddeford as a teenager?*

**BE:** Very nice. I worked. I worked at the school. We all worked. And I had no problem. We'd go to some of the games — I wasn't into the sports. I went to some basketball games because my brothers liked to play basketball.

**CK:** *Who were your close friends as a teenager?*

**BE:** I was fond of the girl who sold the shoe findings, Betty Simensky. Ruth Shapiro, who was valedictorian. I never could beat that girl. She was my nemesis. If I got ninety-nine, she got one-hundred. If I got ninety, she got ninety-five. I could never beat her. And in grammar school, Mr. Cowan knew about the rivalry. He just watched it. He didn't mix. But he told one of the teachers, who told me that he got a big kick out of the rivalry. But I was glad of that because that made me strive to do as well as she did, and boy, she was smart. Oh, was she smart. She was first in the class in grammar school and valedictorian in high school.

**CK:** *As a kid, in your home, did you have time to play any games, like Tiddlywinks or—?*

**BE:** Oh, God, no. What we did was, I had a cousin who lived — When my grandparents came from Europe they brought this girl, who was high school age, whose mother died. That was my father's sister. And we never heard about her father. My father would not break down, my mother would not break down and tell us. All I know, her name was Dora Alexander, and she was the best dancer. And she used to come over and teach us. So once she taught us, this is what we did a lot. We would move the dining room table into the corner and put on records and dance. We all were good dancers. My brother Sam, oh, God, he was the best. My sister Charlotte, superb dancer, superb.

**CK:** *What kind of dancing were you doing?*

**BE:** Oh, the foxtrot. That was the big dance. What were the big dances in that time? The foxtrot. I wouldn't do jitterbug.

**CK:** *Did you do the Lindy Hop?*

BE: Yep, I used to do that.

CK: *Who was dancing?*

BE: All of us. We danced with each other. The biggest fun we'd have is, I would play the piano, Sam would play the violin, my brother, Bernard, played the trombone. And my brother George used to take the shade off the lamp and sing into it as if it were a microphone. Rudy Vallee. He would sing as well as Rudy Vallee any day. And we would just get hysterical with laughter. Yes, we all danced. We were good dancers, I have to say. My brother Sam was the best. My brother Lester, the one who's alive, oh, my God, can he dance. He's a wonderful dancer.

CK: *And were there teen dances anywhere - socially?*

BE: No. No. The synagogue had dances. We used to go to that and have a very good time. Yeah, we danced.

CK: *Did your parents dance?*

BE: No, never. They didn't have time. That wasn't in their realm at all. That was totally foreign to them.

CK: *Did you play any board games that you can remember?*

BE: Monopoly, I think. What's the game with the pegs? I think my father played that. Dominoes. And he played that game with the pegs. I can't remember the name of it. My father's dream was to go to see Mr. Kabitsky in Atlantic City. That's all I ever heard was, "Oh, some day, some day I'm going to be able to go to Atlantic City." Well, Mr. Kabitsky came to see us, for a day. He was on his way somewhere. And I was at the beach, at Old Orchard Beach. Oh, we all grew up at Old Orchard Beach. That was everybody's stomping ground. I'm on the beach, I'm as black as black can be, and I'm wearing two pigtails. And Mr. Kabitsky says to my father, "What kind of a beach is this?" pointing to me. They allowed gypsy kids—"Look at that girl. Gypsy kids." So my father looked and he saw me coming, and he turned away. And they went home. And he told me about it afterwards. We laughed so hard. I said, "Pa. All I ever heard was Mr. Kabitsky. Why didn't you tell me? I'd have come running" "No, I was very glad you didn't see us. You were going in a different direction, in your pigtails." And my father and I enjoyed that story so much. We used to laugh about it all the time. "And I didn't want to tell him you're my daughter. Oy vey, he said. You looked so dark." Oh, God.



The following is a continuation of an interview with Beatrice Espovich taking place at her home in Newburyport. Today's date is January 24th, 2006.

CK: *Good morning, Bea. I just want to start by going back and asking you if there's anything you would like to add that perhaps we missed in our conversation yesterday. It might be something you thought about last night, or some memory that got triggered by what we covered yesterday. So now it's your turn.*

BE: All right. I would like to speak about my brother Sam, who, when my father died in 1939, took on the role of father to the family. And because he was not truly gifted, he made a great success of his life without going to college. And in later years Sam thought he might go to law school. But when he realized he needed an undergraduate degree in order to enter law school, he abandoned the idea. But he was extremely generous, extremely charitable. Every year at Christmastime, he would consult with the Catholic priests and other ministers in the area as to who might need Thanksgiving dinners or Christmas dinners. And he would leave it to the priest that he knew and would pay for all of it after they all got their meals. And that was just the least of all his philanthropies. He established the Julius and Celia Cohen Swimming Pool at the YMCA; did a tremendous amount for the hospital in the area. And his generosity was felt all through the state. He was very friendly with the Lunder family, who must have graduated from Colby College, because under their insistence, he did a great deal of philanthropy for that school, Colby College. And I do believe that the New England School of Medicine in Biddeford was able to get a lot of financial assistance from my brother. He was very kind to all his nieces and nephews. Not only was he generous in his bequests, but he helped a number of them get through school. And he always found joy in giving. And I think the memory of my brother will last for many years in Biddeford. He played really a leading role.

He was very active in the Democratic Party in the state of Maine. And because he was, he became very friendly with Ed Muskie, who originally came from Rumford, Maine, but summered at

Kennebunkport. And he also was very close to George Mitchell, who came from some small town in Maine. And he loved that association. He loved the feeling of power that it gave him to be in the company of these men. And the warmth he extended — that my whole family extended to everyone has had a lingering effect upon everybody. I just did not want to neglect to mention his philanthropies. He was so philanthropic.

**CK:** *And did he continue the bottling business?*

**BE:** Yes, he did. Not only did he continue, he made it a beer and wine distribution center instead of just a tonic and beer, and was very, very successful at it. He had a true salesman personality. And when I would go down to Ogunquit or Kennebunkport and people who knew who I was would come over always to speak to me and would mention my brother. He had a terrific personality and was kind of a charmer. And being in the sales field he used that charm, and it contributed a great deal to his success. He was an extremely wealthy man, lived in a beautiful home, and just loved this position in the community, would never leave it, and always told me that the happiest time of any trip that he took was turning the key in his door and coming home. He loved Biddeford. And it's sad — Lester and I speak of this — it is sad that there are no Cohens left in that community. Not one of us settled there. So it is now devoid of Cohens.

**CK:** *Were any other family members in the business with him as he continued it?*

**BE:** No. Lester worked in Bangor for Irving Broder, Charlotte's husband. And Charlotte lived in Bangor, of course, during her married life. And no, no one continued. That was it. He sold the business before he died. And that was the end of the York Bottling Company in Biddeford.

**CK:** *And when did he sell the business? Did he retire?*

**BE:** Yes, he retired maybe five— Annetta died in '02. Sam died in '03. He enjoyed his retirement very much.

**CK:** *Do you know what year the business was sold?*

**BE:** I do not know the exact year. But I would say maybe ten years before his death. I'm not certain of that. In the 90's, yes.

**CK:** *Why didn't the children stay in Biddeford? Do you know?*

**BE:** Well, when Lester came back from the war he started working in the business and started working in Bangor. And my sister Charlotte

moved to Bangor when she married Irving. And my sister Annetta and Dan went to Portland. I married and moved to Newburyport, Massachusetts. My brother George moved to Portland. My brothers Bernard and Sam were the only ones running it, to the end. And then Bernard died. So I guess Sam had an opportunity to sell it, and he did.

**CK:** *So Bernard stayed in Biddeford and raised his family.*

**BE:** Well, he lived in Saco, which is right across the river.

**CK:** *We talked a lot about your life in Biddeford and the Jewish community, and I just wondered if you'd be able to describe your home for me? When you think of the home that you grew up in—*

**BE:** Yes. We moved to 53 Oak Street in Biddeford when I was nine-years-old, and it was a tenement house, as they were called in those years. And we occupied the first floor. And my father divided the second floor into two apartments, hoping to realize an income from it. It was a large, kind of a long house, as apartments were in those days. And it was just a very ordinary apartment. And there was room for everyone. We always had company. I don't know where and how my mother did it, but we always had company, especially in the summer because we were so close to Old Orchard Beach. In those days, very often on Sundays, family would arrive, and it was always very nice, I always loved that. I don't know how my mother did it, but there was room for meshulach when he came collecting. There was always room for company. I guess we all doubled up, and people got in our bedrooms.

**CK:** *Do you remember looking over and seeing someone in your bedroom or sharing it?*

**BE:** Yes. And Annetta and I shared a bedroom. And Bernard and Sam shared a bedroom. So where did the other two boys sleep, unless they were triple. There were four boys. Where did they sleep? I don't know.

**CK:** *If you moved when you were nine, this was before Lester was born.*

**BE:** Yes. Lester was born in that house. I think Charlotte was too. Maybe I was eight. I think Charlotte must have been born on Oak Street.

**CK:** *Charlotte was born in 1923. Lester was born in 1924.*

**BE:** Well, if she was born in '23 then I would be nine when we moved.

**CK:** *And what did you say it was called, a tenement house?*

**BE:** Tenement. Most immigrants lived in tenement houses, because they needed the revenue. Because they would rent out the floors, the apartments. They were individual. They were houses. But they were on the second story of a house. And that was very common. And I

think most people lived that way - that I can remember - in Biddeford. I know the Spills Family didn't, and Leo Simensky's family lived in an individual home. But I'd really have to wrack my brain to remember people who had the luxury of an individual house. Everybody that I can remember started out — Generally, the people who own the house lived on the ground floor, and they would rent out the second floor, and the third floor if they had three floors. And these people came and went. I didn't know them particularly.

**CK:** *Were they attached homes?*

**BE:** No. They were — not a ranch by anyway, but there was a first floor, where the owners generally lived, and then upstairs. You would go up a flight of stairs from either the front or the back entrance to where the tenants lived.

