

Maine's Jewish History

Interview Transcript: Kenneth Jacobson, January 9, 2010

KP: Today is Saturday, January 9th, 2010, and this is Katie Peterson interviewing Kenneth Jacobson from Colby College in Waterville, Maine.

Alright, Mr. Jacobson—can you tell me a little bit about how your family came to Waterville?

KJ: My father came here first from Europe. He came here because his sister had married someone and moved to Waterville and that was almost the only relative in the United States. So my father got here. My mother was born here. But her parents had been immigrants. [0:46]

KP: So she was born in the U.S.

KJ: Yeah. Barely, but yes. In Waterville, actually. [0:57]

KP: Oh, wow. So your father came here? How did he actually get from Russia to Maine? [1:07]

KJ: It's Lithuania now, but in those days it was Russia. Well, he'd gone to Boston first—well first New York and then, you know, the whole Ellis Island thing. Actually the family name was not Jacobson. The family name was Chodikov and like many immigrants, they said, “no one in the United States has a name like that.” And so they said “do you know anybody here?” And he said “yeah, he's got the address of a Mr. Jacobson” who was a relative actually. And so he says “okay, that's your name from now on.” So that's how we became Jacobson. [1:52]

KP: And from Boston he just took a train up to Waterville I'm guessing.

KJ: Well, he lived in New York first and then in Boston, you know, for a short time, and then came up to Waterville because his sister was living in Winslow actually.

KP: Oh, I see. And your sister, it said on the questionnaire, married into the Jolovitzes?

KJ: Yes, the Jolovitzes, that's right. Very good.

KP: We have someone else in the class interviewing Lester. [2:21]

KJ: Lester, sure! He's my cousin. Oak Knoll Drive.

KP: Could you describe maybe any childhood memories you have growing up in Waterville? The community you were in? It says on your questionnaire your father was pretty active with the local community—he was president of the synagogue?

KJ: Yeah, that's right. Growing up in Waterville—as part of the community you mean?

KP: Not necessarily. Just anything you can tell me really. [3:10]

KJ: Well, as part of the community first of all, I used to go to the Rabbi five times a week and I became the world's fastest writer. You know, I learned how to write Yiddish and I learned how to *read* Hebrew. I never knew what any of it meant. And I could do it so fast that you couldn't believe it. And I did his correspondence and everything else and I never knew what I was writing. [laughs] Which is really pretty crazy but I can still do it, actually. And I still don't know what it means. [laughs] [3:54]

Uh, English was spoken at home, but you know, secrets were spoken in Yiddish and so the kids all learned a little bit of Yiddish 'cause we figured out what they were talking about. [laughs]

Anyway, I have three sisters: one older, two younger. Well, let me see—growing up in Waterville. Well, Waterville was, in those days, a very nice, sort of peaceful factory town. It was a very innocent era. There wasn't a lot of crime and there weren't a lot of problems in Waterville that cities have now. Of course it was a little over 18,000 people then, except that everyone was working and there was a paper mill, a shirt factory, there was a plastic factory in Fairfield, and so I mean it was pretty much a growing community. I mean it was fairly thriving in those days. We're talking about when I was growing up though. [5:10]

KP: You were born in 1930?

KJ: That's right. So we're talking about the Forties and of course during the war and into the Fifties. And then urban renewal came and there was no more stores on Main Street—they all started to close up and went out to the malls and things like that happened. And of course the factories all closed. Which was really the killer of the city. [5:37]

I went to Waterville High School. I went through the school system in Waterville. And skipped a couple of grades so I still can't divide very well. [laughs] And then went to Colby.

KP: How long did you go to Hebrew school five times a week?

KJ: Well, it wasn't really Hebrew school. It was me and the Rabbi. There was no Hebrew school. And I went five times a week and hated it. [laughs] I just hated it. And there were a couple of other kids going who were smarter than I was—they used to set the clock ahead. He had a clock right on the table and as soon as he'd go out of the room they'd set the clock ahead and so he wouldn't have to be there for the whole half-hour. Nobody liked it much. [laughs] But anyway, I went. At the time, there was the old synagogue on Kelsey Street which no longer is there of course and there was the small synagogue on Ticonic Street.

KP: So there were two synagogues in Waterville?

KJ: Well, one wasn't really a synagogue, it was like a room. [laughs] It was very small. And there was really one synagogue. [7:12]

KP: What did your father do for a living in Waterville?

KJ: He had a soda factory for a while and he was a beer distributor. [7:22]

- KP:** I see. And your mother—you had three sisters so she was probably pretty busy.
- KJ:** Yeah.
- KP:** So your decision to come to Colby was kind of out of convenience or did you look at other schools at the time—or?
- KJ:** Yeah, but when I got out of high school I had just turned sixteen. Nobody knew anything—there was no internet, you couldn't look things up and I mean, it was difficult, you know? And in the end I applied to three places and I got in. I know I applied to Brown, and I applied to Colby. I applied to Columbia, in New York, except I applied to Barnard! Knowing it was part of Columbia. I didn't know anything, and my family didn't know. There was no internet, there was no way of figuring all this stuff out. I mean, there were libraries but that was all. I remember getting a letter back saying that, [laughs] "we appreciate your application but your name made us wonder [laughs] because it's a women's school." But that's how I got to Colby. I mean it just seemed the most practical thing to do. I lived at home.
- KP:** Did you have any friends that joined you at Colby during your year? You knew your cousin Lester—was he there with you, or—? [9:04]
- KJ:** Oh no, he was older. Lester graduated when I was like, I don't know, eight or nine years old. But I had friends who went to Colby with me. Someone named Bob Rosenthal who's a very good friend who lived not far from me in Waterville and he had gone to Phillips Andover. And so he had not gone through the Waterville public school system, but we'd been friends since we were kids. And he ended up going to Colby in the same class as me. And also friends from Waterville High School ended up there with me.
- KP:** What was your experience in high school like? Within the Jewish community in Waterville—
- KJ:** Well there wasn't a very large Jewish community in Waterville. It was all mixed. [10:20]
- KP:** My research topic is actually about Tau Delta Phi, the fraternity, but anything you can tell me about your experience at Colby would be helpful. [10:38]
- KJ:** It was wonderful. Oh, it was wonderful. The first year was on the old campus, which was right across from what used to be the railroad station in Waterville and no longer exists. And on the river, on the Kennebec. And that was the first year. And they were meanwhile building the new campus and the whole college moved my second year, my sophomore year, to the new campus. And there were buses to take you from town to the campus. The first year, most everyone was living on College Avenue—there were dormitories, you know, all that. There were some on the new campus and so some have since been turned into other places on College Avenue. Which is why it's called College Avenue. Then afterwards of course it moved to the new campus but there weren't that many buildings then. The library was there, and Lorimer Chapel, and Mary Low. Is Mary Low still called Mary Low? [11:43]
- KP:** Yeah, I think it's in the same place. It's over past the chapel, right?

- KJ:** Yeah, that was a dormitory. And there was Roberts Hall. Yeah, there were a few buildings there and there were men's dormitories near the lake and the gym. As a freshman I was still in Waterville. My experience at Colby was wonderful. It was a wonderful time. [12:20]
- KP:** Where were the frat houses located back when you were at Colby? Were you in the fraternity as a freshman?
- KJ:** Yeah, when I was a freshman I got bids from, I don't know, like three fraternities. Which was kind of strange because actually most Jewish kids didn't. First of all, there weren't that many Jewish kids and secondly, they didn't really get bids. It was kind of unusual. And I don't even remember which fraternities they were. Like three or four maybe. And I ended up in Tau Delt. I decided to go to Tau Delt. I was in Tau Delt for, well, I was a member. But when I saw what fraternities were all about I really didn't like it. I didn't like the whole principle. [13:17] That whole exclusionary thing. I didn't like the whole thing. I wasn't very active in Tau Delta.
- KP:** Did you live at home or did you live in the fraternity house?
- KJ:** I lived at home. And at first I spent quite a bit of time at the fraternity house but after that I didn't. I was always busy doing my own thing anyway. [13:42]
- KP:** So what else were you involved in at Colby?
- KJ:** Oh, let me think. I haven't thought about this for a lot of years! I was very involved in Colby. Oh, I don't know. I was involved in a lot of stuff. Clubs, I wrote shows, you know, varsity shows, three of them and then I don't know. I was all over the place at Colby. It was a wonderful time. And you know, the people, and the place, and everything. I don't know what it's like now, but then it was terrific. [14:42]
- KP:** Could you tell me what life was like there? You know, where you went with your friends...
- KJ:** Well, we went to the movies, went driving. You know, the community of Waterville in those days was really a big part of the college life. I mean, they were very connected, which evidently they're not so much anymore. But then, since the college had just moved from the old campus to the new one, they were very connected. There were always a lot of activities at Colby but also there were, you know, there wasn't television yet. There was no computers, there was nothing. So it was a whole different kind of life. It was a much more innocent time and much easier, in a way. There was always a lot going on at the college. I mean I spent a *lot* of time at the college. I mean, when I wasn't in actual classes. I was never home. I was always up at the college. [16:13]
- KP:** So you were involved in a lot of productions? You wrote plays?
- KJ:** I wrote musicals. In college I wrote musicals. And when I was a freshman, someone had written a varsity show, a musical, and I was sitting there, watching it, and I thought: "this is very good, but I could do that." And I did my sophomore year and junior year and senior year. And actually the last one the college kind of took on a tour to raise money. And we did it in Boston and stuff like that and alumni used it

as a fundraiser. And then I came to New York—well, I went in the army, I was drafted for a couple years. Then I came out of the army and couldn't get to New York fast enough. Actually, what I've done all my life is write music and sometimes lyrics. Often lyrics, actually but always music. Actually the first song that was ever published of mine—Well, I came to New York not knowing how to do anything or, you know, quite what you do to get started writing music. And I was only here for a couple weeks and got a call from a big recording artist at the time, unknown today, but at the time she was a big deal, and she had heard a song from a varsity show I had written in Colby and the whole thing happened quite by accident. Over the weekend I was in ASCAP suddenly and sort of had the beginnings of a career. It was all accidental, and so I didn't have to worry about how do you become a songwriter in New York. [18:14]

KP: So at Colby, I'm assuming you were probably a music major?

