

HD=Hannah Dhonau

JM-S=Julie Miller-Soros

JM-S: I feel bad for you guys having to record and transcribe...[laughter] time consuming.

HD: Alright, this is Hannah Dhonau recording an interview via phone [on January 10, 2011] with Julie Miller-Soros for "Topics in Maine's Jewish History." Julie, do I have your permission to record this interview?

JM-S: Yes.

HD: Perfect. Could you start out by just telling me a little bit about your family?

JM-S: My family meaning my family from Waterville, right?

HD: Yes.

JM-S: Okay, I was like "You want to know about my family down here, today? No"[laughter]. I was born and raised in Waterville, Maine. My dad was from Massachusetts and Maine. His parents, his mother, father, grandparents, all of them were from Waterville, Maine. My mother came later. But, I don't really know what you want to know about them.

HD: I know your mother came from Algeria...

JM-S: Right, my mother came from North Africa. She met my dad during World War Two when he was stationed there. Are we focusing on my mother, or?

HD: Yes, mainly.

JM-S: Okay.

HD: If you could talk about maybe the relationship between you and your mother.

JM-S: Mother-daughter relationships are complicated. My relationship with my mother as a young child? [HD: Yes.] Growing up, I looked up to her and idolized her and felt like she just did so much for the community and home. She was the matriarch; she took care of everything for us. And then in the teenage years, I'm sure I hated her as every teenager does. That probably continued through college, but in my older years we became very, very close.

HD: How did your relationship with your sisters change as you grew up? You're the youngest of three, correct?

JM-S: I'm the youngest of three, yes. My oldest sister is ten years older than I am and then the other one is five years older. I grew up as their pain. I was a real pain in the butt for both of them, I'm sure, because I wanted to do everything they did and follow them around. My oldest sister left the house when I was eight years old. All I knew was that I had a sister

that went away to college. My other sister moved into her [Sara's] bedroom. Once a week on Sunday we talked to my older sister, who I really didn't know. It was usually money conversations. Just "Hi. How are you?" and that's it. I didn't become close to my older sister until I was in college, and I went to school maybe a half hour from where she lived. I spent time with her and her husband, and her children, my niece and nephews. My other sister was five years older than I am, and I literally nagged and nagged at her. She had her driver's license. She could go places. She could do stuff. I was always nagging her and her friends to take me with them and looking for excuses to get her in trouble so she would have to take me with her. I basically wanted to be a little bit older and be able to do what she was doing. I'm sure I was a pain for her, but I just adored her all the time. Then she went off to college much earlier.

HD: What is your favorite memory from your childhood with your older sister?

JM-S: With the older or the oldest?

HD: Wendy is the middle, correct?

JM-S: Yes, Wendy is the middle, yes: Sara and Wendy. My favorite memories with her... Probably when we were winter skiing; I used to love going skiing with her. That was always fun, going up to Sugarloaf and skiing and competing with her. We were both very good skiers, and fast. Those were really good memories. And working in the store with her, causing trouble. [HD: In the Levine family store?] The Levine family store, we all worked there at different times: after school, weekends, and summers. When we wanted to buy something and couldn't afford it, we would go to work for a few days; it was very convenient, having a family business.

HD: What was the relationship like with your extended family and having them so close?
[5:11]

JM-S: I didn't know it at the time, growing up. I just took it for granted that it was so great to have a grandmother, great-uncles, other aunts, uncles, and cousins and everybody nearby. I didn't know that we had anything special or different; I just thought that's how it was for all families growing up. So I don't think I really appreciated it. I just took it for granted that that was life. Once I was older, and especially raising my own family, realizing, "Wow, I don't have any of that support system or anything like that." It just put it all in another perspective. When I went away to college and made friends with other people who didn't have a family like I grew up with, it kind of blew me away. I was very naïve and surprised that that wasn't the reality for most people. Now, as an adult looking back, I feel really fortunate that was very, very lucky: to have my grandmother, uncles, and everybody right there. And by the way, if we get disconnected (all my phones in this house are cordless), just call me back [HD: okay] It just means the battery is dead, and I'll grab a different phone. I figured I would tell you that.

HD: What do you think stands out about having all that family around you?

JM-S: Just a lot of love and support. No matter what I did growing up--even when I made mistakes, even when I got in a car accident—it didn't matter what I did, I didn't do anything

wrong in any of their eyes. It was all really positive. Even when I did disgusting, terrible things, I was still Howard and Gisele's third daughter who was just wonderful. "Everybody makes mistakes; everybody does whatever. Don't worry about it; she's fine." I was always just treated so special.

HD: Treated special from your family, or?

JM-S: No, treated special no matter what I did. Nothing was terrible. Nothing was worth anybody being angry at me for. If my own kids had done some of the things that I did growing up, I would be furious and upset with them! Nobody was ever upset with me. Everything was like, "Hey, that's not life and death. It's not a big deal: it's okay." I mean, write down my first round of going away to college I didn't want to go. I wanted a year off very, very badly. I did not want to go to college right away. I needed space, time, work, whatever. My family, of course, wanted me to go to college and didn't think I would ever go if I took a year off. They kind of pushed me, forced me—my family being my immediate family. Once I got there and I was miserable, and I hated it, I quit. I drove home. The last day that I could quit without having it on a record, I left and drove back home. My uncle, Ludy, at the store just was like, "She didn't like it. She wasn't happy. She'll go back when she's ready, just leave her alone." It never phased him; it was just not a big deal. There was no anger, there was nothing. So it was nice having extended family. They prioritized differently than mothers and dads do. But even then I didn't realize how lucky I was.