**CK:** *Was there a separate entrance for the tenants?*

**BE:** Yes.

**CK:** *And a full apartment? They had a kitchen?*

**BE:** Everything. They had a home. Except it was spread out, and we called them apartments.

**CK:** *And was there a front yard?*

**BE:** Yes. We had a big yard. I remember my uncle coming one day, and my brothers were all in the yard playing ball, and he came from the old school. And they were kids. And he came, and he said to my mother, "Celia, - in Yiddish - you're raising a family of bums." And my mother said, "Why"? He thought, and he meant it, they should be out working. I don't know what they could do. They were little kids. Even in high school, they all worked. Nobody stayed home; everybody had a job. And I remember we laughed about that for years. Because they were out having free time by playing ball, he couldn't understand that at all. At all.

**CK:** *I guess it was a different generation.*

**BE:** Oh, yes.

**CK:** *And also, your father's siblings had settled in Maine?*

**BE:** There were four of them. One [Louis] lived in Rumford, Maine. Let's see. Where did my father's brothers lived? One [Joseph] lived in Saxonville, Mass. One [Abe] lived in Lowell, Mass. Have I got four there? Minnie Leah Cohen? That was my grandmother. She lived in Biddeford with my grandfather. They came through Rumford.

**CK:** *And then your mother's siblings were in Saco and Bangor and Auburn, it looks like.*

**BE:** Yes, her sisters.

**CK:** *Were there family reunions - times when you all got together?*

BE: Well, certainly at all of my family's weddings, of course. And, yes, they'd be there for the holidays. My Uncle Abe would come down regularly. And it was a long ride in those days because there were no highways. They were all back, country roads. He came often. We just loved him. And my father's family was always together on a Sunday close to the high holidays to go to the cemetery together. And my mother, after my father died I noticed that every time she went to the cemetery she'd be dressed very nicely. And I'd say, "Ma, why do you do this?" "I wouldn't think of going to the cemetery and visiting your father without getting dressed." So, I do that. And then recently I was in Portland with Jay, we were going to the cemetery, and we stopped by and picked up Karen, who occasionally lives in her mother's house. She inherited her mother's house. And I didn't like the way she looked. She didn't know we were coming, and she'd been cleaning out the place. And I said, "You don't go to the cemetery that way. Your grandmother taught me, always, when you're visiting your loved ones, be dressed up." So we all do it. And when I said, "Karen, you know, you have to be dressed to knock 'em dead." And she said, "Well, Aunt Bea, they're already dead." But we always told the three girls to be dressed, and if we went downtown, to look our best.

And I've taught that to all my nieces. And they were going up to Maine. Dr. Osher had a maparium, which he was donating, and they were having a dinner — and they stopped here. Sherry flew in from San Francisco and was going to pick up Karen. And they were going to dinner together. And I said, "Sherry, you don't wear pants. You don't wear jeans. You get dressed to go, as your grandmother said, when we three girls went out, we had to look our best. So I want you to knock them dead. So they called me when they got dressed, from Portland, said, "Aunt Bea, you'd be very proud of both of us." And then on the way back to Boston — Sherry was taking the plane in Boston — they called me from the road and said, "Aunt Bea, we walked in that hall, and we knocked 'em dead." And I was very pleased that they learned so quickly. So I've always taught that to the girls. Never go to the cemetery looking unkempt. You wouldn't visit your mother that way, so why should you visit her that way because she died? If you go and visit the grave, pay a visit in the proper dress code. That's all. And they all do. And so do I.

CK: *And where do you think your mother developed these values, in terms of appearance?*

BE: I don't know. But my mother, in the house, always wore what they termed housedresses, and usually with an apron over that. But I don't know. When my mother would go to a Hadassah meeting, she'd be dressed up. And I don't know. We were always taught to look well, dress well. My two sisters were very, very beautiful girls, very beautiful. And I think that my mother wanted to show us off at our best. It was a reflection on her, you see, if we didn't look nicely dressed. But I don't know where she got it. She had a sister in Newport, Maine, one in Bangor, Maine, and one in a town called Montague, Maine. And I remember seeing their children. They'd come to visit. They'd look very, very nice. See, that was before the days of shorts, before the days of pants. We wore skirts. If you weren't dressed for a party, you were at least always presentable. When I first moved to Newburyport, to go downtown I wore a hat, gloves. Now I just try to get decently dressed when I go downtown.

But in those days we wore a hat to every meeting and gloves. If you went to the movies, you got dressed. And I don't particularly like the new trend at all. And I hate going to the theater and a concert and have someone in front of me sit there in ski sweaters. I just can't understand that. My husband was always dressed. Not when he - he loved to work in the yard - not when he was doing - or perhaps on the weekends on his bike. But even when he went downtown on his bike, he looked fine. And he always wore his hat. They were dedicating a bridge, and the newspaper photographer was there. And he saw Norman in the hat, the pipe, and the boutonniere. So he photographed him. And I thought, when Norman died, that all his nephews and nieces would want - We had pictures of him in his robes. And, no, they didn't want that. They wanted that picture. So I had a bunch of them made up for everybody.

CK: *It's a wonderful photograph.*

BE: Yes. And he was totally unaware that it was being taken, which was the best part.

CK: *Is this a straw hat?*

BE: He wore straw in the summer and felt in the winter.

CK: *And he smoked a pipe?*

BE: Always.

CK: *And he's wearing glasses.*

BE: Yes. And if you can see that little area on the side, he's got just a shadow of a boutonniere there. He never went out without that. And at Christmastime, all the little waitresses downtown bought him, for

Christmas, little blue bachelor's buttons, in silk. And every one gave him a bachelor's button, so that he could keep up the tradition of wearing a flower all winter long.

**CK:** *Did he always wear a bow tie? He has a bowtie in the photograph.*

**BE:** Always. Yes, 90 percent of the time he wore a bow tie.

**CK:** *Well, it's a wonderful photograph. A very distinguished looking man.*

**BE:** Yes, he was. He was a lovely man.

**CK:** *And with a little twinkle in his eye it looks like.*

**BE:** Yes. Oh, he was a wonderful man, a superb father, superb. Jay just really worshipped him. And Jay was very fortunate that he was there in the hospital when his father passed away. His father said to him — His father woke up at like one o'clock in the morning, and he looked at his watch, and he said, "Oh, nobody's here?" And I was told not to go near him. I had a bad sore throat at that time. So the last two days of his life I couldn't go near him. And the nurse said, "Don't worry." He thought it was one o'clock - noon. So she called me. And I said, "I can't go because I have a bad sore throat," — I was running an infection, and I didn't want to go near him — but Jay would be there. So Jay went right over there. We're not far from our hospital. And his father was very talkative and wanted him to know all kinds of things. And he said to Jay, "I'm really very tired. I think I'll sleep now." So Jay left. And before Jay was home I got the call he had died. So I told Jay he was so fortunate. How many people have that opportunity to be with their loved one right to their last breath? And he was. So.

**CK:** *It sounds like he had something he wanted to say.*

**BE:** Yes. He had a lot. And Jay twice tried to tell me. And it was too painful. And I said, "Jay, please. I can't listen to that." "But Mom, he said lovely things about you." And I said, "Please, Jay. Someday you'll tell me. I don't want to hear it now. I can't bear it."

**CK:** *That's certainly understandable. I think you have some wonderful family photographs here.*

**BE:** Everywhere. I've got a bunch in the living — I don't know what to do with them. I'd tuck them away, but everybody who comes looks. Cindy always looks for her family. Cindy was always very generous with gifts, and I keep them all displayed, because I notice that when she comes she comments on all of them.

**CK:** *We were talking about your family getting together for the holidays. What about Bar Mitzvahs? Were your brothers — ?*

**BE:** Oh, of course. We were not Bat Mitzvahed, because no one did it in those days. That's a new phenomenon, the Bat Mitzvah. But, yes.

**CK:** *I know it's a special occasion. How was it celebrated?*

**BE:** Well, no, it was not celebrated. Yes, it was a religious celebration. It was never a party or a social— I remember, with all my brothers, they were Bar Mitzvahed, and then you went into the social hall and — Do you know, what kichel is? It's a little crusty pastry. There'd be kichel and wine and herring and — a few specialties, but it was never a social celebration, ever.

**CK:** *Were there invitations? Or announcements, perhaps?*

**BE:** No. The local people came. And my mother would probably tell her family, and maybe they came. I don't remember. Maybe they didn't. I don't remember.

**CK:** *So in that sense, things have changed, traditions have evolved.*

**BE:** Oh, yes. But it was a religious service. It was not a celebration. You didn't have dances at night or anything. Jay had that, but not my brothers. And there were no Bat Mitzvahs, ever.

**CK:** *The boys were learned in Hebrew?*

**BE:** But I was sent to Hebrew school for a short period, to learn to read and write in Yiddish. When I was married — when we moved here — my mother insisted that I write her — they were then penny postcards — every day, in Yiddish. And I'd say, "Ma, what can I tell you every day?" And she says, "I don't care if you tell me what you ate for dinner. I want you to write every day so that it would be natural for you to write in Yiddish." And I did that, until she died. I did that. I'm sure my other sisters did that. And then I had a friend here, a very, very elderly lady. She died. I think she was one hundred and one-years-old. And she spoke English well, but she spoke to me two or three times in Yiddish, because she wanted to not lose the habit, and I didn't want to lose the fluency either. And I still can speak Yiddish very well, very well.

**CK:** *Did you and your husband speak Yiddish in the home?*

**BE:** No, he didn't know as much as I did, because his mother died when he was a young child. And he was the youngest of six. And he was literally brought up by housekeepers. And it was difficult for me because evidently the housekeepers would not tolerate any clothes around or messes of any kind, and every night of his life he would come home and shower and strip all of his clothing and put on more casual clothes. And in almost forty years of marriage, I never once had to pick up anything from him, ever. Now Jay, on the other hand, is not that neat. And he taught me to be neat. Because when you come up in a family of seven, things do get strewn around. And I was



a little lax. I didn't know any better. And he sat me down one day, and he said, "Look, Bea, there's no reason for this. We only have one child." I love silver, and he said, "I don't care how much silver you have, but if it's ever tarnished I'll come back to haunt you." And to this day, as you notice, all the silver's polished. And now I'm very intolerant of the fact that Jay strews his clothes around, and his newspapers.