KJ: No! There were no music majors then. I mean I took a lot of music courses, but I was an English Lit. major. And then actually what I'd done—well, this has nothing to do with Colby or Waterville, but—in the summer I'd gone to BU and the New England Conservatory of Music to take extension courses.

KP: So how did you first get interested in musicals and writing music?

KJ: Because well, I could always play the piano. And so I would listen to the radio and play what I'd heard. When I was a kid, they started giving me piano lessons. And so I played the piano really well in those days. Not so well anymore but in those days, I was pretty good. So I could always play the piano, and I couldn't do much else. I never thought of anything else to do so it was a natural thing. I never thought of doing anything else.

KP: Growing up, did you ever visit New York or go see any musicals?

KJ: A couple of times. As a matter of fact, the first time I came to New York my mother had come with B'nai Brith or Hadassah or something like that where she was representing the community. I don't really remember. And she brought me and my sister with her. And that was the most exciting thing I'd ever done. But I was really a kid then. And we went to a couple of shows. [20:26]

KP: So your mom was also with a Jewish organization in Waterville?

KJ: Oh, there were Hadassah and B'nai Brith, and my mother was active in those things. The Jewish women often met to play bridge or mah jong.

KP: Aside from your lessons with the rabbi, do you remember going to synagogue?

KJ: Oh yeah, it was a horror! Well, it really was—you were in that place with all the windows closed and it was loaded with men downstairs and the women had to sit upstairs. And it was endless. The services were endless! Especially when you were a kid, you know. And everyone was always telling you to shut up. [laughs] It was awful. And when I was thirteen, they had to get ten men together Friday night services at the small one, it was called the Talmud Torah, on Ticonic Street. In fact, it was just a room, that's all it was. Because I lived right near there, someone would

always come to me and say: “we really need you, you’re the tenth man” and when I got there I was always like number two. [laughs] They told everybody they were the tenth man, to get people there. And so, that’s my experience with the synagogue. [laughs] And on holidays and everything of course we all went to synagogue and there was always a big feast at our house for all the relatives and everything because we lived near the synagogue actually. [22:18]

KP: So you would have people over to your house. So maybe the Jolovitzes?

KJ: Yep.

KP: So you guys lived near Kelsey Street?

KJ: Yeah, on the corner of Ticonic and Kelsey. And the synagogue was on Kelsey Street and the small one, the little Talmud Torah, was on Ticonic Street.

KP: So, your father sounds he was pretty successful coming up to Waterville. His sister probably helped him out, but do you know how he got started here?

KJ: Well he got started as a beer distributor and at first he was living with his sister in Winslow, that’s the Jolovitzes, when he first came. Then he married my mother, and they lived on Oak Street in Waterville. And then we ended up there, on the corner of Ticonic and Kelsey.

KP: So your mother’s family, they were in Waterville, though.

KJ: Yes, they were in Waterville. I don’t know how they ended up in Waterville though. We were one of the only families in Waterville who wasn’t related to everyone else in Waterville. They were all related. Yeah, the Levines, the Rosenthals, they were all related and interrelated. [24:00]

KP: So you guys were sort of the second wave after them.

KJ: Well, almost the same time.

KP: So, when you were talking about Tau Delta Phi you said you didn’t like the exclusionary way the fraternities worked. How did they work back then?

KJ: Well, there was a blackball system and well, I just didn’t like the whole idea. I didn’t do anything to fight it except I just sort of bowed out a little bit. I mean you couldn’t bow out exactly, once you were a member you’re a member. But I didn’t have much else to do with Tau Delt after that. After the first year.

KP: Did you ever go to dances or visit the house—you didn’t really visit the fraternity house often after your freshman year, probably.

KJ: Not really, no. I mean, yeah, I was there only cause I knew all the guys. But no. I wasn’t actively involved in the fraternity really.

KP: Did you go to other fraternity dances?

KJ: Well there weren't many fraternity dances. They didn't have fraternity dances really. There were a lot of fraternities and a lot of sororities but mostly they didn't really sponsor dances or anything. Maybe they did earlier.

KP: It was mostly the school at that point?

KJ: Yeah.

KP: Did you date while you were at Colby?

KJ: Yeah.

KP: Did your parents encourage you to date Jewish girls?

KJ: Well, there were very few Jewish girls at Colby. I mean, there weren't a lot of Jewish people at Colby in those days. It was that old time system of a certain number of Jewish kids were allowed and that was it. There was one black kid in the whole college, no Orientals at all, and it was white, you know, a Caucasian college. [laughs] You know, there were Jewish kids there, but not an awful lot.

KP: With the other fraternities—did people not perceive you as Jewish?

KJ: Well, I guess they knew I was Jewish. I don't know how that happened, but it did. I mean I went to several of the—I don't know what you call them, but when you first meet everybody and when they decide who they're going to ask to join the fraternity. And I went to those, a few of those. Three or four of those. That was it. But I ended up in Tau Delt and then I didn't like the whole fraternity system much.

KP: Yeah, it sounds like you were really involved in stuff you were more interested in.

KJ: Yeah, I was.

KP: Were you involved in any sports at Colby?

KJ: I was a cheerleader! [laughs] Which I can't believe now that I used to do flips in front of the grandstand! Can't believe it. In the end I was head cheerleader. I can't believe it. But I think I mostly did it so that was my physical education credit. [laughs] I don't know. I can't imagine that I did that. It has nothing to do with anything I am. [laughs] But I did. [27:46]

KP: You must have been just leading cheers and shouting cheers at the game though, it must have been fun.

KJ: Yeah. It was peculiar. [laughs] When I think about it, I can't imagine that was me. [28:10] But I was involved in all kinds of college activities, and actually as far as dating Jewish girls and that—there were very few Jewish girls at Colby. Very few. I don't know if I ever dated any of them. I don't think so. Don't think I did. [28:35]

KP: So you just dated girls from town?

KJ: Not really. Well, I was from town. [laughs] You know, girls I met in Colby.

KP: Were there a lot of students from away at the time you went to Colby?

- KJ:** Almost all of them were from away. There weren't a lot of people from Waterville. You know, who'd gone through Waterville's school system. There were some I'd gone to high school with, but not a lot. [29:07]
- KP:** When you went to New York, did people know of Colby? Did people in New York and Boston know about it by then?
- KJ:** Well Boston, certainly, yeah I would say. But New York not as much I don't think in those days. There were quite a few students from around the Boston area.
- KP:** Yeah, still that way. Yeah, a lot of people from Boston. What about your classes at Colby? Do you remember any teachers that—
- KJ:** Oh, sure. Couple of them I remember very well. There was an English teacher called Louella Norwood who's the best teacher I ever had. She was at Colby, she taught English Lit. The romantic poets and all that. She was wonderful. Wonderful teacher. Well, Dr. Comparetti was music. I remember him very well. Actually he used to write music for the Colby—there was a sort of cut-down symphony orchestra at Colby and they used to play at concerts and he wrote music for them sometimes. And he was my music teacher actually, at Colby. [30:40]
- KP:** And you continued piano at Colby probably?
- KJ:** Not piano lessons, no. But I played a lot.
- KP:** So, overall, was your social life at Colby mostly through your clubs or just—?
- KJ:** I remember, sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you but I thought of something that was sort of funny—when we're talking about being Jewish and being at Colby in those days, when I was a senior I got the Condon Medal, which is a whole big deal honor that they give to one senior every year by vote by the class and the faculty. And I got it. And I do remember at the announcement just before graduation, getting on stage and the president of the college was reading what's written on this medallion that they give you. And it was for "Christian citizenship," which I thought was sort of ironic! [laughs] I just thought of that 'cause we're talking about Jewish and Colby. [32:00]
- KP:** I was just wondering since you weren't really active in the fraternity, it sounds like the college really ran most of the social events? What was the social life like at Colby?
- KJ:** Well there was always a lot going on. There were a lot of clubs, and there was no theater at Colby at the time or big place. There was—oh, what's the name of the building behind Mary Low...
- KP:** Oh, Runnals? That was the gym—?
- KJ:** Oh, Runnals. That was Dean Runnals. Well, there was a stage there. I don't know if it's still there and they had like assemblies there. Things like that. There was also a Jewish organization at Colby. Hillel. Hillel was there. And they used to have breakfasts and stuff like that. That was the only place you could get lox in

Waterville. [laughs] Anyway, but there was a lot of activities at Colby. There was a lot going on. Lots to do and lots to get involved in if you wanted to. Even though the campus was new. [33:37]

KP: Oh yeah, that's true. Where would you have classes?