HD: How do you think having the extended Levine family in place already affected your mother's transition into life in Waterville? [9:21]

JM-S: Oh God, it must have been hell for her. [laughs] I can't even imagine coming into a family like my mother had to do. My mother grew up in North Africa with a very very close family on that side—on her side of the family—her mother and father, extended cousins. She had a large family also, so she was used to the cliquiness I guess, of a close family, and of doing things together, holidays and whatever, as all families do. For her to come into my father's family—she wanted to be a part of it all, but it was really difficult in those beginning years. Not because anyone was mean to her, or didn't trust her, it was just hard. She lived in my great-grandfather's house, with my grandmother, my uncles, my great-uncles, my great-aunts, they were all there. I can't imagine being a new bride—she also came with a new child. I think my sister Sara was nine months or a year; she was young. I can't imagine coming into that. My mother was a Sephardic Jew, and my father's family was all Ashkenazi. My great-grandfather believed my mother was Jewish, but he didn't believe she was Jewish. Her traditions were the same holidays—she knew everything—but he didn't understand that all the food was different. Everything revolved around all the holiday food. Hers was different because in the Mediterranean you don't get these heavy foods that Russian and Polish Jews eat, or what we had in Maine. I think that it was hard for her to realize that my father's family, who he was so close to, was questioning her all the time, quizzing her and checking to see if she was really Jewish. Plus, he was meeting with the rabbi, asking questions about Jews from the Mediterranean [laughs]. I think that must have been really hard for her, on that level, just with the immediate family type hard. But as far as in the community, I think by marrying a Levine, one of the founders of the synagogue and stuff there—just by marrying a Levine, probably made it easier and gave her respect in

the Jewish community that may have taken years to gain. And she didn't have to because she just followed in my grandmother's footsteps, continuing the clubs and whatever they did.

HD: What sort of clubs was your mother involved in?

JM-S: B'nai B'rith, Hadassah, all the cooking stuff at the synagogue. She had a B'nai B'rith ad book—she was very big on raising money for the synagogue and for other things. Plus, she was huge on making the synagogue fun for kids: the Hanukah parties and all that kind of stuff. My mother was also really, really involved in stopping, or helping to prevent some anti-Semitism in the state of Maine. The state of Maine was very different when I was growing up, and it is from what you guys have seen today. When my mother was there, the coastal towns of Maine did not allow Jews. She worked with the Anti-Defamation League, is that the right word? [HD: Yes.] Yeah, she worked with them. I was really young, so I don't remember a lot; I just remember the stories. She worked very hard with them to make changes. I do know that as a little girl when we went to Bar Harbor, or Kennebunkport, or Camden—Camden was a little better, actually—but Booth Bay Harbor and Bar Harbor especially I do remember. There were signs, this is really disgusting and I'm sorry that we're on tape, but there were signs that said, "No Dogs, No N**ers, No Jews Allowed!" My mother went around to get rid of that. She worked with legislatures, with governors, all kinds of people to change that in the state of Maine. I didn't know how much she worked, or even what it meant as a little kid. I almost didn't believe it. First of all, I grew up, and I had never seen a black person, except maybe there was one black student at Colby. I didn't grow up with prejudice. Knowing that my mother was working to get rid of prejudice, I didn't really understand it. I do also remember, my senior year of high school—in fact it may have been my junior year of high school—that summer, many of my non-Jewish friends were going to get summer jobs in Bar Harbor. It had changed by then, I thought—the signs weren't there, at least. My blond, blue-eyed friends that would fit in beautifully in Wilton, Connecticut, [laughs] were going to get jobs in Bar Harbor. Whether they were chamber maids, waitresses, whatever, they wanted to be at the coast for the summer. I remember telling my mother, though, "I'm going with Robyn. We're going to Bar Harbor, and we're going to find a place to live. We're going to get a waitress job, or a bus-girl job, or whatever for the summer. It'll be really fun!" And she looked at me and said—and I'll never forget this because I thought she was nuts—she looked at me and said, "Robyn will get a job; Nancy will get a job; Sherry will get a job; you will not get a job." I was like, "What are you talking about?" And she goes, "They won't ask you if you're Jewish, but you will not get a job." And I thought, "She's crazy. That doesn't happen." She was one hundred percent right. All three of my friends got jobs, and I did not. I'm happy to say that she did make changes for that. But then that was the first time I felt it like, "whoa." I never knew that.

HD: How did your mother's community involvement and the fact that she was working really heavily on the legislation in coastal towns affect either how she was received in the Jewish community or how she was viewed? [16:47]

JM-S: I think she was very well appreciated. I think she was viewed as somebody that you didn't mess with. That she was going to take larger issues on than just what needed to be done at Beth Israel Synagogue in Waterville. Yes, she was going to do that. Yes, she was

Comment [DF1]: note: in the interview itself, Julie omitted "No Dogs"; she corrected herself in a follow-up email.

going to raise money. When she was going to any of these conferences, or any of these events out of state or out of the area, meeting with the governor, you just didn't mess with her. She was very kind, and sweet and very respectful, but you didn't want to cross her and you didn't want to mess with her.

HD: Could you give an example of maybe of one of those times where you observed that kind of reaction to your mother?

JM-S: I was too little, so I'm going on stories. I wish I could, I wish you could call my other sisters because they probably could. Well, there are things at the house that probably aren't even there anymore: her pictures, shaking hands with the governor, I don't even know their name (the one before Curtis, I forget who that was). Things that I've seen, heard and read of people appearing to look like they have a lot of respect for her.

HD: Going back to—

JM-S: And you know I'll think of some specific example three days from now, but that's life.