**CK:** *Speaking of celebrations, as we were, about Bar Mitzvahs, how about birthdays? Were birthdays celebrated in any way or recognized?*

**BE:** They were recognized. We might have had a birthday cake. I'm not sure of that even. And you'd get a little present. And that was it. My generation, made a big thing about birthdays, and the kids, and the presents. And we were always sending all our nieces and nephews presents on their birthdays. There was no need for that. There was no money and there just was no room for that. Everybody was working, everybody was trying very hard. When I speak to kids now, and they say they're saving for a car, I'm always horrified. Not one young man or woman that I see around has ever said, "Oh, I'm putting away money for college." Everybody's saving for a car. The little lady you saw here yesterday, as you can see she doesn't have any money, but her daughter's graduating, and she bought her a 2004 Mitsubishi. I was so shocked. I said, "Well, Jeannie, you work so hard. What do you mean you bought her a Mitsubishi?" "Well, I wanted her to have it. She wanted it. And I work hard." And there's no father there. There's no husband. And she said she was shocked that I was shocked. I said, "You bought her a 2004 Mitsubishi." "Well, didn't you buy your son—"? I said, "No, we did not. He graduated one day in high school, and the next day he went to work."

When Jay came home in the early fall, let's say, he'd go right to the post office to make sure he'd have a job over Christmas vacation. And he wasn't unique. That's what everybody did. Everybody worked. And that work ethic came from my husband and me. My husband went to the University of Maine for his pre-law work, only because there was a man from Haverhill who lived in Bangor and said that if he came to the university he would give him work Saturdays and Sundays - Sundays replenishing stock, Saturdays on the floor. And then when he went to law school, he lived in Haverhill with his parents — with his father and siblings — and got up at four o'clock every morning to meet the train for the mayor. And he'd have a bunch of mail carriers, and they would distribute it all. And he inherited that business from

his brother, who had done it when he went to law school, and his brother before him, who went to school. And they all went to school that way, and would get a train and go into Boston and work hard and always had a job after school. These are the stories I heard —

When he was in his last year of law school, he worked in a freezer plant, and he got sick, but he kept working. And he lost weight, and he looked terrible. And my sister-in-law, from Pawtucket, Rhode Island, saw him — Norman had an older brother who died of tuberculosis, and she was very upset. They were extremely wealthy in those years. They summered in Narragansett Bay. And he was there for twelve weeks, the only vacation he ever had, until in later years when we traveled. But he loved her. And he loved her as a result of that. And she was a social butterfly, but good as could be, kind —. My husband would kill anybody who said anything against her. He wouldn't allow it. He would not allow it in his presence, because he felt that she probably saved him from some devastating illness. He was so run down and so tired.

**CK:** *And her name — ?*

**BE:** Was Millie Espo. That branch of the family in Pawtucket are all Espos.

**CK:** *Well, before we leave these earlier years, we haven't talked a lot about the shul.*

**BE:** Well, the shul was the focus, in Biddeford; the little shul, which still stands. And, oh, one of the Oshers, Alfred Osher, who was the dentist, his wife — My brother was always a fundraiser for that shul — And he went to see her and said, it had to be saved, "even though it's not occupied very much." There's nobody in Biddeford now. And he went to see Mrs. Osher, and she gave him something around \$150,000. And they did a wonderful renovation of that little shul. When my brother died, a month later, they had a memorial service for him. And Jay was going to speak, among many. And we went to that. And I was in awe. I kept looking around. My little shul looked like a beautiful church. It was beautiful, just beautiful.

**CK:** *How did the shul get started in this little community?*

**BE:** I don't know. When my grandfather came to Biddeford, I think there was a little community. I don't know how the shul got started. I don't know. I know how ours here did, but I don't know about that.

**CK:** *And what was your grandfather's role when he came?*

**BE:** Well, he was the rebbi, the Hebrew school teacher. He took on the role of a rabbi, without being an ordained rabbi. Nineteen ten, I think they came. They came to Rumford at first. And then my father and his

father went to Bangor, where he applied for a job as a shochet and a Hebrew school teacher, I guess. And then, when my father moved to Biddeford, he wanted his mother and father there, because while it was small, it was a strong orthodox little community. And my father felt that my grandfather would be very happy there. And they were very happy. They loved it.

**CK:** *And the grandfather who was the rebbi is your—*

**BE:** Father's father. His name was - Ben Mordachai — Max Cohen. His Jewish name was Mordachai. He taught Hebrew school. We didn't have Sunday school in those years, because it was bad enough the kids went to his house five days a week, directly after school. And then it was mandatory they go to shul on Saturday. So Sunday was left for the more or less social pleasures.

**CK:** *And how many families belonged to this synagogue?*

**BE:** Maybe thirty, at the most, at the most.

**CK:** *So that's all the Jewish families in Biddeford. There was one shul?*

**BE:** Yes. Oh, they were all orthodox Jews. In those years, there were no conservative movements. Maybe reform movements. I don't think so. I told you, when I came here I was so shocked that not everyone in the city was kosher. You would go to Portland for your meat. You went to Portland for your kosher rolls and bagels and so forth. That was the main Jewish community in the state. Now I don't think there's even a kosher butcher there. There was a kosher butcher here when I moved here.

**CK:** *Oh, that's interesting. Certainly a lot has changed with the next generation.*

**BE:** Oh, it's a different world.

**CK:** *Just going back one minute, I was thinking of the way you described the occasion of a Bar Mitzvah, as a religious service.*

**BE:** It was not a celebration of any kind. And it was a celebration in the fact that you lived to see your child become a Bar Mitzvah. But it was purely religious, purely.

And the little celebration afterward was just like a coffee hour.

**CK:** *Were there gifts?*

**BE:** I think so. I get a little confused. See, in my son's generation we were abounding with gifts. But maybe. I don't think so. Maybe there were. I don't know.

**CK:** *What do you see as having happened between the generations, in terms of the way in which you celebrated special occasions, whether Bar Mitzvahs or birthdays, that they became much more elaborate?*

**BE:** I think when my generation grew up and we went off to school, there was already a separation of— My aunt, with whom I lived, I don't think she kept a kosher house. It was a very Jewish home, but I don't know if it was kosher. I doubt it. And I had that year away, and then when I came back I was busy going to night school. There was an emancipation of a sort. And we would never have — in Newburyport, our temple — survived everything so well if they didn't loosen the rules. They had to loosen the rules. Because as we grew up— When I went to temple, I wanted to sit with my husband. I did not want to be in the other side of the room. There's a very active temple that is reformed, in Haverhill. And I think there was a conservative one in Portsmouth. And with the advent of cars, I think they were a little nervous that we would abandon this synagogue and go where there was a little more freedom. And then, as the elders died off — when I came there were many elders — and we became in command, we loosened some of the rules. And now, in order to attract the young people who have moved here—and many have — we have to be even freer. They can sit together. We have our collations together. We work together. Well, in order to hold them you had to do that.

**CK:** *Is it a shift in values, in terms of giving elaborate parties, giving gifts?*

**BE:** It's a shift in customs. Oh, you know, the Bar Mitzvah parties and the Bat Mitzvahs parties — You should see these girls, how beautifully they're dressed. And to me they're just little girls, at thirteen. But I don't think it's a shift in values. It's a shift in the times. I don't think that when we adhered so closely to the orthodox principles, that it was any better than now. You know, I have an Aliyah almost every week. And the women share with the men the Aliyahs and so forth. I don't think the values have lessened. I think, in order to hold Jewry together, all over the country. Now, you know, in many areas of New York and Maryland and Florida and up in Bethlehem, New Hampshire, it's very orthodox. But we term them the Chassidim because they observe everything. There's no laxity of any kind in the observance. And so they exist. And if you want to, you can join them. But who would want to? The women have a baby a year. And they have a very strong communal life. When the women have the children, all the Chassidic wives come in and feed the families and take over the children until the mother is— And it's very secure. It's very, very secure. Because you're not allowed to break any rule. And

if you do, I guess you're not in the Chassidic movement. They have a number of little schools in Boston — I think there are two or three that are strictly, strictly orthodox. And when I was in Paris I had yahrtseit for my Aunt Violet, and I wanted to be able to go to synagogue. And we went into a synagogue where we were — auch — we were just shuttled off to an area. We couldn't be near the men at all. And I thought, This is, in my mind, barbaric. I did what I had to do. I was noticing — it must have been a Shabbes — the women were dressed with their diamonds and their hats, and the men were dressed beautifully.

There was also another thing. There's a laxity in the way they come to shul now. They come in jeans and a T-shirt. And I've had people say that they object. Hey, as long as they come, I don't care how they come. I don't care if they come in bathing suits, as long as they come and adhere to the Judaic principles of living, which are very noble principles. And even in that Chassidic group, which you think is totally out of pace with the rest, they go to yeshivas, but very good ones. And there is a school now, a high school, in Waltham, Mass., which is called the Jewish High School. Now a family has taken over a lot of the finances and has given generously, and it's now called the Gann High School. And it is a high school. And my dentist, who lives in Andover, which is close to us, sends his son. And his daughter, who was just Bat Mitzvahed, next year she goes to that high school. It's expensive, and you have to provide cars. So the few families that send their children, they take care of the carpools. So there's that thing happening now, which interests me. And they also claim that kosher butchers and anything kosher, even the mikveh, is now having a resurgence, which I think is amazing. It's not values, it's connecting with the times. It's either/or. You either help them, give them a little more freedom, or you lose them. And nobody wants to lose Jews. We've lost enough, God knows, in Hitler's regime. So.

**CK:** *Were your nieces and nephews Bar Mitzvahed?*

**BE:** Oh, yes. I remember Karen's Bat Mitzvah. Oh, yes. I went to Bangor to my niece Cynthia's, who now lives in California, to her Bat Mitzvah. And they became social events. Now when Jay was Bar Mitzvahed, we sat down and discussed the guest list, and Norman said, "I don't know where to begin or start." He had been president of the Mass. Bar Association. He was president of the Newburyport Bar Association at the time. And he said, "Would you object, Bea, if we just had a beautiful family Bar Mitzvah?" And I said, "Fine with me." And it

was beautiful. The relatives all came. And we had a caterer from Boston who set up a beautiful dinner. And at night, because Jay didn't care about the Bar Mitzvah, he only wanted the party at night. And there was an orchestra here called Pop Mendelssohn's Band. All the music was attuned to the Bar Mitzvah kids. And we had a lovely supper, for just the children. Just my little nieces and nephews were there, of course. And they all danced. They did line dancing. You know, these people, they know exactly how to involve the kids. They're trained that way. And it was lovely. Jay was happy as could be, and he had all his friends. He had all his non-Jewish friends; he had all his Jewish friends. And one of his friends, who lived on the next corner, his father was the principal of the high school then - Richard Menaine — he always, when I see him, tells me his first Bar Mitzvah was Jay's. And then, all the kids invited him. It was a little group. And kids went out together and skied together. And they were all included. And that was very, very nice. They had a ball. The kids had a great time. And that's how we did it. There were a few hard feelings along the way. And I just said, "If we invite you, then what do we do about all of Norman's—?" He just couldn't do it. And it was too tricky to begin with, and I said, "Hey, we'll take whatever slack we have to take, but we'll do it this way." And it was beautiful.