KJ: All the classes were in the library. In Miller library. Certainly, most of the classes were there. [33:56]

KP: And then most of the other buildings were dormitories.

KJ: And buildings were mostly dormitories and the chapel was there and Runnals was never a dormitory. And Roberts Hall was there. That wasn't a dormitory, but you know, they were building all the time and planting trees, landscaping the place. But it was physically much, much smaller. I mean it's grown incredibly. [34:35]

KP: Yeah, most of campus was over near Roberts. Between Roberts and Miller, probably.

KJ: Well, that's where the fraternity houses were. But the campus was spread around. The president's house—Eustis—that was the president's home at the time. The far end of the campus was there, and the other end of the campus was Roberts Hall. In those days, you know. And now it's everything in between plus. [laughs] I used to go back to Waterville all the time because my family lived there, you know. And I sorta saw the growth of the campus. Which was tremendous over the years.

KP: Did your sisters go to Colby? [35:36]

KJ: One sister went to Colby. She went to Colby and got married to someone in Tau Delt. Tau Delta Phi.

KP: And did they stay in Waterville?

KJ: No, no. He was from New York, and she lives in New York still.

KP: Oh, so you probably get to see her pretty often. Oh, that's cool.

KJ: Yeah.

KP: So, do you know if she joined a sorority?

KJ: She was a Tri Delta.

KP: Yeah, they sounded like they were the big sorority on campus.

KJ: There were two: Tri Delta and Chi Omega. She was my younger sister.

KP: And do you know how she liked Colby?

KJ: I think she went to get married. [laughs] I don't know. I believe she did like Colby a lot.

KP: Oh, she was probably there when you were in the military?

KJ: She was there right after I got out. But her husband was there when I was so I knew him before she did.

KP: And what was his name? [36:53]

KJ: Paul Ostrove.

KP: Paul Ostrove... Oh, really! So, we have an “Ostrove Auditorium”. I wonder if its—

KJ: Yes, that’s him!

KP: Oh, really!

KJ: Yes!

KP: Wow!

KJ: He was very active in the alumni association and he gave lots of money, very generously. Yeah! And that’s his auditorium. Actually, he named the music room after me. There’s a music room at Colby named after me which is over—oh, I was there...

KP: Over in Bixler probably.

KJ: I forget. I remember where it was but I don’t know how to describe it because I’m not that familiar with the whole new campus. It’s over near where the fraternity buildings used to be.

KP: Yeah, that’s the music building.

KJ: Yep. They keep records and recordings and stuff like that there. [38:00]

KP: Wow, so you probably keep in pretty good contact with them nowadays.

KJ: No! Not at all! [laughs] No, no, no. But at one point I was up in Waterville to see it and they told me I had to have some kind of special pass to get in and I said “no, no, you don’t understand! This place is named after me!” [laughs]

KP: Oh my gosh.

KJ: Anyway, that was funny.

KP: So in New York, you freelance compose, or—?

KJ: Yes.

KP: So have you ever done anything else, or have you been able to make a living doing just that?

KJ: No, just that. [38:53]

KP: So ever since you got back. Where were you stationed?

KJ: In France. In a place called Orléans.

KP: And how long were you there?

KJ: I was there for a year and a half. And then I was out of the army and I went to New York from there. It's really good because it's only a little over an hour from Paris.

KP: You ever visit Paris?

KJ: Oh yeah! Like a hundred times. [laughs] And I've gone back there since, a lot of times. I love that city.

KP: I spent part of my freshman year in France.

KJ: Oh, where?

KP: In Dijon.

KJ: Mustard! Where's that?

KP: It's about an hour south of Paris. In Burgundy.

KJ: An hour south of Paris... it must be near Orléans!

KP: It's fairly close, but it's an hour south by the really fast trains.

KJ: Is it on the Loire?

KP: No, no—it's not on the Loire. It's not southwest, it's southeast. Basically in the center of France in the Burgundy region.

KJ: Oh, I gotcha.

KP: But it's a really great town.

KJ: But Orléans is on the Loire.

KP: Yeah, but not quite in the valley though.

KJ: No.

KP: I've never visited, but I have friends that had and they really liked it.

KJ: So I go back to Paris a lot. Almost every year. I mean, whenever I'm going somewhere—my family jokes about it—they say, you know—I say I'm going to Spain too, they say: "you going to Paris?" "Of course!" [laughs] [40:41]

KP: Your parents can't be living, but your other sisters—where do they live?

KJ: One is in Connecticut and one is in Nova Scotia.

KP: Oh, wow.

KJ: Which I just came back from actually.

KP: Oh yeah, it's a beautiful area.

KJ: Yeah, cold. Beautiful in the summer. It's very like Maine actually.

KP: Yeah, I visited—well, I went to New Brunswick this past summer.

KJ: New Brunswick's even colder. [laughs] In the winter anyway.

KP: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about Colby? My topic is about fraternities, but—

KJ: Yeah, I wasn't really involved because I just hated the whole idea of fraternities after being in one for a little while. [laughs]

KP: What exactly turned you off? I mean, do you remember any conversations, or?

KJ: Oh, I remember all the hazing stuff and the blackball system and all that. I *hated* all that. And the whole exclusionary thing I didn't like about fraternities you know. [41:56]

KP: Did you have friends that tried to get into other fraternities and had been excluded or did you have—

KJ: Well mostly they almost automatically went to Tau Delt. The Jewish kids. But other friends, sure, they'd try to get into one fraternity and end up in another one or something. Yeah.

KP: Was it kind of unspoken that if you were Jewish you'd be in Tau Delt?

KJ: Generally, yeah. Yeah, generally I think that's true.

KP: Were they active in the local community? Like with the synagogue or anything?

KJ: No. No. Not at all.

KP: Your father was really active with the synagogue, but did you ever—well, it sounded like you hated it.

KJ: I didn't really *hate* it. But you know, I just thought the services were—Oh, as a kid I hated it. [laughs] What was the question?

KP: Oh, when you were in college you still attended synagogue?

KJ: Oh, well holidays I certainly did. But generally, I wasn't the tenth man all the time anymore. [laughs]

KP: At home, did your family keep kosher?

KJ: Yes.

KP: There was a butcher in town, probably.

KJ: There was no kosher butcher in town. However, the rabbi used to sell kosher meat. There weren't enough families to keep a real kosher butcher in town in those days,

you know. And they'd get meat from Portland too. But yeah, it was kosher. My mother had enough sets of dishes for four families. [laughs] [44:02]

KP: You had all the holidays at your house, so—

KJ: Yeah.

KP: And what were those like? How many people would come to your house for the holidays?

KJ: I dunno, twenty? Twenty-five? I dunno, a lot.

KP: And they were all in Waterville, right?

KJ: Mostly in Waterville, but sometimes others would end up there. But mostly from Waterville. Yeah, we had an attic actually, with a couple of finished rooms in the attic. When I was a really young kid, before I went to Colby, they used to have Colby students living there.

KP: Oh, so do you remember talking to those students or interacting? They probably just had dinner with you.

KJ: Yeah... that was when I was very young. But I remember there were Colby students up there and I moved up there when I went to Colby. I moved up into the attic. I lived in the attic in my house. [laughs] And I *loved* it because nobody'd bother me up there! [laughs] That was part of the joy of going to Colby.

KP: How was the day structured at Colby? What was the typical day there?

KJ: Well, I mean you'd go to classes, and then you'd go to the library, well, the classes were in the library actually and then you know, study time. There was always a lot of free time do things and there was always lots of activities that you could get involved in. And I don't even remember half the things that I was doing. I was always busy. I was always involved in something there. [45:59]

KP: And that was mostly in the afternoon after your classes?

KJ: Yeah, after classes and sometimes evenings too.

KP: Do you remember the plays you were involved with or what it was like working?

KJ: Yeah, I was head of Powder and Wig at one point. That one still exists, right?

KP: Yeah! It's really great, yeah!

KJ: Yeah! I was like the president of Powder and Wig.

KP: Oh, so you acted while you were here too?

KJ: Oh, yeah. I was doing all kinds of stuff.

KP: Yeah, it sounds like you did everything.

KJ: Oh, not everything. But I did lots of stuff. I was busy at Colby.

KP: Were there A Cappella groups on campus back then?

KJ: The Colby Eight. They had just started actually.

KP: But you weren't involved with them?

KJ: Oh no. I was not a singer. [laughs] No. I mean, friends were involved, but no.

KP: And where was the movie theater in town back then?