HD: And that's perfectly alright. Going to back to, briefly, your talk about how you came home from college and your uncle Ludy's reaction to that. You said that your family really wanted you to go to college [JM-S: Oh yes]. Was that something you felt your whole life, or?

JM-S: Oh yes! Education was extremely important. Extremely important. That's probably part of why I didn't want to go right away, because education was so important. Both of my sisters were really bright. My sister Wendy was valedictorian of her class. My sister Sara, when it came to academics, she's quick as a whip. They both still are; they are really quick. I process differently than both of them. I probably had learning disabilities before we knew what learning disabilities were. I never felt like I was as smart as they were, or like I could keep up with them. I was very insecure. I grew up in a small town where I had the same teachers they had, so everybody compared me to them. I had one teacher who my father had in high school. It was like, "oh my God, this is crazy." And, I lost track, except that I think because of my insecurities—I always knew that I was going to school: that there would be some school for me and that I would go to school to do something. I was clueless and just not ready, very immature and just not ready.

HD: How did that experience shape your own mothering, as you have children, correct?

JM-S: Yes, I have one son and two older stepchildren. One son, who is 26 now. What it shaped for me is that school is very important for me for him too, for different reasons. More, I felt like if he was busy with school, if he was doing well, if he went to a top college, if he did all the "right path" crap, that he wouldn't hang out with kids that were just drinking and doing drugs and getting into trouble. I mean, we're in California, we're in surf city here, where all that's important to most of the kids he went to school with is "where is the next party?" and "who has the best weed?"[laughs] This is Santa Cruz, California, a little different. So school was very important for me for him. I wanted him to push himself, so I probably pushed him too hard. He knew growing up he wasn't going to college on the West Coast. He always knew. He was pretty bi-coastal because we spend summers in Maine, many vacations on the East. He always knew he was going to an East Coast school. He also

always knew if he screwed up that he would be going to prep school back east instead of being lucky enough to go to a prep school out here where he wouldn't have to live there. I think I was worse than my parents, but it was more out of fear of what our environment was around us. It was more out of not having all the support systems that I grew up with. I had no family out here, nobody to help if something had happened, and I needed to go away, or whatever was going on. I couldn't send him to his grandmother's house for a week where he could still walk to school. The importance of education, growing up hearing about important that was, I wanted that for him. I probably over-pushed him, but in over-pushing education, what was really important to me was just exposure to everything, which is why he knew he wasn't going to school on the West—he was going on the East of the Midwest, most likely the East. He traveled a LOT from the time he was like 15 years old. He traveled with his dad and I first. Then, he did the NFTY trip to Israel when he was 15. He went to Prague; he went all over Europe, snowboarding in Austria. The kid has seen and traveled the world and volunteered in different places, because it's also important to give back. He is still doing it. Those pieces were important to me. [23:48]

HD: You just touched on your son's volunteering, was that a part of your growing up and your life experiences as well?

JM-S: From my mother, probably yes. From my father, my father believed, "Yes, you should give back to the community, and yes all those things are nice. But, gosh, all this volunteering and not getting paid? You should get paid for your worth." From my mother, because of all the committees and the activities she did along what my grandmother did, volunteering was important. That definitely struck a strong thing in me. That definitely got passed on to my son.

HD: Could you just talk about the relationship between your mother and grandmother?

JM-S: They had probably the best mother-in-law relationship that I've ever seen to this day. My mother was a daughter to my grandmother, not a daughter-in-law; she was another daughter. I'm sure my mother, at different times, felt like her sister-in-law was better or whatever in my grandmother's eyes. You never would have known it or felt it. My mother would have done anything for my grandmother, anything. It wasn't out of a requirement, or feeling an obligation; there was none of that. My mother adored my grandmother, and it came back: my grandmother adored my mother. They were very, very lucky. I truly have never seen that happen in any other relationship. [25:48]

HD: Do you think that your mother's coming from Northern Africa to Maine, do you think that affected how you viewed moving far away as well?

JM-S: Oh, definitely, definitely. I think that for me to have been able to move this far away and to stay all these years. I definitely knew that my family would have preferred me to be on the East Coast. When my sister Sara went away to college, she couldn't apply past Boston. Wendy, I think she could have applied, but no further south than Philadelphia. They just wanted me to go to school; it didn't matter where I went. When I moved to California, sure that was really far, but it was just a plane ride away. It was nothing like when my mother came from North Africa to Maine, and it took days upon days, weeks if she wanted

to go home. They couldn't afford to send her home anyway. But for me I knew: it was only a plane ride. I could always save and save and be able to afford it or ask for help. I'm sure it made a difference, knowing that. It would have been easier to have not been so far away, but that times are different, and it was fine. I think even from the story of mother and father marrying, and my mother coming so far—North Africa to Maine—that has affected my son. Yes, we've groomed him to be a free spirit and travel and do that stuff. His current girlfriend is from Russia right now. The plan is not for her to move to [the US]; their plan is for him to try living in Russia. I hate the idea. I think it's horrible for me, but I totally understand it. For his girlfriend, I don't blame her. If they end up staying together and raising children, she wants to raise her children near her family, and I don't blame her. Again, I have to self-talk to myself. It's hard enough to find love anywhere, so if it's far away, that's life. I think that he feels that it's okay because he compares his relationship to his Nanny and Poppy's, my mother and father. He told the story to my sisters, to me, to cousins, everybody, and he makes it sound like, "You don't understand. It's like Nanny and Poppy; we can't help it. But instead of her having to come here, I can go there. I can do it." We'll see.

HD: I had a chance to read some of your family's letters, of your father describing your mother and your mother's letters to your grandmother as well. [JM-S: Right.] How do you think your father marrying someone from so far away was viewed in the community?