The family, oh, they all looked lovely. And we had a man taking care of a bar. And, of course, I don't know about now, but Jewish people in those years never drank. And when Norman paid him, he said, "I hate to take the money, Judge." He said, "We consume more alcohol in one afternoon at my house with a few friends than this whole thing." Nobody drank. Nobody drank the liquor. And he had nice wines and— It was done very nicely. Jay was perfectly satisfied. He didn't care about that part. He wanted the party. That's all he talked about. And he had his Hebrew school class and his public school kids. He had a big crowd of kids. They all loved it. And from then on, they were invited to all the other little Bar Mitzvahs that came along. And they were also invited to the night party.

**CK:** *It sounds like it's a big shift from Biddeford and the way your generation gathered and celebrated.*

**BE:** Absolutely, absolutely. No one had any money. No one did it. There were no wealthy Jews in Maine then. There were none. There are plenty now. But in those days there were none. I wasn't here at the time, but the Jews in Newburyport met in a little hall for the holidays and Sabbath and so forth. And they decided they wanted a shul. So

they wanted to buy the Methodist Church, which is our shul now, and convert it to a real shul. And they wouldn't sell to a Jew. So the Jewish community got a gentile who bought the shul — bought the building and sold it to the Jewish community the next day. That's how we got it.

**CK:** *That's very interesting. And maybe this kind of does have a connection with what we're talking about. The Depression came up quite a few times yesterday. You shake your head.*

**BE:** Oh, it was awful.

**CK:** *And we also talked about the many Jewish shopkeepers.*

**BE:** That's what they all did. They were merchants in Biddeford. Their children are doctors and lawyers and judges, but they were merchants. And they educated their children. I hope this isn't misconstrued by anyone who's listening, but I think that one of the major ethical things that held Jews together was their drive for education. They couldn't get it, because in Russia and Poland, that was out of the question. But because they didn't get it, that's the one thing that they wanted for their children. There were a handful of Jews in Biddeford. One of the girls went to Radcliff. Well, the man who was a superior court judge was a classmate of my husband's in law school. It was just strange that they met later.

**CK:** *Who was that?*

**BE:** Judge Spill, in Biddeford, Simon Spill. And it was such a strong force in everybody's home. Not just mine, everybody's. You've got to go to school. You've got to become something. You have to be what we couldn't have. You know, the way I feel my generation over-indulged their children because we were products of the Depression. I think, without thinking, we wanted to do more for our kids than we had. And that's how our parents and our grandparents felt: We couldn't read a paper. We couldn't enter a library. My father said they used to study Hebrew in the cellars with the curtains drawn so the police and so forth wouldn't disrupt the service or whatever it was. And there they all were the same, every one of them. Even if you ran the pawnshop or a butcher store, it didn't matter. That was the focus of every family. Look at the way my father took Bernard by the scruff of his neck and threw him in the car and said, "You're going to college, and you're going to be something." And he was. It was the best thing that any parent could have done, what he did with my brother. My brother was yelling and screaming. "I'm not going. I want to go in the shoe shop," where this one and that one's going. And my father said, "You're not going into any shoe shop. Not only are you going, you're

going to do well. You have to do well. Because you know, once you're there — that how little money we have to send you. But you must do it." And he did it. And he had a very fine college career. And he was, I'm sure, ever grateful. Now his son, who just moved to California to be with all his cousins — this is Bernard's son Andrew. Bernard died when he was eight-years-old. He went to a private school through the eighth grade, in Portland. She [Evelyn]drove him every morning and picked him up every afternoon.

BE: He went there for four years. And then he went to the University of Wisconsin. And he became a sportswriter. And my sister-in-law, I give her all the credit in the world, she drummed that education into that boy, because he was only a little boy when his father died. And that was the focus in their house. He's very well educated, and he came to Boston to go to law school, and he's a wonderful young man. He married a classmate at law school, and they have a little baby now, a year old. But then they moved

CK: *One thing I want to wrap up is — not to belabor this issue — was how the Depression hit Biddeford shopkeepers?*

BE: Terribly. Terribly. Everybody had little shops. And if the mills didn't work, there was no work. If you didn't see smoke — I don't care how polluted — coming out of those chimneys, everybody suffered. I remember my father thinking in the business he should sell candy. There'd be a bigger market for candy than for cold tonic in the winter. And I remember one night — and they didn't know I overheard it — my father said, "I did not sell one box of candy today. And how are we going to feed the kids?" And he broke down. And I heard it. And I never forgot that. I never let them know I heard it. That, to me, was the essence of the Depression. That the shops, some of them had to close. The mills were closed. The Pepperell Mills were not doing anything. What was the name of that company I told you about last night? There was a factory that made the machinery for the cotton mills — The Saco-Lowell Shops. And if those factories closed down, businesses had to go into bankruptcy. Bankruptcy was the order of the day. And I know how my father struggled not to go into bankruptcy, because he knew that disgrace would follow him the rest of his life. He worked so hard. And my mother worked so hard. And they never went out except to go to the shul. I must have been fourteen when they went to a movie together. All those years, they didn't. And my father's diversion was his little pinochle club. That was as far as they went. They couldn't afford it. And it's very hard for this generation, your generation or Jay's generation, to understand that



they could not afford it. No one had money. No one was richer than the other. No one was poorer than the other. Everyone was poor. And life was a hard struggle.

It was a long time after I was married that I could take joy in buying anything nice. I was always guilty. That coffee table in my living room I saw in Boston, and I wanted it desperately, but I couldn't afford it. And I went back and back, and finally Norman said to me one day, "You know, Bea, go back and buy that table. You've already spent more money than it cost going around looking around for a cheaper one. Buy that one, and get rid of the problem." And I did. But with guilt. Always with guilt. And it took me many years, when I knew my husband was really doing well, really doing well. And he loved beautiful clothes. Oh, he had gorgeous clothes. And he wanted me to have beautiful clothes. But at that point, I knew I could have them. And everybody I speak to who lived through the Depression has said to me, "Oh, the guilt of buying something nice. It hounded me." And it hounded me.

**CK:** *Do you feel that your brothers and sisters experienced it in the way that you did?*

**BE:** No. They were younger. Yes, they experienced it, but I don't know if they have the same memories. I know my brother Sam does. I don't know, my sister Annetta. But I think from then down on — I'm not sure. I'm not sure that they did. Oh, it was a terrible time.

**CK:** *You said you overheard your father talking about how —*

**BE:** And crying. I heard him break down. I'll never forget how deeply that affected me and how scared I became.

**CK:** *Did your parents protect you children from the reality of the times?*

**BE:** They tried to protect us. But it was all around us. You could not escape it. Kids were coming home from school and colleges. And they had to go to work to make enough money to go back to school. There were no jobs. There were soup lines in all the major cities. In Biddeford we had a St. André's Church, and they had soup lines. And I remember the people all the way down the street, standing in line for a bowl of soup.

**BE:** Oh, it was terrible, terrible.

**CK:** *How has it affected your life, your generation — ?*

**BE:** It certainly did for many years, for many years. And I have friends who tell me that it was a long time before they would buy a fur coat or — It was always with guilt. I'm over it now. But I certainly did feel that way. And it was a painful thing. Everybody's experiences in the

Depression were painful. And there was a young man from Kenya who came here to substitute for somebody one day, and he was taking an economics course at college. And he asked me a million questions about the Depression. And I said, "Why do you ask me that?" He said, "I never knew anybody as old as you in my whole life, and I'm sick of the teachers who give lectures out of the same books I study from. I want to know somebody who lived through it." I said, "Let's go to lunch." And he wrote everything down. Everything. And he asked many penetrating questions. And I never saw him again, but he called me once to say that shortly afterward he had to take an economics exam on the Depression, and he got an "A." And he said, "I want you to know I would have never gotten this "A" from my professor. I wrote down everything you said." So. Next.

**CK:** *OK. Yesterday when we stopped, we had been talking about being a teenager in Biddeford. I would imagine a lot of what you told me is similar for your siblings. You were saying that you cleared out the room, and you danced.*

*Were there any fads at that time, which you remember?*

**BE:** Oh, yes. The flappers, you know, with the fringed dresses, and those short dresses. And the hairstyles were different.

**CK:** *What kind of a hairstyle?*

**BE:** Oh, they were very bouffant, you know, way out here somewhere. Well, I didn't do it, but when the mills were working, Mr. Green used to tell us he couldn't wait for Friday nights because they'd pour out of the mills, the French girls, and get, not good shoes, but the fanciest. Because they went to dances every Saturday night, and they never wore the same clothes twice. And he used to love to hear them talk about it. He said the shoes weren't good, so they'd be in next week for another pair of shoes. It was part of their daily expense to, once a week, buy a pair of shoes that wouldn't stand up. But they were beautiful. They were pretty. And in those years all the French girls mainly married men that they met at those dances and in the mills. I'd say 90 percent of the people who worked in the Biddeford mills were French. And I got along fine with all of them. They never were unkind — except that one experience — in my entire life. So I was lucky. I was very lucky.

**CK:** *You went to school with the children of the people who worked there?*

**BE:** Yes. I think, because all the relatives were in the mills working, not as executives, but as mill workers, which is very hard, I think they wanted me out of there. And they made it very hard. And I couldn't

tell anybody. I couldn't destroy my mother and father's dream of equality in America. That's all they ever talked about was how lucky we are. In the Depression there were no rich. Nobody was richer or poorer than the other. They thought it was so, so wonderful, that I *could not* reveal to them what happened to me in those mills. I don't know if it was because I was Jewish. I don't know if it was anti-Semitism. I know they didn't want me there. Well, that was it.