KJ: There were three of them. One was on Main Street, the Haines Theater. Further down to the right, there's a restaurant there now... do you know where WTBL is?

KP: Oh, no. I don't.

KJ: Well it was right near there. It was called the State Theater, and the old Opera House.

KP: Oh, I know where that is.

KJ: The Opera House. It's the police station. [laughs] That was the theater upstairs. Still is, I think. It showed cowboy movies there. [48:02]

KP: What were your favorite movies? Do you remember? In college.

KJ: I don't remember. I don't remember. I used to go all the time. A lot. [48:12]

KP: So was that kind of the main thing you guys would do going out?

KJ: Well, everybody else would drink beer. And I used to try and I ended up throwing up a lot so I stopped drinking. [laughs] Cause I could never handle it. That was a weekend thing mostly. But there were bars in Waterville and they'd end up at the bars in Waterville. The guys especially. Not the women so much. [48:46]

KP: Yeah, I've heard they had some problems. Have you ever heard of the Jefferson?

KJ: Yeah, sure.

KP: Yeah, we had a tour yesterday just of what Waterville used to be like—

KJ: That's the hotel! With a restaurant. Ma and Pa Shiro owned it.

KP: Oh yeah!

KJ: And Ted Shiro was in my class! Ted Shiro was a big athlete in Waterville, and we went to Waterville High together.

KP: I heard that the Jefferson at one point was off-limits to Colby students but I think that was in like the Thirties or the Forties.

KJ: I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised. [laughs] There's a decent restaurant there now. I've forgotten the name, but... Yeah, but the activities there, in town, were mostly movies and bars.

KP: Did they have dining halls at the time?

KJ: Yes. Yes they did.

KP: But you probably ate at home.

KJ: Most of the time I'd eat at home but I'd been to dining halls, yeah. [50:18]

KP: Let's see... it's almost one. That's pretty much all I wanted to talk to you about, but thank you, thank you so much!

KJ: Oh, okay! A pleasure. You're a good interviewer! [laughs]

KP: Thank you!

KJ: You got me talking too much.

KP: Oh no! That's the point!

KJ: Oh! [laughs] You got me thinking about things I haven't thought about in an awfully long time.

KP: Yeah, I bet! Yeah, your life seems so different now. I mean, Waterville and New York. Nowadays it seems like a huge difference.

KJ: It was different back then. Culture shock moving from New York to Waterville. [50:59]

KP: Yeah. I imagine. Going to the army too probably. If there's anything else you remember or you just want to let me know, I sent you an email yesterday so you could just reply to that email and I might be contacting you for a follow-up interview. I don't know, our class's schedule is pretty flexible but if that happens I'll call—

KJ: What specifically is the class?

KP: Oh, the class! Oh yeah—the class is—we're a research class, and basically there are about twelve of us and we're all looking at the Jewish community in Waterville and kind of just different facets of life. Like someone's doing religious life—someone's doing what—

KJ: And you're doing fraternities.

KP: I'm doing fraternity life, and I have a couple of other people to interview, but we're all kind of looking at a broad idea of what life was like in Waterville. Because, you know, there was a decent Jewish community compared to other New England towns. So we're all doing that.

KJ: Well actually the fraternity life in Waterville has very little to do with the community. Jewish life. Very, very little to do with it. If anything. It's a totally separate thing.

KP: I mean, how so? What did the fraternity do?

KJ: What did they do... Well they blackballed people. [laughs] They went out and drank a lot and they, I dunno. I mean, if you were a part of that whole thing they liked it a lot, all their buddies were fraternity members, not all, but many of their buddies. And you know they all lived together and that was fine.

KP: But it doesn't seem like Tau Delt—it just so happened that Jewish men ended up there.

KJ: Yeah, but none of the fraternities in those days were active with the town. None of them were.

KP: We don't have fraternities here now, but—

KJ: Well that's a good thing.

KP: I mean, I have no concept of what they do.

KJ: That's a good thing.

KP: Yeah, that's one of the reasons I came here. [53:34]

KJ: That's one of the reasons I got out of Tau Delt. [laughs]

KP: Yeah, it seems awful.

KJ: Yeah. But every college had them in those days. They were all national fraternities.

KP: Yeah, I got fraternities. What my professor was looking at with fraternities—he really wanted to see what career opportunities the fraternities may have gotten—because like Tau Delt was a national fraternity he was interested if it connected people to jobs when they left college—

KJ: No, no they didn't. There was no connection really, I don't think. I mean except maybe from people you met in the fraternity. So, you know—No, on a national level, no.

KP: Did they set up dates with people other fraternity members knew—or if they found connections through the fraternity or—it sounds like it was just a place for people to live while they were at Colby.

KJ: Yeah, it was a social place more than anything else. [54:56] Especially in those days you know, that's what it was.

KP: Were there a lot of rivalries between the fraternities, like would they—

KJ: Were there rivalries... I think not particularly. Except, you know, there were some fraternities who considered themselves just wonderful, like the—there was a fraternity of course of the athletes belonged to, and there was—you know, different.

KP: So it was a way, just of grouping people.

KJ: Yeah.

KP: Yeah, because, with the fraternity question, I think earlier—before you were at Colby—I think the dances were organized by the fraternities. Like fraternities would often organize dances and I'm interviewing, you probably don't know him, Jerry Gilson?

KJ: No.

KP: Yeah, he was like class of '46.

KJ: Yeah, that's just before I entered.

KP: Yeah. So he was long graduated. Apparently they had dances.

KJ: That would have been on the old campus. That would have been true, but on your campus. No, not particularly. I mean there were, occasionally there was something like that. But certainly not often, and certainly not Tau Delta Phi. [56:34]

KP: Did Tau Delta Phi have a reputation other than being the Jewish fraternity?

KJ: I don't think so. I don't think so. I mean it wasn't—I don't think there was a lot of discrimination or anything in Colby at the time. Although the number of Jewish students who could enter were limited. It was a limited number of Jewish students that could get into Colby. And all colleges did that in those days. They had quotas. [57:12]

KP: So did you know that when you applied? I mean, were you worried?

KJ: Oh yeah, I mean I knew there were Jewish quotas.

KP: Did you know other Jewish kids in town who had been rejected by Colby?

KJ: There weren't any Jewish kids! [laughs] There weren't really very many of that age.

KP: Well you had Bob Rosenthal.

KJ: Bob Rosenthal was the only one in my class, Jewish, that I'd known previously. And in high school there were no Jewish kids. I mean there were a few, but— [57:52]

KP: You just fit in with everyone else, it wasn't a big deal?

KJ: Yeah, mm-hmm.

KP: And you had other friends coming from your school to Colby?

KJ: Yes. Yes. [58:08]

KP: Did you remain friends with them while you were at Colby? Did they lead you to the other fraternities, or?

KJ: No. I just went to like three or four of those open houses. You didn't know anything when you were sixteen years old. You know, I mean. "These guys seem nice" or whatever. [58:38]

KP: Yeah, you were so young. It seems so weird nowadays, going to school at sixteen. Well, thank you! You've given me a lot of material, even though we have topics, any material is important. Because we're trying to build kind of an overall view of what life was like here. We're focusing specifically before 1950, 1953.

KJ: Yeah, that's my era! [laughs] Right when I was there.

KP: Yeah, exactly! Like I was saying, we're looking at the Jolovitzes... I think someone's interviewing Bob Rosenthal.

KJ: Oh really? I'm in touch with him all the time.

KP: Oh really?

KJ: Yeah. And I'm also in contact with Lester Jolovitz all the time. He's my cousin, he's in Florida now. Actually, Lester would be a wealth of information for somebody. He's still really with it. And he knows a lot more than I do about the Thirties in Waterville and Colby. [59:47]

KP: I think the person who's interviewing him is doing like occupational life or something. You know jobs and that sort of thing. You know jobs or their parents' professional lives. But pretty much everyone who was in town at that time we're interviewing, seems like! So, thank you so much, it was a—

KJ: It was a pleasure.

KP: It was for me too!

KJ: And if you have to do a follow-up or something just let me know.

KP: I will! Have a good day!

KJ: You too.

KP: And stay warm, it's pretty cold there!

KJ: Oh, yes it is. Okay. All right. Goodbye.

KP: Bye! [1:00:32]

Katie Peterson
January 27, 2010

Maine's Jewish History

Follow-up Transcript: Kenneth Jacobson, January 23, 2010

KP: This is January 23rd, 2010 and this is Katie Peterson conducting a follow-up interview with Ken Jacobson at Colby College in Waterville, Maine.

Could you tell me a little more about your mother? We were wondering specifically about her because she grew up in Waterville. We were wondering if she ever told you memories of growing up in Waterville or her involvement in the community. [0:29]

KJ: Well, she grew up in Waterville in the early 1900s and they lived on Oak Street and she had four brothers and one sister, who are my uncles and aunt on that side. She grew up in Waterville, she went through the Waterville public school system. There weren't many Jewish people in Waterville in those days. [1:06]

KP: Her family was probably one of the first families.