JM-S: Oh, I think it was probably viewed in two ways. One, how awful, why couldn't he have married a girl from Boston, and brought her up to Maine? Why do you have to go so far? That would be one view. The flip side view would have been, how exotic and how lucky he is. Everybody thought my mother was beautiful. It was viewed both ways. In the beginning I think it was viewed as both ways too. I think it changed into just being this great thing that happened. In later years, as they stayed together.

HD: Were there any other women from as far away as your mother, or any other war-brides in the community that you know of? [30:30]

JM-S: There were other war brides as far as I know, but no one from that far. I think Sam Pachowsky's wife, Minna Pachowsky may have been a war bride, I'm not sure. I don't know where Gordon Wolman met Myrt Wolman, but I think she was from Cincinnati or the Midwest. I'm not positive. Let me think, Marion Hains married Ben Hains, but no, she was from Boston—that was not a war bride. I don't really know; I just assume there must have been. Oh, Burt Shiro and Phyllis Shiro, I don't know where they met; they're still around to ask. The person that would really know the answer to that would be Myrt Wolman or Phyllis Shiro, [HD: Okay] they're both in Waterville. Somebody must be interviewing them, or they already have.

HD: You touched a little bit on your mother's beauty and how she was viewed exotic. [JM-S: Exotic, yeah] Did that affect how she was received in the community?

JM-S: I don't know. It may have. I mean, everyone talked about her accent that never went away, so I don't know.

HD: I read that she—

JM-S: Her French accent.

HD: Because she spoke Parisian French, correct?

JM-S: Parisian French, yes. It was Parisian French. I never understood how different that is from Canadian French, but it's the same language, but a totally different language. Her accent was completely different than the French-Canadian accent. I'm sure that was viewed in a different way; I'm not sure how, but I'm sure it was a little different. I know my French teachers in school were all French-Canadian and the accent wasn't even close to my mother's. They used to tell me to go get help from her, that she knew more, just used to piss me off. To this day, I can't speak French. I can understand it, but I can't speak it.

HD: Earlier you spoke about not only your mother's community involvement, but also with the Hanukkah celebrations. I know she was part of what's referred to the "Latke Brigade," could you speak on that a little bit?

JM-S: Sure. The synagogue has a kitchen downstairs that is known to be "Gisele's kitchen." My mother has been gone for many years now, and they still refer to it as Gisele's kitchen. Even this group of newer members that didn't know my mother, know of Gisele's kitchen. Back when I was growing up, you could not bring food into the synagogue [34:03]It was a kosher kitchen—I'm not sure if it still is or not. Unless we cooked food at Judy Brody's house, that house had a kosher kitchen, or basically it had to be done in the synagogue. There was no way that my mother would have let anybody make a mistake or slip or use Passover dishes for the Hanukkah party or anything that I wouldn't think about. It just wouldn't be as big a deal to me, "Okay, run it through the dishwasher." Absolutely not, that's not Jewish law, and this is very important. It was Gisele's kitchen, and she ran the making of the potato pancakes. Even when food processors were invented and came in, no, no no, that was not right. They had to be hand-grated; she didn't care if 20 women were in there grating (you couldn't get 20 women). But if ten women were in there grating, they were grating by hand. "Don't bring a food processor!" The temple didn't need one, the old ways. And she stuck to it, and people were afraid of her. I mean I've heard stories from other women in the community of when they came to help that "Oh no no, we just did it the way Gisele said." One story from somebody—I can't remember who told us—that her first year when she went to help, she thought she was helping and was going to make things, but my mother didn't quite trust her. So she just sent her, "Oh, we need more eggs." So she would run and go buy more eggs. "Oh, we need this, we need that..." She realized that she was just running errands for my mother while my mother was doing it. It was just her thing and she was very, very controlling and it had to be what she considered the "right way." It was a great Hanukkah party, and there were more potato pancakes than anyone would want to make or see today. It seemed to work for them. They all seemed to figure out, at least her generation of them, how to make it work and how to get along. As the newer generations came in, I'm sure they would have appreciated it, as I would in my own community here, to have been allowed to make little changes and to go with the flow a little. I think that's just the old transitioning to the new and how hard that must be. I don't know. When I hear stories from the younger people up there now, we're all laughing about it. They're not like, "Oh my God, your mother was so difficult. It was terrible!" It's more,

"And then she made me do x, y, z." It's more in jest and what a good time they had in the kitchen...Did I answer that? [37:11]

HD: Perfectly.

JM-S: Oh yeah, right. [laughs]

HD: How did that come about, that you mother coming from such a different culture, although the same religion, suddenly came to be the authority on Hanukkah food?

JM-S: Yeah , right. Probably because other people didn't want to do the work, would be my guess. Who knows. I think she followed in my grandmother's footsteps. My grandmother had a lot of the authority for the synagogue, especially with B'nai B'rith. I think because my mother followed with my grandmother was putting her on all these clubs. Once you were a temple member and a woman who wasn't at work everyday. A temple member meant you helped everything that the synagogue needed. The same women were on B'nai B'rith as Hadassah, as sisterhood, as every club that you can imagine. It was the same 20 families, or 20 women. They just rotated positions. "Okay, you're president of B'nai B'rith this year. Okay, now you're treasurer. Oh, you did B'nai B'rith this year? You've got it for Hadassah." They just rotated. So I think what happened is that my mother was a very good cook, she liked cooking. It was also important to her that all the holidays were done so the kids would have fun. She wanted to hook all of us into staying Jewish, which is not easy when there were maybe 50 Jewish families in Waterville. I didn't date anybody Jewish until much later in life. There is no way I would have dated any of the Jewish boys I went to Hebrew school with; they were like brothers to me. I think that's how it became her, just that she was willing to do it. She was a good cook. She made it fun for kids, so people just went with it. I know friends of mine, their mothers weren't in there doing this stuff, nor did they want to. That's my guess. The ad book, I don't know why she did that. She knew that they needed to raise money for whatever events they wanted to do.