**CK:** *Did you have a hangout, the teenagers?*

**BE:** We didn't hang out. Girls didn't hang out, but the boys did. Yes. Around that grocery store that my mother ran to when my brother fell out of the tree, Nadeau. Everybody hung out. But they were just kids. And they were good kids, and Jewish kids. Everybody hung out, in our neighborhood. And I'm sure there were other such places everywhere.

**CK:** *Did you go bowling? Did you have dances? Was there an amusement park?*

**BE:** No. And when you went to Old Orchard in the summer, you were on the beach. I don't recall it, but I'm sure my younger siblings went on the roller coaster, the dodge-ems, stuff like that. I never did. I worked. I was thirteen-years-old; I was working in a drugstore, so.

**CK:** *Tell me about Old Orchard.*

**BE:** Oh, everybody was at Old Orchard. We couldn't afford a cottage, but we lived close enough by. I used to go on the beach after I worked, like at five o'clock. And we had one kosher deli there, and we'd meet for a kosher hotdog or something. And then we'd meet on the beach. My friend, Anne Stack, who drove the truck with the shoe findings, she married a man that she met at Old Orchard. My sister married Irving Broder. He came from Bangor, but she met him at the beach. A lot of Canadians were there. And a lot of marriages took place with the Canadians. They had dances at the Jewish hotels Saturday nights. We would go. We were allowed to come in and go even if we weren't guests at the hotel. Another dear friend of mine, Bella Margolis — she came from Boston, but she used to come and hang out with us. And she met a young man who was a dishwasher at a hotel, who became a doctor. I can't begin to tell you. Everybody became somebody. That's the only way I can describe it. In my little town we had a judge, a lawyer, a baby



doctor, a pediatrician, and a regular doctor, Dr. Haas, an internist. Morrill Shapiro became Dr. Shapiro. It's amazing.

Let me take a minute and tell you what happened to our shul. Everybody left. The Jewish people are gone. Their children didn't come back there. My brother was probably the last of the Jews to live in Biddeford. Sam. And Jewish people, mainly of mixed marriages, but who wanted their children to have a Jewish education, took over my little shul — our little shul. My brother, of course, was the philanthropist. Also he couldn't give it up. And he would tutor for my grandfather. He would tutor a few kids for their Bar Mitzvahs. God, he loved that, he just thought that was so wonderful. And he'd go to a Bar Mitzvah and sit there and perspire; he'd be so nervous they'd make a mistake. So they use it for Sunday school on the weekends.

When they had the memorial service for my brother, the little Hebrew school kids — there must be ten, twelve of them now — My brother was a Red Sox fan, absolutely crazy, and would go to every game that he could. After he retired, he never missed a game — and they sang. And then their Hebrew school teacher, who was a non-Jew who married a Jewish doctor and became a Jew, and in Yiddish sang, "Take Me Out to the Ballpark," in Yiddish. It was phenomenal. Our friend Barney [Osher] flew in from California, and he spoke about my brother in a very humorous way, very. And it was wonderful. And then Jay spoke, beautifully. It was packed. They had a policeman there directing traffic. That's how many people came, Jews and non-Jews. And two men came over to me. One of them hugged me and kissed me and said, "Beatrice, I can't believe you don't know me." And there was this gray-haired man. I didn't know who he was. He said, "I'm Dick Potzin." That was the number one truck driver we had. But I never saw him so elegantly dressed. And his hair was white. It was so good to see him. And then there was another truck driver of my brother's. One of his customers, Mr. Thromolus, was there. Mr. Thromolus came over to me and said, "Beatrice, who's that dark man who spoke, big heavy man?" I said, "That was my son." Well, Dick Potzin, "That was your son? He was good." With that little French — They never lose their French accent. I said, "Oh, I want you to meet him." But Jay, there were so many people around him, asking him questions. He really outdid himself. He loved my brother, and it came from the heart. And then his business partner spoke. My

brother was a part owner of the Kittery Mall. I can't remember his name. And the president of the shul spoke. And it was such a wonderful gathering. And then the women of the congregation, we went downstairs. Where the mikveh used to be is now like a dining hall. They had every type of refreshment you could imagine. Oh, and there was a presentation of a plaque that was going up in his memory. It was such a wonderful evening.

And I stood looking at that little bimah, you know, the alter there, and I said, I remember Zadie; he always had a big yarmulke. His picture's up there. He always wore a tallis over his head and he'd wrap himself in it. I could just see him there. My father, who was president for years, who was president of Talmud Torah. There was only my sister Charlotte and Lester left then, and I don't know how they felt, but I was moved. And Karen's husband, who's a very fine speaker, came over and said to me, "You can be very proud. Jay did an outstanding job." I just felt as though the Cohens were back, you know, for that one evening. And I was deeply moved by the whole thing.

And I walked around that shul. It's beautiful. The windows are kind of palladium windows. It was beautiful. I kept walking around. And I walked around that kitchen that was such a dump. And they have an elevator now. And I was so glad because I can't climb stairs. I got in the elevator. It was the fruition of all the dreams and work and money put in by my parents' generation. It was the full fruition of that. It was wonderful.

**CK:** *Well, I hate to have you go back to the things of daily life. You mentioned also that you had a piano and you took piano lessons.*

**BE:** Oh, of course.

**CK:** *You could afford to have a piano in your home?*

**BE:** Those were essentials. Those were not luxuries. You had to have a piano. My brother had to have a violin. My brother Bernard had to have a trombone, I think he played. George didn't play an instrument, but he used to love to sing. Well, that was like having bread and butter in your house. Those were not luxuries. Those were the building of the character. And the things that my parents couldn't have, we got. It was not unusual. Every Jewish house had a piano, no matter how poor. Every house had a piano. Not that any of us became very accomplished. I played for the USO during the war, one night a week. And that was fun too.

**CK:** *Aside from going to Old Orchard, did your family ever take a vacation — — your parents?*

**BE:** Oh, no. Never, even once. Never. How could they take a vacation? And then after my father died, my mother was so distraught for so long that— It never even came up. Vacations. Never. My mother felt we were vacationing because we would be on the beach all summer, as little kids.

**CK:** *How did you get to the beach from your house?*

**BE:** My mother would call my father, who would send a driver down with a car, and they would take us to the beach. And they'd come down three hours later and pick us up. My mother would pack a lunch. And when we were all at the beach on Labor Day — that was always a sad day, the farewell — my mother would have all these paper cups. And she'd make us fill them with salt water, just water from the ocean, and gargle, all of us. You could imagine what a sight it must have been, to see seven kids, they're gargling. And my mother gargling. Because if you gargle, you wouldn't be sick in the winter because all that salt water was healing. We were always sick in the winter, but the next year Labor Day came, we all gargled. Ma said, "gargle," we gargled. Nobody argued with a mother or father in those years. You couldn't. We were all sensitive to the fact that they were giving us so much with so little, and you didn't argue. As I told you yesterday, you'd say, "Ma, are you sure?" She'd hit the dining room — "Definittle, Beatrice." I says, "Ma, you told me over and over again, if you didn't speak correctly, to correct you. The word is 'definitely.'" "That's what I just said, definittle." So I gave up.

**CK:** *Would you say that there wasn't any confrontation in the home?*

**BE:** No. Yes, we kids fought a lot. But no. You mean with my mother and father? Oh, no. No, no. You didn't do it. I think of it now. And how did it happen? Everybody emerged as a whole being and with our own opinions. We were all very political. The whole family's very political. And we're all Democrats. I don't know how we emerged from that atmosphere into whole individuals, psychologically and physically. I don't know. But it was a miracle. (laughter) But we did.

**CK:** *You just mentioned being political, and I'm wondering if you would talk about politics in Biddeford.*

**BE:** Local politics were dominated by the French people. I don't know any non-French that served in any capacity. But everybody was a Democrat when I was growing up. And when Felix Frankfurter was appointed to the bench — my father had very arthritic hands at that point — we were listening, I guess, to the radio, there were no

televisions then, and he applauded and applauded and applauded. He was so proud — and Louis Brandeis — that these two Jews were on the Supreme Court. I never forgot that day because we had to soak his hands in hot water afterward, they were so painful from that applause. And it was so strong. You know, he was so thrilled.

And, of course, when Franklin Roosevelt came into power, it was like a liberation for everybody. Herbert Hoover had ruined the country. He didn't know anything about running a country. And we went into the Depression under Hoover. And when Franklin Roosevelt — In those years, only after he died did we know that he was handicapped. He always had bodyguards. We assumed they were there because he was president. They were the people who covered his feet. He was always behind a desk. In all the years, four terms, you never saw him standing up. And it was a deep, dark secret. Nobody knew. Nobody. Maybe his cabinet members knew. But the public never knew he had a physical handicap. And he was a very liberal man. And he came in at terrible times. And for a man of his aristocratic background, he had a very great feeling for the people. We got — oh, what do they call those trade things — unions, under Roosevelt. We got Social Security under Roosevelt. He didn't do anything in his years, but he started the feeling for community colleges. There were the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps. I went with a young man who was a veterinarian. In Alfred, Maine, we had a CCC camp, and he would examine the animals. And, oh, God, so many things. The only man who I ever felt afterward, after his death, that did as much as when we got the Peace Corps. Now I think it's called the Americorps. These seeds were planted by Roosevelt. Some of the presidents who followed him did lovely things, but they expanded on the seeds that Roosevelt planted. He came from such a wealthy, aristocratic background, but nobody could understand — Every Jew in the United States loved him. And how he came down to the level of the needs of the people, I don't know. God endowed him with a special gift for that. Because he was what we needed to save us from God knows what, God knows what. He was wonderful.

**CK:** *You said that Biddeford was a Democratic community?*

**BE:** Yes. All French were Democrats, yes.

**CK:** *Why?*

**BE:** Because they felt that the Democratic Party was the expression of the things they needed, they wanted.

**CK:** *Were there political activities in Biddeford? Was there an active Democratic party?*

**BE:** I went to some rallies, as a kid, yes.

**CK:** *Were your parents involved in politics?*

**BE:** In the home. But they didn't do anything out of the home, politically. My brother Sam was a great leader of the Democratic party in that area, in Biddeford. He was, I think, probably the leader. He was very close to Ed Muskie; Judge Mitchell was his very dear friend; even the Secretary of Defense, Billy Cohen, who came from Bangor, even though he was a Republican. My brother loved the whole atmosphere of politics. And they all were his guests in his house. And he had dinner parties for them. I think he was the number one Democrat in Biddeford. And I think it gave him a great sense of leadership, importance.