KJ: Yeah, and then the Levines came to Waterville when the Jolovitzes were in Winslow. The Paikowskys, that was my mother's family—her family name was Paikowsky, and she went through the Waterville public school system and as a matter of fact we've seen her report cards. They were all A's. [laughs] And then she got a job as a telephone operator. [1:49]

And there wasn't a big Jewish community in Waterville back then. I mean, it was a growing community in those days, but not big. I have no idea when the synagogue was built. The original synagogue on Kelsey Street. I don't know. It always seemed like an old building to me. [laughs] Next to the junkyard.

KP: We know that they brought in Abraham Hains, the original rabbi?

KJ: Yeah! He's the one I'd go to every day! [2:38] He wasn't actually a rabbi—he was a cantor, really. I mean everyone called him Rabbi Hains, but wasn't a rabbi. Though he did conduct all the services and everything.

KP: We heard they brought him in from Canada in 1918, so—

KJ: I don't think they had a rabbi before him. I'm not sure about that. There weren't enough people to have a rabbi! [laughs] [3:18]

And even when he came in—I mean the fact that he wasn't really a rabbi is probably because there weren't enough people who could afford one. And then Mr. Hains came; everyone called him "Mr. Hains" although unofficially he was Rabbi Hains. Only the newspapers called him Rabbi Hains. [laughs] Anyway, and he was also the butcher. [3:54]

KP: Yeah, he was. [3:53]

KJ: Oh, you knew that.

KP: Yeah, we talked to Bobby Hains. He showed us around the area down near Kelsey Street and Ticonic Street. He pointed out where Abraham Hains had the little butchery in the back of his house... [4:11]

KJ: In the back of his house on May Street. Yeah, that's right. And when we were doing our lessons, he would go and do his butchering.

KP: Oh, wow! Oh my gosh! That's kind of scary.[4:27]

KJ: Yeah! That often happened 'cause he had stuff he had to do, too. [laughs] Anyway, as far as the Jewish community was concerned, there wasn't a very large Jewish community, but it was a growing community. But it grew with pretty much the families who originally went there. And so, in the end everybody was related to the Levines. Everybody was a Levine! [laughs] And then my family was not, but we had—there were even connections there—we had cousins who were related to the Levines who lived on a farm. [5:15]

KP: Oh, what family is that?

KJ: Levines, they were Levines. His name was Kalman Levine. He was somehow related to William Levine... I don't know—except they never spoke, really. I think they were... I don't know. They had a farm just up outside of Waterville. And there were a bunch of, well, it's a rather complicated story but would you like me to go into it? [laughs] [5:48]

KP: Oh yeah! Go ahead! [laughs]

KJ: OK, his name was Kalman Levine. He married someone who I never knew and they had four sons. Four or five. Four I think. And the sons grew up on the farm. They were all great big guys. And they all grew up on the farm. And then the mother was hauled off to the state insane asylum in Augusta and he remarried. I don't know if they were ever divorced or what, but he remarried to a woman who became Gertrude Levine, who was my mother's cousin. She came from Boston and he had a second family with her which was three daughters and a son—all giants. [laughs] And three of them are still alive—they're living in Florida and we're in touch with them, as a matter of fact quite often. They're my, probably third cousins. Anyway, so he was related to the Levines but somehow they were never really connected to the family. They always showed up for services. Gertrude Levine was a very cultured woman. She was the one who first got me reading. Yeah, when I was a little kid she bought me a book called *Oliver Twist* and she was a great friend of my mother's. And I thought: "This is the greatest thing that ever happened—books." [laughs] And so I spent the rest of my life, or at least then—waiting until I could get into the adult section of the Waterville Library. [laughs] ...

Kalman really had nothing much to do with the rest of the community although Gerturde Levine, his wife—his second wife—did. She was very active. And very bright. [9:59]

KP: Oh, yeah. Well she was from Boston, right?

KJ: [laughs] Not even Portland—but *Boston!* [laughs]

KP: Did your mom grow up speaking Yiddish? Could your parents read English?

KJ: English was her first language.

KP: Oh yeah, she went to the public schools.

KJ: My father spoke Russian, he could speak Polish, he could speak German, Yiddish and English. Although he never had a “V” in his mouth—I mean a “W” in his mouth—he often pronounced it “V”. Therefore we lived in “Vaterwille”. [laughs] ‘Cause he couldn’t always remember where the “V” went and where the “W” went. [laughs] But he spoke English very well with no accent, actually.

KP: Your mom grew up in Waterville.

KJ: Yeah.

KP: Man—so her parents must have arrived really, really early. [10:55]

KJ: I don’t know when they arrived.

KP: I mean it must have been a long, long time ago.

KJ: Yeah.

KP: So how old was your dad when he arrived in Waterville?

KJ: I think he was about 18 when he went first to New York then Boston then Waterville. He was probably in his early twenties. I’m not sure. [11:20]

KP: Did your parents ever tell you how they met or got married?

KJ: No. [laughs] Not really. I mean he was in Waterville and she was in Waterville and there weren’t many Jewish people in Waterville and it was the next natural step almost. Those were in the days of arranged marriages, too. I don’t mean that their marriage was arranged. I mean *they* decided to marry but these were the days of arranged marriages. My aunt was an arranged marriage. That is, Lester Jolovitz’s mother. [12:08]

KP: Oh, okay. Wow. So, your dad lived with the Jolovitzes until—?

KJ: He lived with the Jolovitzes until he got married.

KP: Was the house that they moved in to—did they just buy it on their own or was it your mother’s house? Like one of her father’s family’s?

KJ: It was originally—part of the house was moved over from I think across the street. It was a piece of property that my grandfather owned—my mother’s father. But it was a rather small house, and it was moved to this lot, where it exists even today—it’s a two-story house on the corner of Kelsey and Ticonic street—and then a whole piece—the major part of the house actually, was added on. And as a matter of fact, you can see from inside in the attic where it was added on. [13:30]

KP: Oh, that’s amazing—so it’s like three different parts?

KJ: Yeah, but anyway—the thing was it was originally a piece of property my grandfather owned. Well no, not the property—the house itself. My father I think bought the property and then moved the house and added on to it. And my mother growing up was a telephone operator. That was her job until she got married. And then became the mother and raised a family. [14:09]

KP: So, you said that Gertrude Levine, your aunt—

KJ: Oh, no, actually she was a cousin.

KP: She was a big part of your life growing up?

KJ: Well, I mean—they used to come and visit. I mean they lived out of town. I mean it was just outside of Waterville but it was out of town. And she used to come in and see my mother. They were very close. And then she was involved in a lot of the kind of women's Jewish activities. Not as much as my mother though. My mother was all involved in like Hadassah and Bnai B'rith. As a matter of fact at one point they named her "Woman of the Year" or something and had a big banquet for her. It was a surprise. [15:09]

My mother was great! She was not the stereotypical Jewish mother. [laughs] Not at all. She was wonderful.

KP: A lot of people had so much good to say about her. There's even that plaque in the synagogue that's dedicated to her. Could you just tell me about your mom? Because anything would be—because we have that girl doing motherhood.

KJ: Well, she was a great mother, really supportive and she really cared. Everybody was afraid of my father and would run to my mother! [laughs] My father, when we were growing up was quite strict and my mother was more understanding and everything. And then my father mellowed a lot as he got older.

KP: What were the rules in your house growing up?

KJ: Well, he had a business that was right across the street—it was called Mineral Springs Soda Company. They made soda and he distributed beer. Schmidts and Schlitz and a beer called Frank Jones—I think it was a Canadian beer. Anyway, he was always busy. He had trucks—and during the war, which was World War II, he had a horse and cart that he would go through the city distributing beer because there was no gas. [laughs] I even remember the horse. Let me see—my mother, she was a homebody although she was very active in the community. Dedicated her life to raising the family and cooking and cleaning and everything else. Which was pretty typical in those days I think. [17:33]

KP: So your dad was gone a lot because he was really busy with work.

KJ: Yeah, and he would come in at noon to eat and he would always be home at night for supper. What we called supper.

KP: Was it typical for kids to go to the rabbi five times a week or did your parents stress it?

KJ: Well, no. It was common if you were a boy. However, most kids in those days started a couple of years before they turned thirteen. When they were ten or eleven.

KP: Yeah, to prepare for bar mitzvah.

KJ: Yeah, I started at like six. And I hated it, obviously. Went all the time, to the rabbi. And when you were thirteen you were finished. But I wasn't. Supposedly you were finished. And when I found out I had to continue to go to him at fourteen, fifteen—I mean, I had everything memorized. I didn't know what it meant, but I had it all memorized! [laughs] So I told you I did his correspondence sometimes in Yiddish.

KP: So your parents—why'd you end up doing that?

KJ: My father. That was my father. He was European, from a Russian shtetl. I don't know, that was just the way things were done.

KP: So, that's really weird because your dad had come from Europe but your mom had been raised totally in the American school system.

KJ: Yeah, in the school system but the family was—I mean, her parents came over from Europe. I never knew my grandmother, she died before I was born, but my mother's father, who I knew, came to live with us when I was a kid. And I remember him very well, my grandfather. And he died in the Thirties but I do remember him very well.

KP: What was your grandfather like?