HD: Was staying Jewish a really important part of how you were raised?

JM-S: Yes. Yes, with my family, oh yeah. They wanted us all marrying Jewish men and continuing the religion. "What will happen if you don't? How will we continue? Judaism will die. It will be gone! You have to marry Jewish; you have to stay within this." And I used to laugh and think, "Are you all crazy? It's hard enough to find love. It's hard enough to meet someone you care about. There's no guarantees. Why is that so important? You can raise kids with two religions, three religions, what's the big deal here?" It was very, very important with my grandmother, my great-uncles, with my aunts, with my parents: extremely important. Now for me, as the next generation down, as much as it would be wonderful for Josh to marry someone Jewish, and continue, I can't say that. It's more important to me that he be happy, be treated well, marry somebody smart who adores him. If he's fortunate enough to find that in a Jewish woman, great. If not, that is great too. Took me a long time to get there, but I'm there. That just has to be more important. I don't know what will happen to future generations, or what will happen to the religion. I don't know. There is so much divorce in this country, that it's so hard for people to just be together, to put stipulations, to put rules, doesn't seem right or fair. With all the intermarrying that

happened in previous generations, of cousins marrying cousins, maybe that's why there is so much mental illness in this country. I don't know. I don't know, but maybe it would be good to mix it up a bit. I do care. I don't want Judaism to be gone, but I'm not as controlling as I thought I was.

HD: Was it communicated as being that important to a lot of your Jewish friends?

JM-S: All of them. To the point where I think I had Jewish friends, who may or may not still be in Waterville, who never married. And that may or may not be partially why—that I won't mention names. Even my great-uncles, Pacy and Ludy, never married, and I think a lot of that was if they had married, they had to marry Jewish. They wouldn't have thought of marrying someone who wasn't Jewish. They could have dated, but no way would they have married. I think it was very important. It must sound very old fashioned to you. Are you Jewish?

HD: No, I'm not.

JM-S: Okay. And in your family, if you were raised with any religion: Catholic or Protestant. Would your family care?

HD: No, I don't think that they would.

JM-S: You don't think they would? I think that's just differences of this many years going by [HD: Yeah]. Because I know even my Catholic and Protestant friends growing up, they may have dated anybody. When it came time for marriage, they were pretty much marrying Catholic or Protestant. [44:07]

HD: You mentioned that it was that way for your non-Jewish friends—

JM-S: Yes, my non-Jewish friends. I mean, we were all friends. We all got along; we all dated. We hung out. We went to the same parties. But when it came to people getting serious... Catholic families were just as concerned that they didn't want their Catholic son or daughter marrying a Jewish, or even a Protestant person. They wanted them to stay in the same religion. [44:42] That used to surprise me because I didn't realize there was a difference between. To me, Christian was Christian, it didn't seem different to me for someone to be Protestant or Catholic. I didn't really understand that those were two different religions. Growing up for me, you were either Jewish, or something else. The something else all blended together. Weird to imagine, isn't it? Where are you from?

HD: I'm from Wisconsin.

JM-S: Okay.

HD: Could you speak a little bit about your childhood, specifically in elementary school?

JM-S: I hated elementary school. I went to Brook St. School. I could walk there; we had little crossing guards with badges. Brownies, Girl Scouts, horrible teachers. Oh God, I hated elementary school. I was lucky I got there walking. What would you like to hear about it? Do you want something positive? My fifth grade teacher was fabulous [laughter]. Mrs.

Covell, that's all I can you. The rest of my teachers were horrible. I was shy, and not the fastest learner. Those were miserable years; I couldn't get out of there fast enough.

HD: Maybe, later in your school career?

JM-S: High school was great: one party after another. I loved high school. Actually, I didn't, in the beginning I hated it. I was at a private school, Coburn, and I didn't want to be there. My later high school years, which is all I remember, is having fun with friends; that is what school was to me. School was not about learning or enjoying a biology class. That was for somebody else, I don't know who. School for me was socialization and just having fun with my friends, laughing. That's probably why I didn't do so well.

HD: As there are always cliques in high school, what was the pecking order, or your observations of those cliques at your high school?

JM-S: Hasn't changed. Football and cheerleaders, number one, work your way down to the nerd group—it wasn't computers being the nerd group—it was music and art as the nerdier groups. I was a photographer, so I may have been partial nerd, yet, I was athletic which put me on the other side. I hated football. I don't know. I think it's the same thing. The football athletes and cheerleaders are at the top of the list, then you just work your way down: soccer and hockey. Hockey was a big deal in Maine, so I guess hockey was up there with football. I don't know. I spent winters on a ski team, and spring on cross country/track, and partying and laughing with friends. The pecking order wasn't like rich and poor, it was sports or not sports.

HD: Could you tell me a little bit more about your experiences skiing and how you got involved in that? Was that a family thing, or just you personally?