**CK:** *What were some of the other activities of the women, and Jewish communal life. Aside from the synagogue, did you have B'nai B'rith? You did have Hadassah?*

**BE:** Yes. Well, if we had B'nai B'rith it might have been in later years, after I left.

**CK:** *What do you know about a Workman's Circle?*

**BE:** God, I don't know where you got this information. It was called the Arbeiter Ring. And the only people who were active in the Arbeiter Ring was a family by the name of Stern. And they had Celia, Arthur, and another son [Saul]. I don't remember his name, because he was much younger. And the parents were the freethinkers of the community. Well, my mother loved them as friends. She always warned us, kind of, "Don't get involved with Arthur too much." Even though she managed to have him take me to the prom. They never kept a kosher home. They were the only family — the Stern family, yes — they were the only family in Biddeford — I don't know if they went to the synagogue, I have no idea. My mother used to say — "Arbeiter Ring, you know, the Workman's Circle." It was beneath her. I don't know where my mother had her sense of snobbery. She didn't want us to have friends — I had many friends who were non-Jews. And she had such a feeling of — Oh, God, Galicia. If I ever brought home a Galatzianer, I mean, she'd have killed me. I don't know where that snobbery came from. But she did have it. And my uncles and aunts had it. Absolutely. If you weren't a Litvak, you know, you were nothing. I can't tell you. Now when I married Norman, I went to visit his father, before we were married. And his father said, "You're a nice



woman. It doesn't make any difference. I really don't care, but are you a Russischer or a Litvak?"

And I said, "I'm a Litvak — my whole family." He said, "Thank God. At long last I'm getting a Litvak for a daughter-in-law. I have two daughters-in-law who are Russuch." And what could I say? I didn't say anything. They were Jewish. But, "I'm so happy you're a Litvak." Oh, I used to write him letters in Yiddish. And one day I went to the house to visit him. I had to be in Haverhill for something, and he wasn't home. So I went to the shul, because it was time for services. And there was a group of elderly men. And, "Which daughter are you?" I said, "I come from Maine." "Oh, you live in the Maine." That's how they all pronounced it, "the Maine." And I said, "yes." And one of them said, "Are you the one who writes him letters?" I was, "Well, I do write to him, yes." "In Yiddish"? I said, "Yes, I do." I had to leave, so I never saw him. But they were all very envious that Mr. Espovich had a daughter-in-law who wrote to him once a week in Yiddish. God knows what I wrote to him. And I didn't see him at the time. But I came home, and I told my mother, and she said, "Did I tell you, you had to go to Hebrew school and learn to write." And the first year I was married I had to send her — postcards in those days were a penny — every day, in Yiddish — The only thing English was the address. And I'd say, "Ma, what can I write to you every day?" "I don't care if you write what you had for dinner. I want you to write me in Yiddish." And she saved them. And she showed my aunt and uncle, who died of jealousy. And when her friends came on Shabbes for tea, she would show them a card. And they were so envious because their daughters or daughters-in-law could not write in Yiddish. Because that was strictly a male thing. And daughters were not supposed to be doing that. So, they were very jealous, very.

And I must tell you, when Sam was a soldier in Muskogee, Oklahoma, he went to shul on Yom Kippur, and he landed in a little shul that was quite modern. He didn't like it, so he found another shul that was orthodox. And in the middle of Yom Kippur, the rabbi fainted, and he couldn't continue because he was fasting. So they asked if there was anybody in the congregation who could continue the service. And my brother raised his hand, and he said, "I can do it. But I don't think I'm worthy. I am a soldier. I eat trayf. I do everything on the Sabbath that they expect of me. I don't think I should conduct." And they said, "Just get up here and conduct." And he did the whole service, in

Hebrew. So my mother got flooded with letters from people— All of the people with daughters were inviting him to dinner. Anyway, when my mother died, and we opened her little safe, in a little bundle with a ribbon were all the letters she got from the congregants at Muskogee, complimenting her and telling her what a wonderful thing that this young man could get up and do the whole Yom Kippur service. And he did. And Sam said, "I want those letters." And I said, "Yes, you should have them. You're the one that they're talking about." Well, my mother was so proud. Ah, you have no idea.

**CK:** *Bea, you mentioned that you went with Arthur Stern to the prom. Had you dated much before this?*

**BE:** No. We were classmates. We didn't date in high school.

**CK:** *So, if I asked you, who was your first date?*

**BE:** My first date of consequence was a young man I met when I was at Boston University, who was a premedical student at MIT. And he was a very, very nice young man, and I liked him a lot.

**CK:** *So you didn't date in Biddeford as a teenager?.*

**BE:** No, nobody dated in high school.

**CK:** *And then how did you meet your husband?*

**BE:** My husband was stationed in Saco, in World War II. And a friend of mine called. She was married. And she said, "Bea, I have a classmate who is stationed here, and I'd like you to meet him. He's a lawyer. And he is in the service. And I'd like you to come to dinner. I want you and Sylvia to meet him." Sylvia Ross. So I said, "Well, would you have Sylvia first and then me?" And she said, "Well, Bea, if it goes well—" I said, "Have Sylvia first." Sylvia was brilliant, Sylvia Ross. Her brother was a pediatrician. And Sylvia was very bright, and was free with her opinions. And I knew that there was a pretty good chance that he wouldn't like her. So the day after they had dinner, Dorothy Sandler called me and said, "Bea, I don't know what went wrong, but it was certainly not a successful meeting. And would you come this Friday night." I said, "Sure." That's where I met him. And we dated a lot for three weeks. And then he was called back to his base in Camp Devens. And he said, "I will be back. I think we're going on a little furlough, and as soon as that's over I will be back." My mother said, "You're more than welcome, but you cannot stay here, if you are planning on that. I wouldn't allow it." So he was stunned. So he called Dorothy and she said, "Don't worry about it. You'll stay with us." So he did. And they went back to Camp Devens, and I got a letter from him saying I would not be hearing from him for quite a long time, but not to worry he was safe. And that was it. So

that meant — I knew that he was going overseas. So he went to the southwest Pacific.

His letters to me were a full history of the war. Never was it long. Never did he say "love." He was a historian, and that's the way he wrote. Oh, she said, "I know the Espovich family. He will not send you flowers. Don't expect things like that. I don't think the Espovich boys would do that." I said, "OK." Well, I got a big poinsettia, and that's a Christian plant. He probably called the florist and said, "Send a plant." Well, my mother, thank God, did not know that it was a Christmas plant. And she thought it was very nice. And I couldn't wait to tell Dorothy that I'd got this plant. She was stunned. Then after a while she said — And he had the worst — auch — his penmanship, it would take me an hour to read one of those war letters. And she said, "I can't read it, Bea." I'd been sending him cigars or different things. And she said, "I don't know. What if he needs something?" She knew what she was doing. And I went over there, and the letter was all about me. Was I dating? He didn't know when he'd get out. Did she think I would be around when he got out? Then, I said, "Well, Dorothy, you read this very well. I know you did. And thank you because now I know where I stand." And I was in a good position. So I wrote him a little more intimate letters. But he kept sending me these cold letters about the progress of the war. All over the world. He was very, very good at that.

I was seeing a boy from Beverly. And my mother loved him. His name was Borah, you know. She was a diabetic and she couldn't get any canned foods. During the war you got nothing. And he would come down with a case of salmon — everything she couldn't get, he brought her. They were in the wholesale food business. And he came in a Cadillac. And my mother said, "I'd forget about that boy in the Army, if I were you, Bea. You know, and I don't like to say it, but he may not come back. He may come back maimed. Look at this wonderful young man." Of course, he must have been 4F. So, as I saw it progress, I said, "Well, I had better tell him that I'm waiting for someone." And because he was getting, I knew, very serious, I told him. He says, "I'll gamble on that. I don't mind. I'll gamble." So he kept seeing me. And one day I get a call from Letterman General Hospital. Oh, that summer my mother and I went to York, Maine, the beach, and there was a fortune teller. So my mother said, "Oh, have your fortune told." So I paid her five dollars and she said to me,

"You know someone who's in the hospital." I didn't know anyone in the hospital. And this was in August. And she said, "You'll be married before Christmas." So I said to Ma, "You know," I said, "Don't bother." I said to the woman, "I don't know anybody sick, and I know no one to whom I'd be married by Christmas." And we paid her, and we walked away. I never mentioned it. My mother never mentioned it. We thought it was just stupid.

I get a call from Letterman General Hospital. He had been in the hospital for many months in the Fiji Islands. He never let anybody know because his father was in his 80's, and he knew his father would be beside himself, so he didn't tell. He wrote to his sisters. He had some kind of a tropical skin disease. They felt he'd better get out of that climate, and they sent him to San Francisco, and he asked if I could come out. My mother got on the phone and said, "I remember you very well, young man, and I'm so happy you're back, you're alive. And I'm really happy, but my daughter will not go to San Francisco. I will not allow it." So he said, "Well, OK." I immediately called Borah, immediately. I said, "Borah, he's back. I don't know when I'll see him. I don't want you coming down at all until I see what happens with him." Then he was transferred to a hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. And there he had family. He had aunts, I think. And I got a call from one of the aunts, and she was very sweet. She told me about her relationship with Norman. And she said, "Norman would love to have you come out. He's very anxious to see you, and I can understand why your mother wouldn't allow you to go to San Francisco. You had no one there. But we're here. You can be with us," and everything. And I said, "Mom, what do you think?" She was on the phone. And she said, "Absolutely not." I just said, "My mother doesn't want me to do that."