KJ: He always had a book. I remember him always reading. And I don't know what he was reading but he was always reading. [laughs] [20:30]

KP: It sounds like in your family you were a pretty precocious kid.

KJ: Well, they really believed in education. They were very big on education and I don't know, we all went to college. And we all got out of Waterville. I think we're the only family where the whole family got out of Waterville. [laughs] I mean, nobody was left in Waterville in the end except my father. [21:10]

KP: So your mother died before your father?

KJ: Yes, she did. My mother died when I was about 26. She died on her way, as a matter of fact, to either a Hadassah or a Bnai B'rith meeting.

KP: Oh... did she have a health problem, or...?

KJ: No... but she had a sudden hemorrhage that killed her.

KP: Oh, no... wow, I'm sorry.

KJ: Well... Even that was involved with the Jewish community!

KP: I know! She was doing it until the moment she died.

KJ: Yeah.

KP: Was Hadassah and Bnai B'rith out of the synagogue, or--?

KJ: No. Well, I don't know where—no, they didn't meet in the synagogue. I believe they met in people's houses. I don't remember. I think they met in people's houses. And I remember the Jewish women in Waterville used to have a bridge club. They also had a mah-jong club. Remember mah-jong? With those tiles? And they used to meet in various Jewish homes in Waterville and they used to come over to our house every fourth or fifth meeting, and my mother made—I remember the cupcakes. [laugh] And the Jewish women would arrive and they would play mah-jong for a couple of hours, or also bridge.

KP: Yeah, it was so popular. I'm looking through all the yearbooks from the Fifties and into the Sixties now—or no—the late Forties into the Fifties and everybody played bridge.

KJ: I played bridge! I play bridge to this day. To this day! I play on the computer sometimes! [laughs] Yeah—bridge is fun!

KP: I've never played it—bridge isn't really popular—

KJ: Well, because it's not just a game of chance, it's a mental game too. Yeah, I don't know anything about mah-jong except they had tiles. They all had a mah-jong set. Anyway, the women in town were very quite close. The Jewish women. A lot of them were best friends.

KP: It sounds like it, because they were all involved in the same activities.

KJ: That's right. And it was the same sort of group of women that would show up at everything.

KP: About how many women would you say were involved?

KJ: Well, there weren't that many families, but—there were enough to have bridge games and mah-jong games! [laughs] I mean there were, I would just guess somewhere between twelve, fifteen women when I was a kid. And then that grew as they started having kids and there was another larger generation. [24:37]

KP: Probably like Bob Rosenthal's mom and—

KJ: Yeah, Evelyn. Lovely lady.

KP: Your mom's name was Gertrude also, like the woman who came up from Boston.

KJ: Also Gertrude, right. The two of them were both Gertrudes. Gertrude Levine, Gertrude Jacobson, originally Gertrude Paikowsky. And I had an uncle who was a dentist in Fairfield though he lived in Waterville. Hyman Paikowsky. And my mother's other brothers lived all over the place. One in Canada, one on Vermont, and one in Baltimore. They were spread all over except for one uncle.

KP: Did your mother's brothers go to college? I mean the dentist must have—

KJ: No. He went to dental school. They did not. They couldn't afford college. I mean there's no way they could afford college. Even though college in those days was relatively very cheap. [25:46]

KP: Yeah, it was more an elitist kind of thing.

KJ: The whole idea in those days was to get out and work. There was a tremendous work ethic. And as far as my mother was concerned—well everybody knew each other. We all knew each other. It was a small community, everybody knew each other, everybody shopped in the Jewish stores which were Sterns downtown and Levine's, which was the men's store, and Weins. And then there were a couple of other small places—Hillson was the shoe store. All of the Hillsons weren't as involved in the Jewish community as other people. They were in Waterville also. Yeah, I always envied Bobby Hillson, who was the son. He was just a little bit younger than me. He was one of my sister's ages. Because he used to go to Mr. Hains and for months he didn't go and his family thought he was going. [laughs] And I always thought: "Wow! That kid has *guts!* I would love to do that!"

KP: Was he the kid who put the clock ahead too?

KJ: Oh. We all put the clock ahead. [laughs]

KP: Oh man...

KJ: After the years I went to Mr. Hains, and actually my sister went too. My older sister. They started a Hebrew School on Sundays which my two younger sisters went to. And it was originally at the synagogue—I don't remember if they had it at the synagogue or not. It was a fairly basic. But it was a Hebrew School, and nobody learned Hebrew of course, but they learned kind of cultural stuff and Jewish history and stuff like that. Not that it quite stuck with everybody.

KP: Well, except you.

KJ: No! It really didn't stick with me either 'cept that I can still write it like crazy and wonder what it means. [laughs] Yeah, but ask me anything that I might have forgotten. 'Cause every time you ask me a question it reminds me of a hundred other things!

KP: Yeah, exactly. I get lost too. I was wondering who taught you piano?

KJ: Well, I could always play the piano. I mean before I took lessons, I don't know how but I always could. And there was a piano in the house. We had a piano there and I could always play so because I could play they started giving me piano lessons and they gave my older sister piano lessons. And they always had a strange thing in those days. I think it was very sort of—trying to be part of a larger community. Not Jewish. Jewish kids—some of the Jewish kids got elocution lessons, and one of my sisters went to a dance class in Waterville. And it had nothing to do with the Jewish community, it was more trying to become part of the whole gentile community. I don't know what it was. In fact there was an elocution teacher who's name was Rhoda Wein, who had been an actress in New York for a while and then moved back to Waterville and they lived right on College Avenue and she started giving

elocution lessons so we all went. The piano thing was—I don't know, I could always play so they started giving me lessons and also my sister. One of my other sisters went on to play the clarinet and the other played the saxophone very badly. Very badly.

KP: Oh, that's not pleasant.

KJ: No, and it tickles your lips! [laughs] Anyway, and so I just continued having piano lessons and my sister did too and for a few years. Probably six or seven years at least. [31:50]

KP: Did your mom play piano?

KJ: My mother played piano. She had a great right hand and the left hand just went wherever it landed. [laughs] Great right hand, yeah. [laughs] Yeah, my mother could play the piano. I don't know how she learned, because for sure she never had lessons. I doubt her mom played. I doubt it because they were Old Country and they didn't have pianos. I don't know, it was all part of getting cultured or something like gentile people were cultured. [laughs]

KP: Yeah, because I mean your dad and your grandparents were immigrants, so—

KJ: Yeah. I don't know, but there was a great emphasis on education, always. And I ended up going to Colby and one of my sisters went to Colby until she got married to Ostrove, Paul Ostrove. He was at Colby with me actually, behind me.

KP: Yeah, I saw his picture in the yearbook the other day.

KJ: Oh, well... [laughs] Yeah. I was involved in a lot of stuff at Colby. Then another sister went to Brandeis and married a guy from Brandeis and they live right now in Canada, in Nova Scotia.

KP: Yeah, you just visited them.

KJ: Yeah, I just visited them. Yeah, we talk all the time. Well, all my sisters and I talk all the time and one lives in Connecticut. They all married Jewish. One kept kosher because the husband insisted on it.

KP: The one that went to Brandeis?

KJ: Oh, *no. No.* She's the least likely to be kosher. No, no, no. Her husband is a sociologist. They're both professors. She's retired now. And he still gives lectures for five hundred people once a week at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. As a matter of fact they're going to China to teach a course on climate change. In Beijing. They've done it twice before, not on climate change. She taught on education and he taught on sociology. And they're on their way to China in February for three months. As a matter of fact I went over to visit them once in China.

KP: Oh, really! Oh wow, that's great. China... China's crazy.

KJ: Oh, it was in the Eighties.

KP: Ohhh, OK. Wow.

KJ: It has changed tremendously.

KP: Yeah. I actually have family in South Korea so I visit Asia pretty often.

KJ: You have family in South Korea?

KP: Well my grandma is actually from South Korea, she's Korean. And my mom is half and I'm a quarter 'cause my grandma actually married a guy in the army during the Korean War and they came over here.

KJ: Oh my!

KP: Crazy story, but yeah—Asia's crazy.

KJ: Oh my. During the Korean War I was hanging out in Paris.

KP: Yeah, you're lucky!

KJ: Oh yeah, tell me! [laughs]

KP: Oh, I'm surprised you didn't get drafted for the Korean War.

KJ: I did!

KP: Oh! Ohhh, OK.

KJ: I did! Three minutes after I got out of Colby I was drafted.

KP: And they stationed you in Orléans, that's crazy.

KJ: Well they sent me to Germany first and then they needed someone in Orléans and they looked up my record and saw there was something to do with I don't know what, special services I ended up in. I told you, I had nothing to do. Nothing! Nothing!

KP: Yeah, you just went to Paris every weekend.

KJ: That's right! And wrote my own little passes to get there. [laughs] But anyway, as far as the Jewish community in Waterville is concerned I really think Lester Jolovitz is the best person that anyone could talk to.

KP: Yeah, we had someone talk to him I think a few days after I last interviewed you.

KJ: Good!

KP: Yeah, he's really sharp. I read over the transcript.

KJ: Oh, sure. And he's just a wonderful, wonderful font of information.