JM-S: I think I was probably about five years old when my father took up skiing. Most likely, my older sister Wendy probably wanted to ski—she was about ten—and that's my guess. Sara was never athletic in any way. She probably went skiing once in her life and hated it, lucky if she stepped outside walking, much less put skis on. Wendy and I were pretty athletic, and it was hard to keep us busy—or keep us not busy. My dad wanted to spend some time with us, so he skied with us. My mom would come to the mountain and pack the picnic basket and lunch. She would be sitting inside Sugarloaf or Farmington, or wherever we were, waiting for us to come in for lunch. She would be sitting reading or knitting, or talking to people. I don't know how she spent all day in that lodge, but she did. We were out skiing all day. Where Mountain Farm Road is, off of upper Main Street in Waterville, past the Starbucks and all of that, Colby College owned a piece of land that was Colby Ski Slope. It was one little hill, two sides. There was a T-bar lift on one side, and in later years, a rope tow on the other side. That got me out of the house on school nights. Without that, I was home. There was no reason to go out on school nights, unless you had to practice for sports. Colby Ski Mountain was where we practiced for ski team. For me, that was my out, "I can get out of here." Even though the ski mountain closed at nine, that meant six to nine. We would eat dinner as fast as possible, and be up at the ski mountain. I gave ski lessons to kids, I was on ski patrol, I was on ski team, so I was in heaven. It was all winter long. Any and every night of the week I could be out. Weekends it was elsewhere,

Sugarloaf, or a good ski mountain instead of this little hill. My son would have looked at that little hill and thought, "You bothered to go here?" To me, it was, "I'm out of the house!" [51:42]

HD: Did Wendy compete on the ski team as well?

JM-S: No, but girls sports were different. One, she stayed at Coburn where I transferred to Waterville High School where they had more sports. She stayed at Coburn for Girls. She was a cheerleader at Coburn, and she may have been on a softball team. But they didn't have anything; Coburn would not have had a ski team. Anything big deal for girls. And really, girls sports started with Title IX money and legislature, when they decided it wasn't equal with nothing offered for girls. That all started during my high school years, not my sisters'. There was very little sports offered for girls until my years; they didn't really have a chance. Well, I guess gymnastics had been around, but it was really just dance, gymnastics, maybe girls softball, there was very, very little. I guess it was Title IX money that changed it. It was a different world, it really was. A lot changed in the '60s, I know you guys think, "Oh, what are they talking about? How different could it have been?" But it really was different. Men and women were not treated the same, or even close. There was nothing equal or fair, and you didn't know it growing up, until you wanted to do something. "We don't have that for girls" or "Young ladies don't do that!" I can't even imagine. We had dress codes—I didn't know it was a dress code—I couldn't wear pants to school until I was in high school. Girls had to wear skirts. That changed in my high school years. I can't imagine that anyone in your generation could even believe that happened. First of all, it was freezing cold. It was Maine, kind of like Wisconsin. I mean, how thick could tights have been back then? Leggings didn't count. Boy do I sound old. Honest, I'm not that old. [laughs]

HD: You mentioned your mother bringing the picnic basket when you would do skiing. Could you tell me a little more about family food, or the importance of food in the family?

JM-S: We didn't keep kosher, so we could eat anything except pork products. For us, we only ate pork if we went to a Chinese restaurant, or out to breakfast, and we could order bacon. We didn't cook bacon in the house. My dad had pork chops in the army and hated them [55:21] so that was not an item he would have even eaten at a table. My mother didn't grow up with that, so we didn't have that. We ate lobster; we ate crab meat; we ate everything else. Lunches were tuna fish sandwich or whatever. I think that's what's pretty much the same as everyone else. Although, my sister Sara remembers her favorite sandwich being something we didn't have at house: a cucumber and mayonnaise sandwich that she loved at some friend's house. You know, egg salad, chicken, meat, whatever. I don't know, probably food like we eat today. Everything was balanced meals, I guess that's different. TV dinners, or smart ones, whatever those little frozen meals are, we didn't have that in our freezer. I know they existed because I remember wanting a TV dinner and that being like, "Okay, your father works on Friday nights. If you really want it then alright. You can have a TV dinner." It was pretty disgusting, thinking about it now. Basically we ate really well, really well balanced meals: protein, salad, vegetable, starch. More than I enjoyed cooking for my kid. [57:02]

HD: You mentioned your father working on Friday nights, was there ever any sort of special Friday night dinner?

JM-S: No. My father hated fish at the time when we were growing up, so Friday night it's almost as if we were Catholic because my mother made fish every Friday night. My father was happy to be at work until nine. We did not celebrate Shabbat every Friday. At my grandmother's house, maybe that was celebrated more often. During the years that I was in religious school, we did do Shabbat candles at home. My father was always at work; the store was open until nine on Friday nights, that was just the way it was. Anything we did was "the girls."

HD: ...Sorry, just lost my place here...

JM-S: That's okay.

HD: Could you speak a little bit about holiday dinners, or special occasions?

JM-S: I loved every holiday dinner. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur we did at my grandmother's house the first night, second night at my mother's house. It seemed like everybody in town was there. The rabbi ate at our house. We had one or two tables of Colby students who had come to the synagogue and needed a place to go for High Holiday meals, so they were always at our house or my grandmother's. My mother cooked everything forever. It was fun: family, friends, wine as a kid. Holidays were just fun and festive. Yes, we had to do all the religious stuff, and I used to think, "Come on, can't they do these prayers faster? What's the big deal?" Now I know that they were real intergenerational meals that I grew up in, experiencing. Having family nearby plus all these holidays, just having extended family. Now I know that that's the name for it. Growing up, that was just the norm for me, I didn't know any different. I actually didn't know that we had intergenerational meals for holidays or for other meals, throughout my entire life, until my son went to college. A friend of his from college came to visit us at our summer home in Maine. His name is Brett. After dinner Brett was sitting out on the dock going, "I haven't had this much fun since I was a kid and my parents sent me to Boy Scout camp." I was like, "What are you talking about?" He goes, "Well, I've never had a dinner like that!" And I was thinking, what did we make that was so special, what does he mean he's never had a dinner like that? So my sisters and I say, "Well, Brett, what do you mean by that?" He said, "You know, intergenerational!" We looked at him like, what are you talking about? He goes, "Josh's grandfather was there, you guys were here, Josh and I are here..." he named some other friends of Josh's that were over, and the cousins that were in-between. He was right. We probably had people from age 5—infants, there may have been a baby—from baby up to age 85. Two or three different tables of all of because it was summer and we were all getting together. To my sisters and I, we just kind of looked at each other like "Oh my God! He's never been at a dinner table with mixed ages? How can that be?" I didn't know it was special or different. Josh is 26 now, that only happened when he was maybe 20. I didn't know it; that's how long it took for me to know it. I don't know. Holidays were always just fun. To me, I got together with cousins in a different light, or a different way. Holidays, as much as they were fun, all they meant to me was more friends, more cousins, plus Colby boys are going to be there. Maybe they're going to really be attracted to this 16 year old brat. Did I consider myself