So then he came to Haverhill, to see his father first. And he called me from Haverhill, and he said, "You know, I know I should come down to Biddeford right away. But my father is so ecstatic that I'm home, and I'm in one piece. And he worried so much. I'd like to spend another day with him, at least. Will you come out?" And our rabbi was at the table. My mother said, "What?" The rabbi said, "Mrs. Cohen, you ought to let her go. This is wartime. Any young man who would respect his father's feelings that much is a nice person. Let her go." So I got on the phone, and I said, "I'm going." I was so sick to my stomach, all the way. I blanked out. I could not remember how he

looked. I could not remember. I mean, I just was so nervous about it. And I got off the plane, and there he was, and I was so happy to see him and him to see me. And then and there he asked me to marry him. So! And I knew he was bright. His letters were brilliant. They weren't what I wanted, but they were brilliant. So I called my mother, and I said, "I'm going to stay overnight." And she said, — We had one friend in Haverhill — "I'm calling Mrs. Vinecour right away. You're going to stay with her. So she called Mrs. Vinecour. Mrs. Vinecour said of course I could stay. And then my mother said, "You ought to be married here." And all my brothers were in the war. So I said, "I guess so, Ma. I don't know." He only had a week, so we had to plan it fast. So she called Mr. Espovich, and she said that she wanted the family to come and be in my house. And he said, "Mrs. Cohen, I don't want to go into Maine in December. What if it snows and we can't get out?" So my mother said, "Well, I've been living here in Maine since 1912. We have storms, but nothing as bad as that." So he said, "Well, can I do the wedding?" My mother said, "Absolutely." There was nobody there except the immediate family. It was the war. And she came up with my sister Charlotte. And one uncle came. And there were about maybe twelve people, at the most. And we were married. And we were together. We went up to Claremont, New Hampshire, for a few days. And then I went home, and he went back in the service.

**CK:** *So you were married?*

**BE:** December 21, just before Christmas. I never connected it. My mother said, "Do you realize he's been in the hospital a few months and that you were married before Christmas?" I said, "Oh, Ma, I never connected it." That was that story.

**CK:** *How did you feel about the fact that she wouldn't allow you to go to San Francisco or to Tennessee?*

**BE:** Well, nobody would do that. I wasn't married. I wasn't engaged. If he said something about marriage — Anyway, I called Borah right away. And he was a gentleman, and he said, well, he gambled, and he lost. And that was it.

**CK:** *And you say you took a plane from Biddeford?*

**BE:** No, by train. It was so bad traveling in those days. Young mothers were there with little babies who were crying. They were on their way to meet a soldier here, there, and everywhere that was — It was a troublesome time.

**CK:** *How did it happen that he was stationed in Saco? Was there a base there?*

BE: Yes. Well, they took the big shoe factory, and they made barracks out of it. And his group was stationed to guard the state of Maine on the water. And I went down there. I may have met Norman. But I wouldn't know. We used to go down. The Red Cross would set up these huge things of coffee and doughnuts, and we would be down at night and feed them. If I ever fed him, I don't know. And he didn't know. Because there was someone different every night who came down.

CK: *Was he drafted?*

BE: No. In those days, if you enlisted for one year you would escape the draft. So he went in, in 1941, I think it was. And he was getting ready to come home when they bombed Pearl Harbor. And he was in there for four years in all.

CK: *So you were married December 21, 1941. It had been two years.*

BE: He was always in the service. But he was not out of the service in 1943. He came out in late '44. And we moved here [Newburyport, MA] in April of '45. He wouldn't settle in Biddeford. My mother wanted him to, but he said it was so un-American to him. Everybody spoke French. And he was in the barbershop, and he didn't understand a word of it, and they were all jabbering in French. And he said, "I don't like this environment. I don't want to stay here." That was that.

CK: *I wanted to talk a little bit about World War II. You met your husband, and you talked about your brothers being in the war. So obviously life changed a lot in Biddeford.*

BE: Biddeford was pretty sad. Everyplace was sad. Nobody wants to be in a war. And we would go to the USO dances. And one night the switchboard operator didn't show, so, instead of playing piano, I ran the switchboard. And this guy, a pure Aryan if you ever saw one, with blonde hair, blue eyes, tall; he looked like a true German. And I said, "May I help you?" He says, "Would you get 463 for me, please?" That was my number. I said, "Oh. I know people at 463. Who do you want to speak to?" And he says, "Charlotte." Charlotte was beautiful. And I said, "Well, I'll call her." And she answered the phone. And he gave me the name, truly a German name. And she knew who it was. She was very excited. And I said, "Well, I'm giving you the message. What you do from now on is up to you." She said, "Well, it's not a big deal. I'm just coming up for the dance." But she didn't feel good about it. He was very German, very much in command of everything. And that was the end of that. But I never forgot that night. Oh, my God, I

didn't know what to do. Imagine, in those years, telephone numbers 4-6-3.

**CK:** *That certainly indicates how much has changed, when you think of the numbers we dial today. What else was changing in Biddeford because of the war? Or what changed for you?*

**BE:** Well, what was changing was that all plants were making raw materials. I don't know if they were in Biddeford, but Biddeford was busy. Everyplace was busy because of the war. It was hard, because leather was rationed, everything was rationed. But people survived that. They just bought lesser valuable substitutes. And so the clothes were okay. I modeled shoes for a factory in Kennebunk, and so did my sister Annetta. And when they banned something to do with leather, we had like forty pairs of shoes between us. We never got paid in money, but they gave you the shoes. We were 4Ds, my sister and I, at that time. We had such fun. My mother was unhappy. She thought men in the shoe industry — and they were in Biddeford — were not very faithful to their wives, because they came from Haverhill and they were in Biddeford. And they all set up these cute little French girls in apartments. And my mother and father were horrified. They always said Jewish people didn't do things like that. But they did.

**CK:** *And what were you doing during this time?*

**BE:** I was working for my family's business.

**CK:** *And your brothers?*

**BE:** I had a brother in the Battle of the Bulge, my brother Lester. My brother Bernard came home totally crippled. He'd been underground in London for a couple of years. He was so arthritic. And he went to a doctor who told him to get to Phoenix as fast as he could. And he did. He studied Spanish, something there for a year. And at the end of the school year he was fine. He came home. And he never had arthritic problems again. My brother Sam, because he was so clever, never went overseas. My brother George was in the Philippines.



**The Cohen Brothers**

L.to R.: Sam, Lester, Bernard. Front: George

**CK:** *And what did you hear from them?*

**BE:** Oh, we got letters. I don't know if you ever saw any of these little letters. They were very tiny sheets of paper. And they were all scrutinized before they left. And you'd get letters with something scratched out in black, black ink.

**CK:** *They were censored?*

**BE:** Censored. That's the word. They were all censored.

**CK:** *How did you feel about somebody—?*

**BE:** Oh, we were at war. Whatever was necessary was necessary. Nobody liked the fact, but everybody was getting mail that was censored. If he said, "I'm in the South Pacific —" I didn't know where he was for a long time. In the beginning, after they landed, they'd scratch it out. After we landed at Guadalcanal, there was a store, Shapiro Variety Store, one store on the island. He couldn't believe it. So he went in. And the man was Jewish. And he says, "Where do you come from?" And he says, "I come from the Boston area." He said, "Look, I'm sick of people telling me they came near New York, from Boston. Where?" He said, "Well, you never heard of it, Newburyport, Mass." And he said, "Of course I'd heard of it. The whole world knows about "Bossy" Gillis." "Bossy" Gillis was an interesting man, he had limited education, and he fought for the poor, and he fought for their rights.



And he did something wrong, and they put him in jail where he ran for election and got reelected. And when Norman came to Newburyport, this "Bossy" Gillis met him.

**CK:** *So Norman went to "Bossy" Gillis' filling station.*

**BE:** Yes, and he said, "Would you like to be City Solicitor?" And Norman was ecstatic. And I don't think it paid anything, but he was politically minded, and it would push him in the forefront. So "Bossy" Gillis was a very interesting man, and he had a wife Marge, and we had the same birthday. So one day I bumped into him, and I said, "And how is Marge?" He looked me right in the eye, and he says, "I assume you mean Mrs. Gillis?" I said, "Well, yes." He says, "Well, she is fine. I will tell her you asked for her." And he said something like, "In the future remember her name is Mrs. Gillis." I met him a thousand times. I'd say, "How's Mrs. Gillis?" And I never called her Marge again. He was not an educated man, but he had very good principles. They have a genteel act for aristocracy in Newburyport. They occupied all the houses on High Street. And they didn't like him. They didn't like him at all. And some of the aristocrats he ran against, and they were all solidly defeated, each and every one. And finally, he retired at a certain age. He stood many terms. I don't remember how many terms. But the poor loved him. The rich hated him. He could care less.

**CK:** *Your brothers were involved in the war, and obviously you were all drawn into what was going on.*

**BE:** Oh, very worried, yes.

**CK:** *And there is another story on another level, about the Holocaust. What you were hearing?*

**BE:** Oh, the Holocaust. We heard everything. We hated Hitler with a passion.

**CK:** *How early were you hearing rumor or stories?*

**BE:** Oh, right after Hitler came into power. He began that campaign of winning over all these small countries. Oh, it was horrible. Everybody cursed him.

**CK:** *Were you hearing anything in the letters from your brothers?*

**BE:** They couldn't write. They wouldn't write that. That would be censored. They would write, "We're well." "Don't worry about us, Ma." "I'll be home soon." That was the tone of all the letters. My brother-in-law Irving wrote constantly to my sister, and they were such love letters. They were wonderful. One day I was at the beach at Gloucester, and Norman and I were sitting on the beach, and this young man came over, and he spoke, "Are you Charlotte's Brother's sister?" I said, "Yes, I am." And he said, "You know, Irving couldn't

express himself. So I would write a love letter, and he would scan it and say, "That's just right." He wrote all the love letters. I never told my sister. He said, "Every letter she ever got, I wrote." She always treasured — I never said a word to her about it. Isn't that funny?

**CK:** *You have all these secrets that you've kept. I know you said that you were all Democrats, and you were supporters of Roosevelt. How did you feel towards Roosevelt at this time, knowing that there were problems in Germany?*

**BE:** He didn't go into the war until we were attacked. We were supporting England, I believe, at that time. My brother Bernard was an engineer, and he did something in the Air Force. He didn't fly. I think it was engineering of some kind with the airplanes. And he knew what was going on. We all knew here what was going on. But when he declared war — He had no choice, after they bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, it was universal in America, the hatred for Hitler. And everybody despised him. And we didn't know until the war was over that a group of refugees did come to the shores of America, and they were turned back.

**CK:** *That was the ship the St. Louis?*

**BE:** The ship. And we were all so upset, because we loved him so much. I don't know what his reason was. Anyway, we did go into the war, full force. We were not prepared, exactly, but all of — That's why there was a boom. Every factory was making raw materials. So the times were better. We crawled out of the Depression at that point.