KP: Yeah, he's a really bright guy. Because he was there early.

KJ: He was there years before I was.

KP: His interview was really interesting. I wish I'd gotten a chance to talk to him about the fraternity—about Tau Delt. Because he was a member when he was there.

KJ: Yeah, I'm not sure how active he was in Tau Delt.

KP: We've done a lot of research. There's really not a lot of information about the community and Tau Delt.

KJ: Well, Tau Delt has nothing to do with the community.

KP: Yeah, I mean it's kind of coincidentally Jewish.

KJ: That's right. There were lots of fraternities and Tau Delt was the Jewish one and they didn't have much to do with Waterville itself and the community and it was mostly a place to live and make friends. [laughs] But Lester—as a kid I remember going to Lester's graduation from college on the old campus. 'Cause the new campus hadn't been built yet. I think I told you my sophomore class was the first year on the new campus. Yeah, I remember all that stuff. I don't know what else about the Jewish women in Waterville...

KP: Not only that but something the girl who's doing motherhood is wondering about is just like—I think family life like what kind of things your mom emphasized with you guys, what values she had... or—

KJ: She had great values which she—my sisters now have great values and it's mostly because of my mother, I think. And they're all kind of concerned people and actively doing things about—my sister in Canada—is all involved with women's organizations and women's employment and minority groups and climate change. All kinds of stuff.

KP: It sounds like you and all your sisters went on to do what you wanted to do. Like you guys really had the opportunity to pursue and do what you wanted. [39:51]

KJ: Well, we all left Waterville! [laughs] As fast as our feet could carry us! But I'll say I liked Waterville. I still like Waterville although it's quite... changed from those days. It's just like a depressed area now. Because all the factories closed and everything else but it's not a very attractive place anymore but growing up there was really "Small Town, USA." It was a good place to grow up.

KP: There's a lot of unemployment.

KJ: All of Maine is like that except the very southern part of Maine.

KP: Yeah, it's really sad. It's really strange. Actually, I'm from Los Angeles, so—

KJ: Wow, culture shock! [laughs]

KP: Yeah, it's just really sad. Like the economy just lifted out of this place.

KJ: That's right. Well, it's happening in California now.

KP: Yeah, it's happening all over. It's really sad. Your mother—she was always home—did she help you guys with your homework and was she always around and helping?

KJ: Yeah, if we needed help with our homework she would certainly help. It seems to me we didn't do a lot of homework but we got good marks. [laughs] I don't mean that we were so brilliant I just mean that it wasn't that difficult.

KP: Yeah, that's true. I think there is more homework when I grew up then back then.

KJ: I think so too. I think there is too, now. I mean when I see kids now, they're doing homework like crazy. We had some of course, but not the amount that kids have today.

KP: Yeah, the school system was different.

KJ: I think it was easier. I mean you didn't have to work very hard to get good marks and now you do. That wasn't so true in college but that was true in public schools. [42:29]

KP: Yeah, college has changed. It's weird now. So let's see—your father could support you all going to college. All four of you.

KJ: Yeah. One sister went to business college and then one to Colby and one to Brandeis.

KP: So, let's see—do you know what Bnai B'rith and Hadassah did? We've talked about it a little bit, but did your mother ever talk about things she was doing, or her perspective on the issues that they dealt with?

KJ: I mean, we didn't really talk about it. I mean things were the way they were and you dealt with them. I don't know. Everybody was a Democrat for one thing. These were the Franklin Delano Roosevelt days and I can't imagine—I think all Jews were Democrats except maybe the Rosenthals, and the Rosenthals may have been Republican because of Margaret J. Smith. You know who Margaret J. Smith was?

KP: No, I don't.

KJ: She was the first Congresswoman. The first actually, woman in Congress. And she had been Louie Rosenthal's secretary for a time. And Bob Rosenthal to this day is Republican. [laughs] But the Jews in Waterville by and large were Democrats.

KP: Wow, that's interesting. My professor had the opposite idea. I don't know why.

KJ: Oh no, most Jews were Democrats.

KP: Yeah, because he was like: "Oh, Jews were Republican because Maine was Republican" and I thought that seemed a little strange to me in those days.

KJ: Well Maine was Republican but not the Jews in Waterville, no. No. They were all Democrats. With the exception of the Rosenthals. [laughs] [44:53]

KP: That's not a bad reason, though. That's interesting.

KJ: Also, Louis Rosenthal was wealthier than a lot of the Jews in Waterville. That might have had something to do with it too.

KP: Yeah, what was his profession—? I can't remember...

KJ: Fabrics and he had mills.

KP: Oh yeah, he owned a woollen mill I think.

KJ: Yeah, that's right. In Lewiston. And later shopping centers—

KP: Oh yeah, he did, like, real estate, he did all those things.

KJ: Yeah, in fact he donated a lot of the land that Colby is on. Yeah. Mayflower Hill. Part of Mayflower Hill was Louis Rosenthal's gift to Colby.

KP: Yeah, it amazes me how much of Colby is from—you know, we have the Ostrove auditorium, it's now the nicest auditorium on campus—and then the Alfonds did so much on campus too.

KJ: Oh yeah, Harold. Yeah. Well, Harold Alfond was really very generous. You know, charitable causes and very involved with Colby.

KP: And the Levines too.

KJ: Yeah, Pacy and Ludy.

KP: Yeah, exactly. At all the games. [laughs]

KJ: Yep. They were in their nineties and they were still at all the games. Football and—

KP: Yeah, they were like the mascots. [laughs]

KJ: Oh, I know it! I know. [laughs] [46:33]

KP: So, I'm trying to think of the questions this girl wanted asked...

KJ: Most of the Jewish women in Waterville were mostly involved with their families.

KP: Yeah, they were all housewives. And then they were in the clubs and things. I think you mentioned last time your mom went down to New York—that was the first time you saw a musical and that was with Bnai B'rith or Hadassah or something.

KJ: That's right. I don't remember if it was Hadassah or Bnai B'rith, and we all stayed in a hotel. I'd never stayed in a hotel before. I must have been eleven, twelve years old.

KP: Did she travel a lot?

KJ: No. No.

KP: Was she involved in any civic life outside of the Jewish community, like in town?

KJ: No, not really. But I don't think any of the Jewish women in Waterville were. I don't think so. None that I can recall anyway.

KP: Yeah, it seems Hadassah and Bnai B'rith were—

KJ: Yeah, and their families. Their families were taking all their time really. My mother had four kids and keeping the house going. There wasn't a lot of time to do anything else. [48:16]

KP: Yeah, and it seemed you had a lot of people over for the high holidays and stuff, so she was an entertainer. Do you remember—well, you guys probably went all out for the high holidays because you had all those guests—do you have any memories of those or how your parents did those?

KJ: Yeah, I remember my father used to make wine in a bathtub that was in the attic and I do remember that when we were kids—well, looking back on it, it was the worst wine that anyone had ever tasted because it was like syrup and all the kids would fall asleep at the table. All of us. When we were little. I'm talking about when we were really small. We'd all fall asleep at the table because the services were endless and they did the whole thing. [laughs]

KP: So it was very traditional.

KJ: Yeah, well it was all Orthodox. And my mother had enough dishes for an army. Because you had the milk dishes and the meat dishes and the pareva dishes and then all the other dishes for the holidays. They had like six sets of dishes. I find it crazy today but in those days it seemed normal. [laughs] Doesn't everybody have six sets of dishes? [laughs] Six sets of dishes...

KP: Your mom sounded like she did all the cooking and—

KJ: Yeah. I'm trying to think of anything about the other women in the Jewish community but I don't know. I would see them at synagogue or bridge and mostly mah-jong games.

KP: And your parents never pushed you towards Jewish girls or anything.

KJ: There weren't any. I mean there really, I mean there weren't any. There were my sisters. [laughs] And Margie Rosenthal. And then the others were younger and then as time went on there were more. When I was in high school there were like four or five Jewish kids maybe at the school. That was all. [51:05]

KP: Yeah, it wasn't really possible. Wait, are you married?

KJ: No.

KP: Oh, okay. And you don't have any kids?

KJ: No kids.

KP: Oh wow, so—

KJ: I have numerous nieces and nephews. No kids myself.

KP: Yeah. Probably married to your job.

KJ: Well, yeah I was for years.

KP: Well, it's a really great profession and everything. I mean I'm really impressed that you were able to and how it all happened.

KJ: Well, if I'd known any better—I don't know how I'd ever had done it. I didn't know anything. [laughs] About how people do it. I just got lucky that's all.

KP: That's really cool though. You always knew you wanted to be a composer and you always did that.

KJ: Yeah, it never occurred to me that I could do anything else. I mean I never thought about it even.

KP: And your parents never pushed you toward anything else?

KJ: No. No. They were really supportive. I mean I think they would have been just as happy if as I kid I said I wanted to be a doctor. [laughs] But that never really came up. [laughs] But we didn't know anything. I mean, in those days when you get out of college—I was 19; no, I just turned 20—and you didn't know anything. There was no technology, things were not available to you, information was very limited to the public library.