that back then? No! It was just, "Oh good, the Colby boys are going to be there." That was the difference for a holiday meal versus just a regular meal, which were still many people and many different ages, just on a small scale. That was Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur; it could be Hanukkah; it could be Passover, any of them. My birthday is on Christmas, so we always have a lot of people. I have some cousins from Massachusetts that it just came out a few years ago that they thought they were coming to celebrate Christmas with us. We didn't have a Christmas tree or presents or anything, but they came for my birthday. Growing up, they were kids, they assumed we were celebrating Christmas in their minds—even though we were singing happy birthday to Julie. Never entered my mind that anybody thought we celebrate Christmas. I thought everybody was always celebrating my birthday [laughs]. Not that I was self-centered. [1:03:52]

HD: The summer home, is that multi-generational, that home, or is it—

JM-S: Oh yeah, my great-grandfather purchased our summer home. He actually bought it because one of his sons, Pacy, Pacy Levine, was sicklier than the other—so sickly that he lived into his nineties—he had stomach issues. Maybe it was stress, allergies, breathing, I don't know. The doctors told him that Pacy should spend some time out in the country, so he bought a summerhouse on a lake ten minutes from Waterville. It was a drive to the country [laughs]. I don't know what the roads were like then, but it's a 12-minute ride from my parents' house in Waterville. The summer camp on Messalonskee Lake, Snow Pond. My great-grandfather bought it, and we're very fortunate that he did. It's my sisters' and mine and my cousins, we own it together. It keeps us all together. My sisters and I and our family all go there in July. My cousins come in August. It's not that we overlap; we make sure that we see each other. They also come up and visit us in July. It's what's made my son know and appreciate, and adore his first cousins. He's had to share a home, a kitchen, share food, with my niece and nephews, and now their wives and children. I think by being fortunate enough to have a family home like that, none of us really own it—because it's all of ours—so it forces people to talk, get along, work issues out. Nobody owns a bedroom; it's getting this room this year who is getting whatever. It's nice. It keeps everybody at least knowing who they are. There's many families that have cousins, but they don't really know, "Whose child is this? Who is that other one?" It's just kind of nice. It can also be a headache. The flip side of it is that it's a lot of work. It would be a lot easier for all of us to go on a Club Med trip together, but I don't think that would happen.

HD: What is your favorite memory from that house?

JM-S: From camp? [HD: Mmhmm] Oh, just waterskiing. Just learning how to water-ski with my sisters and my cousins (my cousin threatening to drown me [laughs]). That's one memory. The other memory would be my mother cooking and teaching me how to make some of the desserts that she used to make. Just everyone being together, I have so many memories there. I have a memory of my son, when he was just two years old maybe, standing in a clothes hamper, with cream cheese all over him. He loved cream cheese and my dad would say, "How much cream cheese do you want?" and he would say, "Too much cream cheese!" My dad would say, "Okay, fine." and give him [Josh] the container. Well, a two year old sticks their hands in the container, puts it all over their face, their clothes. My sister just picked him up and put him in the laundry hamper and said, "That's where he

belongs at this point!" I don't know. If those walls could talk they would have many memories. Just learning how to water-ski with my sister that was always a lot of fun. Oh, and the parties I threw there when I wasn't supposed to because camp was locked up and boarded up for the winter. For me, this meant a getaway house even though there was no heat, no electricity, nothing turned on. It didn't matter. An available party house in the springtime. And yes, I got caught and got in trouble.[1:08:56]

HD: Were you caught by your parents?

JM-S: Oh yeah. When you're a teenager and you decide to have a big party and invite everybody and put signs the whole way from Waterville to our summerhouse that said, "To Julie!" on a Friday night. Friends of mine's parents went shopping downtown and "Oh, Howard, Gisele, are you going out to camp after you close the store to check on the kids?" and "Of course we are!" that was the answer my mother gave, not knowing what they were talking about. "Oh yes, of course we are!" "Oh, I'm glad to know there will be adults out there at the lake." And your parents show up at 9:15, imagine how fast they closed the store that night. They show up to scattering teenagers going "Oh shit, it's her parents!" [laughs] That party got shut down rather fast. There is not much to deny when there are signs that say, "To Julie!" the whole way. Genius child [laughs]. What can I say? I told you I was more into having a good time!

HD: How did discipline work in your household growing up?