**CK:** *As a result of the war?*

**BE:** Yes.

**CK:** *What was Lester's role? He was the youngest.*

**BE:** Lester was a soldier. And he went into the war when they landed at Normandy. And he was in the Battle of the Bulge. And for years he didn't want to hear about it, wouldn't discuss it. And I once sent him Tom Brokaw's book on the best generation. And he thanked me for the book, but he said he was not reading it, at that time. I think he's read it since. It was a terrible experience. And he was in the Liberation of Paris. And he found a death camp somewhere, I don't know in Paris or in Germany. I don't know where they were. And people were literally tearing at his arms and giving him addresses,

names to write to and tell them these people were alive and they were being liberated. And he did write all those letters. He did.

**CK:** *And when did he tell you about that?*

**BE:** He told me about that when he came home. But he didn't talk about the invasion of Normandy or anything. He lost a lot of good friends. Anyway, his son was teaching — Scott was giving a course at a medical school in Dublin, and he called his father and said, "Before I come back to the States, Dad, why don't you take a week and come over here, and we'll do Normandy again." He says, "I can't do that." And Lester called me and told me. I said, "Lester, if that were my son, I would walk the ocean, but I would fulfill his wish. What do you mean you can't do it? You have to do it." So he called me an hour later and he said, "I'm going." He said he cried a lot on the trip — a lot. But he said it was one of the best experiences of his life, to do that with his son. And his son is a doctor, and he watched over him very carefully. And he still talks about that week. He just had such a wonderful, wonderful experience.

**CK:** *How was your mother reacting to having sons in the war?*

**BE:** My mother prayed every night. And I used to hear her. And I would say, "Ma, don't do that." She prayed every night. She'd walk the floors, and I would hear her. And I'd hear her plead with God, "Take me. I've lived my life. Save my sons." Every night I heard it. And I said, "Ma, don't do it. We need the boys, and we need you. Don't pray." She did it every night. They were on her mind from the minute she got up until the minute she went to bed. I went with her when they were drafting Lester out of college, to the Army Board in the city. And my mother was in tears and said, "Please, I don't know what's going to happen to my three boys. I don't dare think. But let me have the fourth. Don't take him." And they said, "We have to take him." And they did. Yep. It was a horrible time for her. But she did live to see them all come back. And we were all together. All the boys were home after a certain point. And we all went to temple together. And my mother was so thankful. And she kept saying, "Oh, if Pa could just see all the men you girls married." She liked every one of them.

**CK:** *How did your siblings meet their spouses?*

**BE:** Lester went back to Bangor. He went to the University of Maine. And he met Honey in Bangor. I think she was a social worker. I'm not sure. And that's where he met her. He dated her for years. We used to say "Lester, either, or. It's killing this girl. Either, or." Finally they got married. It was on Valentine's Day, I think. And Jay was sick. He's sixty-one now, so he was in his teens. They were married, I think,

forty-five years. And we had a registered nurse up the street, and I spoke to her, and I said, "It's my youngest brother. I've got to be there." And she came in and stayed with him. We went up to Bangor in the worst snowstorm. We couldn't see where we were. We followed plows all the way until we got there. And they were married, and it was a nice little reception. Everything was lovely. Lester went back after the war at the University of Maine, and he became very involved with his friends from the University. To this day. And that's how he met her. Charlotte met Irving at Old Orchard Beach. That was a mecca for all marriages.

**CK:** *And Annetta?*

**BE:** Annetta met Dan — He came from Portland. But I think he met her at Old Orchard Beach. George met Anne at Old Orchard Beach, I think. Sam never got married. Sam had a relationship with a lovely, lovely woman. And he would have — She wasn't Jewish. And I think he was afraid, if he married her, it would set an example for the rest of the kids and — Who knows? But he never married her. And she died before he did. She had breast cancer and died. A couple of years before he died. And he never bothered with anybody after that. Bernard married Evelyn. He met her at Old Orchard Beach.

**CK:** *So Old Orchard Beach is the big story.*

**BE:** Oh, you have no idea. Everybody tried to get married to someone Canadian. They all had money. To come down for the summer, you know.

**CK:** *Have you kept in touch with people in Biddeford?*

**BE:** There's nobody left. I lost my last friend there last year.

**CK:** *But did you keep in touch with your friends from Biddeford?*

**BE:** Oh, yes. Betty Simensky and Tina. Tina met her husband at the beach. Yes, I did. But they're gone. There was a man, his name is Conrad. He was very good to my brother. My brother was having visual problems. He was driving him. He was very good to him. And I called Conrad, and I said, "Conrad, do you know the people to whom the house was sold?" My brother had a beautiful house. And he said, "I haven't met them yet, Bea." I said, "You know, I think I'd like to come down and just see if they're keeping up the grounds and everything." It was around Christmas last year. And he said, "I don't think you should come down." And I said, "Why not?" "Not this week, anyway." I said, "Why?" "Well, you know that beautiful bay window that Sam had?" And I said, "Yes." "Well, there's a huge Christmas tree, decorated. I'm not sure you want to see that." And I said, "Thank you, Conrad. I'll go another time."

CK: *Looking back, we've talked about your childhood, going to school, and you're your life overall. Who, outside of your home, do you think has influenced you in your life?*

BE: Mr. Cowan, my old principal. He taught me to read. He started me with children's books. And then, even as I got older, I was still reading, but by that time I was reading serious books, and he made me come in and give him a book report. He was very stern. But I really liked him a lot.

CK: *So how do you feel that that's influenced your life?*

BE: Oh, very much, because I loved to read all my life. And I think he set the seeds in me, my desire to read. I remember when I got married. And Sam, of course, was in the service, and he'd call me, and he said, "Does he read a lot?" I never forgot that he said that. I said, "Yes. He's a very, very bright young man." I think he influenced me a great deal. And I had that wonderful music teacher in the public schools, who certainly fostered my love for music. And I thought it was interesting, when Jay started at Berkeley he took a course in the history of American jazz and rhythm and blues. And then he went on to more. That's how he started. I said, "Well, Jay, good." I love music. I love all kinds of music. We went to symphony all the time. I think that teacher influenced me a great deal. And when I went to Pops the first time, when I was a student at BU — And for seventy-five cents you could go all the way up. And when they played the encores, I knew every one, every one. And they held up signs, but who could see them? So I would say to everybody, "That's such and such." And they'd say, "God. How do you know?" And I said, "Well, I had it in school." And when I went back, and I hadn't seen that teacher for many years, from grammar school on — she didn't teach in high school — I went to see her. And I said, "Miss Crowley, I think you ought to know that I go to the Pops, and I know every one of the pieces, three bars — ." See, she would play three or four bars. "Tell us the name, the composer, the number of the concerto." Anything. I could recognize them, quickly. And I thanked her. She was beside herself. She was so happy. And I wished Mr. Cowan lived when I became an adult, so I could have gone back and seen him. But he died at that — I had never had a chance to go back. I think that he started me on the right road.

CK: *I want to ask you if there's anything that I have forgotten to ask you.*

BE: No. I thought of my brother Sam and his philanthropies last night, and I said, "I should not omit that." I don't know what else you could ask me, to tell you the truth.

**CK:** *Is there anything that you would like to add?*

**BE:** I feel I'm very fortunate to have had such a wonderful family of siblings and to see their children and mine, who are so philanthropic. Each one has won an award or something for something kind they've done. My nephew Steve Kornetsky was just named "Man of the Year" with the Jewish Federation in San Francisco. My nephew Scott goes all around South America setting up wonderful clinics for children, because he's a pediatrician. He's done wonderful work with them. Right down the line. Now Andrew. I know I'm omitting somebody. I know Jay's done wonderful things and so has Steven and so has Scott. Cynthia tutors, but she gets money for it. It's with the greatest of pleasure, when we're at a family gathering, and I look at all of them, they're my great-nephews now and great-nieces. They've gone beyond being my nieces and nephews. Each of whom I love very, very much. And I'm just really proud of them. I don't know whether it's genetic, but I think that all the good things we were taught by our parents — And not because they were so sophisticated. They had these wonderful ambitions for their children, by instinct. They just knew that that's what they had to teach us. They taught us to be charitable. We saw these meshulachim come. My mother never knew them. They'd ring the door. You could tell. They all wore big hats, and the peyos, and you knew who they were. And my father was very generous. My mother was very — As generous as they could be. And I just feel I've had a good life. I married a remarkable man, absolutely remarkable. And he was brilliant, he was kind, he never touched Jay. He knew exactly what to say to him to straighten him out when he was getting a little frisky. And I know Jay reveres him too. He's been gone twenty-two years. And he reveres him. He loved my brother Sam. There's a lot of love in the family. And I think it's a great gift, and it was given to me. And it's extended now to what I call the kids in the family. I'm so proud of them. Everyone's a college graduate. Everyone's productive. They're wonderful. I don't know what else to say. They're wonderful. My niece just came back from Iraq. And she was with us for Thanksgiving. And I think everyone at that table gave thanks that she was back. She's a wonderful young lady. Her brother, who lives in Florida, is a wonderful young man. He saw on television, a few weeks ago, that we had some bad storms. He called me. I was so touched that he did it. "I just was watching TV, Aunt Bea. Are you OK?" And I said, "I'm fine." He's my sister Charlotte's grandson.

**CK:** *And your niece who was in Iraq?*

BE: Is Gabriella, his sister.

CK: *Bea, if you were able to give some advice for the next generation or for your family, what is it that you would like to say to them, from your perspective?*

BE: Well, I don't know, but I have a lot to say to them. I think they've been genetically blessed. Look at them. All in California. They have their own privacy, but they're together for every important occasion. And I just hope they continue and give those same values to their kids. That's what I hope for the future. So genetically the family will be sound all the way. My father died young, my mother died young, but they held very firmly to their beliefs and what they wanted to instill in their kids. And they did it. They did it. No question about it. Under adverse circumstances. But they did it.

CK: *Do you have any regrets in your life?*

BE: Well, I regretted that circumstances did not allow me to go back to school. I regret that. But I've studied a lot. I've read a lot. Unfortunately I can't read any more, but I still love — And I watch every political program. I love PBS. I wish I could have gotten a degree. But I didn't. And I don't dwell on it. I don't dwell on it. And I feel that, without sounding egotistical, I feel I've held my own. So.

CK: *I'm  
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what you've  
with them.  
quite a gift  
you to them  
honor for  
want to hear*

**BE:** Oh, they want to badly.

**CK:** *So thank you, very much.*