KP: Yeah, it was all who you knew and what—

KJ: Yeah, and we didn't know anything. [laughs] And Waterville was a very, very small world. Which was why New York was so exciting. Or Boston even. I mean *Portland* was an exciting place compared to Waterville.

KP: Totally different scale. [53:43]

KJ: Yeah.

KP: Did your family go down to Portland often? I mean did you take trips down there?

KJ: Occasionally. I mean, very occasionally we went to Portland. I mean, I guess we knew people in Portland and then we had a summer camp. Not a camp, a cottage. Well, we had one on North Pond. Belgrade Lakes. That my father built right near the Rosenthals who had one right across. There was woods and then right across the woods was the Rosenthals and the Waterville people used to come there on weekends. I mean, my God, there was thirty, thirty-five, forty people who used to descend on us and my mother used to make sandwiches for everybody. [laughs] I remember that. That was when I was really little. But it was almost all Jewish people. Just about almost all—like the whole Waterville Jewish community would show up at our summer camp. [55:00]

KP: It just sounds like during the holidays all your family would come over—it just sounds like your mom especially really was good at being the center of activity.

KJ: Yeah, yeah. At the time it didn't *seem* like it but in retrospect that's what it was. I mean at the time it just seemed like this is the way things are. But thinking back, sure. In a very kind of quiet way. As I said, she wasn't a stereotypical Jewish mother. At all! Not a bit. [laughs]

KP: And your dad sounds like he was a pretty ambitious guy. I mean everybody was back then.

KJ: Everybody was. Especially the immigrant generation. They all were. I mean the whole point of coming here was to have a better life. Exactly.

KP: I mean it sounds like he made it really quickly. Just from the sounds of everything. Well, I didn't want to keep you for more than half an hour and it's been an hour—

KJ: No, it's okay! It's interesting—you're making me think about things I haven't thought about for years and years and years.

KP: Yeah, you have a lot that you remember and it's very interesting—I mean I've learned a lot just talking to you in this past hour.

KJ: Good, good.

KP: I mean, you have—a lot of unique information for the class. I mean we never would have heard about Kalman Levine and we never would have—

KJ: Yeah, on the farm. Slaughterhouse. He had a slaughterhouse! Quite wealthy actually. But it wasn't particularly an agricultural farm, it was like a dairy farm. Slaughterhouse! [laughs] And we used to visit them on the farm every once and a while. [57:31]

KP: Oh! Something else I wanted to ask about really quick—did you ever hear about Center Youth? It was like a youth club—apparently a lot of Jewish kids went to it...

KJ: Not when I was there.

KP: Yeah... I think it was a little bit earlier.

KJ: It must have been earlier. When I was there, Hillel was there. Which is probably the same kind of thing.

KP: Oh, well this was like—it wasn't through Colby. It was kind of like—for younger kids. Like twelve, thirteen.

KJ: Oh, well there wasn't any of those.

KP: Yeah, it was probably a little earlier.

KJ: Yeah, Lester would know all about that.

KP: Yeah, Lester has a very good memory and like, he *knew* what was going on.

KJ: Yeah, well he was all involved all the time. Yeah, Lester was very, very close to my father. Very, very close. It was almost like he was the fifth member of the family. The fifth child in a way.

KP: Lester's dad ran the grocery store... if I remember.

KJ: That's right. In Winslow.

KP: Yeah, I read Lester's transcript and it was really interesting. He really didn't want to work in that grocery store anymore. And it sounded like he met someone through Tau Delt from New York and he visited New York and that was the first time he'd experienced high society life. It was this rich kid from New York. Lester still lives in Waterville, doesn't he?

KJ: Yeah, Oak Knoll Drive. It's right near the college campus actually. [1:00:06]

KP: Oh, wow. But I think he's in Florida right now.

KJ: Yeah, in Naples. They bought a house in Naples. And Lester used to always come over and my father used to always give Lester advice. We're talking about Lester when he was much, much younger. My father was a good advice-giver.

KP: Huh, oh really? Do you remember any advice he gave you?

KJ: *No.* [laughs] Probably didn't follow it, but—[laughs] I remember when Lester was a judge he used to come over and tell my father about his cases and my father would argue with him. About his decisions! [laughs] I do remember that.

KP: Wow, both of your parents sound like they were really strong-willed and I guess it just comes with the generation.

KJ: My mother didn't seem to be. But I mean I guess she was but she didn't seem to be. My father was.

KP: Yeah, your mother sounds like she was really a gentle and compassionate person.

KJ: Yeah, she was.

KP: Would you say she was pretty popular in the community because she was so active?

KJ: Well yeah, I mean everybody really liked my mother a lot. And she was popular in the community although it was all in a very quiet way.—Yeah, I mean they made her woman of the year. I do remember that.

KP: Yeah, I think that's about it. Let's—

KJ: I don't know, I can't think of very much else. I mean as soon as you ask something it opens up a whole new venue and I think "Oh my gosh I haven't thought about that one." [laughs]

KP: Yeah, I'm just trying to think if there's anything else anyone wanted to ask. I mean because this is the last week of our class so we're all kind of wrapping up.

KJ: Well one interesting fact is that George Chessner, who was a Jewish guy in Waterville, lived in the post office! You know, the post office on Main Street. The old post office. Well, he lived there! Yeah, after his wife died and the kids went off and everything—were there any kids. I don't think so. The wife died and he sold the house and went to live in the post office. He bought the post office and lived there. I always thought that was a weird one. [laughs] There was also a woman, when I was a really little kid, named Mrs. Mintz, who sold bread. And she used to come in a bread cart through the streets of Waterville selling her bread. Mrs. Mintz.

KP: You've given me a lot of interesting stuff for the guy who's doing jobs and things like that. Yeah, that's really interesting. Yeah, because all the other stories we hear are about like junk peddlers and—

KJ: Well there were those too. Harry Brisk, who owned the junkyard next to the shul. Next to the synagogue rather.

KP: You don't really know much about the Paikowskys because they were so early. [1:04:19]

KJ: I don't know a lot about like, how they got to Waterville. No. I know how my father's family got to Waterville. I don't know how my mother's family got to Waterville.

KP: Do you know where they were from in Russia?

KJ: Yeah! Yeah, I mean everything was Russia then but since it's become all those little countries—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and even part of Poland. I believe a part of Poland even was a part of Russia then. And my mother's family was from the part right on sort of the border of what is today sort of the border between Russia and Poland.

KP: Yeah, because her name sounds kind of Polish. Paikowsky, yeah. Who knows, yeah.

KJ: Yeah, I remember telling you how we became Jacobsons.

KP: Yeah. Chonikov and Ellis Island. [laughs] Oh yeah, so—I just wanted to let you know this is probably the last interview I'll be able to do with you but we're going to send you this letter. We're making this website about Maine's Jewish history—apparently it's this huge project and people from Portland are working on it and we're going to have this exhibition here at Colby next year. Next Spring. So he's going to send you some release forms because we're going to be making reports off of all these transcripts.

KJ: Oh my God, so anything could be held against me. [laughs]

KP: So I'm going to send you transcripts of our last interview and this one and you can feel free to read over them and make any changes, or—I think that'll probably be sent out next week so just a heads up about that.

KJ: Oh, well that's great!

KP: And it's really been a pleasure interviewing you.

KJ: Yeah, it's a wonderful project. Terrific.

KP: Yeah! It's really exciting.

KJ: You're really good at it too!

KP: I just really enjoy it.

KJ: You managed to draw me out! [laughs]

KP: That's the point—but you're just really easy to interview. I've seen some of the other transcripts and some people really don't want to talk, I mean they just get really nervous and...

KJ: Ah, it's just all past history.

KP: No, but I mean it's been really easy and nice talking to you. I just really want to thank you. You have made things really easy and fun for me too.

KJ: OK, great. Well thank *you*. You're good at this. [laughs]

KP: It's a really fun class.

KJ: I give you an A.

KP: It's something I never—I'm a history major, and this class was a requirement for me, so I can't graduate without it, so I need like two US history classes because I focus on kind of like, world history. So I'm graduating next semester and this was like the only class I could take, but I really lucked out. It's been a really fun class. We get to do these interviews, and—yeah, the final project will a website and we're doing it this week.

KJ: Oh, that's great. Let me know about the website, OK?

KP: Yeah, absolutely. I'll email it to you. We're going to have like individual websites at first so I'll email you the link to mine.

KJ: OK, that's great. Great.

KP: Well, I hope you feel better. Still sounds like you're a little sick.

KJ: Well, I've got a lingering cold.

KP: Yeah, just a cough, yeah? That's no fun. Yeah, it's freezing out here. My roommate is from New Hampshire and she said it was nice out so I went out in a cardigan and it's freezing!

KJ: Well, you're from California! [laughs] There's no such thing as warm here.

KP: Yeah, after four years I still haven't gotten used to it. [laughs] Well, anyway—thank you Ken, and I'll send you that link.

KJ: Terrific, I appreciate it. And tell him I said you were good at it! [laughs]

KP: [laughs] Thanks! I will!

KJ: [laughs]

KP: Well, have a great day.

KJ: You too. [laughs] Bye!