JM-S: Oh it was great! Discipline for that was my friends and I had to go back to clean what we had messed the next day or that weekend. My parents taught me the correct way to have a party: with permission. They gave me a party my senior year with all my friends out at camp. I don't know what discipline was. Sure, I was grounded, I was told I couldn't go out, or whatever for different things that happened. As bad as I'm making myself sound, it was mischievous behavior. It wasn't drugs and excessive alcohol. The drinking age was 18 when I grew up, made a big difference. It should be now; it shouldn't be 21. It was just different. It was mischievous, terrible behavior. Yes, we 18-year-olds drank and drove, and we shouldn't have. We learned the hard way, I'm sure. The problems were so much smaller than they are now. Okay, so I was grounded. I didn't make curfew; I was supposed to be home at 11:00pm, and I came in at 11:30pm. So, I couldn't go out the next weekend. Oh well, I couldn't go out the next weekend, or I couldn't use the telephone. Then, thinking back, I'm sure it was a big deal: Oh my God, I'm stuck home all weekend! It wasn't life and death. I felt like when I raised my son, I felt like the problems that could happen, the things I was worrying about were life and death. They weren't just somebody getting into a little trouble. I remember climbing out my bedroom window to go out with friends after curfew. And there was this Mr. Donut, or Dunkin' Donut—I mean there's no place to go at midnight in Waterville, Maine, back when I grew up. There was You Know Who's Pub in my high school years, but I think that closed at 1:00am. Nothing was open except for a Mr. Donut and a Dunkin' Donuts. I remember being in one of those places—I don't remember which it was—and the police officer coming in there (make fun of cops, they always go for donuts). Anyway, I remember him looking at me going, "You're Howard Miller's daughter." And I'm thinking, "Oh shit. If I lie it's just going to be worse." So I go, "Yeah I am." He goes, "Um, I know you're not supposed to be out. I'll give you and your friends a ride home." I went, "Oh

no, no! I'm staying at Nancy's house" She was with me. "I'm not going home. It's okay." He goes, "You might be staying at Nancy's house, but I know you're not supposed to be out now. I'm giving you both a ride home." We got in his car. He didn't know Nancy, so we lied to him and told him her house was a different house than it was. He drops us off, and I remember thinking, "Okay, we got away with this one!" We went in the backdoor in somebody else's house. He left, and then we left. Then Nancy went home, and I went home—it wasn't that far from either of our homes. Okay, end of evening, and I'm thinking, "Okay, we got away with that one; aren't we lucky?" Well the next day, my father comes home, "Hmm, so I heard you were at Mr. Donuts last night." I'm going, "Oh, you did?" Well, of course, it's a small town. If you ran into the cop who knows where, he told him he gave me a ride back to Nancy's house. Of course I was in trouble again, but it wasn't a big deal. Now, if that had happened for my son growing up? If they had curfews in my town, which I'm sure they didn't—if they did have curfews, a cop picked up my son for something. There is no way he would give the kid a ride home and tell him he needs to be home. They arrest you, and make a big deal out of everything. Times are just different. It wouldn't have just been some kid sitting in a donut shop; it would have been who knows what. I don't know. Did I get off-track, probably? [1:15:09]

HD: No-oh. Was that sort of notoriety of the officer knowing you were just a result of a small town, or um?

JM-S: It sucked! It was the result of one, a small town, but two [HD coughs] You still there? [HD: Mmhmm]... Two, because we owned Levine's store, so everyone knew my father. My older sister, Sara, has stories being at the Chez Paris, the "wild club" down on Water Street in town, and it was owned by a friend of Pacy's...I'm forgetting his name now and probably shouldn't. He's probably still alive, too. But anyway. If she were in there [Sara], the owner would literally look at everyone in there and point and go, "Cokes for that table!" They couldn't order a beer, absolutely no way. It sucked. God forbid we drove to Augusta! I didn't realize Augusta was so close; I wasn't allowed to go that far in the car. I didn't know it was ten minutes down the highway—that's where I needed to be going out, where I might not have been known. But no, I think it was because of Levine's store and Pacy and Ludy, and small town, small community. We couldn't get away with anything!

HD: Did your friends kind of sense that as well, that your family kind of had that sort of fame of being that well known?

JM-S: One of my closest friends was Debbie Sterns—that was Sterns' Department Store a block away from Levine's. Nancy Nason's father was a pretty known realtor and investor, and investment guy. My friend Robyn's father was, I think, the head of something at Central Maine Power or whatever. So I think it was all of us; I think maybe it was just small town. Certainly Pacy, Ludy, and Howard were known, but other parents were known too. It just depended which cop or which person was out seeing you, so I don't know. I don't know.

HD: Were most of your close friends growing up—you mentioned Robyn and Nancy—were they Jewish as well, or did it just not matter?

JM-S: No, most of friends were not Jewish. In my younger years, yes: elementary school. Even then, there were maybe three or four Jewish girls who were my age that hung together. So most of my friends were not Jewish.

HD: Is there anything else that you want to add about your mother or your family in general?

JM-S: My mother was lucky. She was lucky that she married into my father's family because they were very accepting. I don't think that she ever felt like she was accepted into another family. I think she always felt like she was that family—if that makes any sense. She didn't have to be accepted; she just was. It was the way it is. Like when I say that my grandmother was a mother to her, and she called her mother. She called her "Mom" or "Mother." She and my father were obviously husband and wife, but it was as if Gisele was the daughter; and Howard could have been the son-in-law, although he was definitely the son. They loved her in the same way. She was just lucky. Out of everybody in our family, my mother and father had an incredibly bond and marriage that you just don't see people having. I wish I could say other families have that, but even growing up, they may not have been divorced or separated, but they didn't have the relationship that my mom and dad had. That's very special. I sure didn't have that. I'm still married to my husband, but I certainly didn't have a marriage like they had. I can't even imagine. I don't know how they did it. So I guess that's it. I'll see you in April when you're presenting!

HD: Yes [JS laughs] [1:20:29]