

Interview – Lester Jolovitz
1/10/10

SL: Okay, this is Sam Levine on the phone from Colby College speaking with Lester Jolovitz, who is down in Florida. It is Sunday, January 10, 2009.

LJ: 2010.

SL: 2010, excuse me. Okay, well I'd first like to begin just by asking you if you remember hearing any stories while growing up about how your family immigrated to America and eventually settled in Maine.

LJ: Yes. Unfortunately, Sam, when I was a young man and my parents discussed their life in Russia, I listened out of, perhaps, well because the colonization was ongoing, but whether I retained as much as I should have, or asked enough questions at that early age, I now have some regrets that I didn't pay more attention to what my parents had said. But, just an overview: they came from different villages. My father came from around Poland, a place called Ivia. I'm not sure how to spell it. Well I'm not sure whether it was Poland, you see it kept changing. Russia at one time owned all of... Poland and Lithuania and Estonia and Latvia were all part of the Russian Empire, and after, as they had wars, they would have independences and so forth. So, it all depends what period of time we're speaking about, but generally speaking, my father came from a town called Ivia, which I think now is in Lithu-, I'm not sure, no I think it's now in Belarus. Belarus used to be a province of the Russian Empire, and I'm quite sure Ivia now...and a lot of this information apparently, my brother tells me that he got some of this information on the internet, and I haven't, I plan to, but I haven't delved into it. But anyway, my father as a young man was a student of the Talmud. And, in the town where he lived, called a shtetl...you speak Yiddish at all?

SL: I have some understanding of it. My grandparents spoke Yiddish.

LJ: Alright (3:41). The villages where they lived were called shtetls. And, the shtetl my father grew up in had, apparently, limited resources, and, as he was a student...they called them Yeshiva. Yeshiva is a Jewish word for school, where you only studied the history of the Bible, the Talmud and so forth. And, in order for him to get the education he wanted or needed, it was a custom in those days that the various towns, shtetls, provided what we would call board and room for the students for periods of time, I'm not sure whether it would be two months, a month, or three months, so they could go to these outlying areas and go to school there. And, apparently, they had different levels of schools, so he would go and stay with one family for a while, and maybe move on to another town. So, as a young man, he spent a lot of time away from home. And then, as he became around seventeen or eighteen, he was going to be called up for what we refer to as the draft. It was mandatory that every young man spent, I don't remember the number of years, but some time in the army. So, it was the general understanding amongst the younger people and their parents that at some point they would immigrate to usually the United States. And, my father had met, in fact I think spent some time in the village where my mother came

from. That town was called, in Yiddish, Rumshishok, and I think in English it might be Rumsiskes. That town, during the war, was, from what I gather, it was destroyed. There was a river called the Neman [sp?] River that ran right along the village, and, for whatever reason, they needed water or whatever, and the village was destroyed. So, my mother had an uncle in New York, that of course she had never seen, and when she got to be around seventeen, her parents decided to send her to America, the land of milk and honey, of opportunity and so forth. But, my father was aware of my mother, and so, when they both came to this country at different times, but I think within a year or two of each other, my father learned that my mother was living in New York on the Lower East Side and working there. And, my father had come to people that had immigrated from his village some time before and had established themselves, and it was a custom if you didn't have relatives that you'd go to the people that you had some knowledge of and were friendly to you, and it was generally accepted that they would take people in and get them started. And that's what happened with my father. He came to Waterville, Maine, of all places because there were the Rosenthal family living there, and my father had known, apparently, of them back home. And, they saw that he had no money, so they saw that he had a place to stay and they provided, apparently, enough money for him to rent a horse and wagon, which was then the generally accepted way of making a living. And he went out in the countryside and peddled buying junk or whatever, and that's how he made a living for a few years. And, he was able to save a little money, and, as a result, he was fortunate...or, on the side, my father gave Hebrew lessons to the youngsters who lived in Waterville, because, apparently, they didn't have a Hebrew school. Most of the young children would be taught by their parents, and in my father's case, where he was well-educated, he provided some education, or prepared some of the students...you've heard of Pacy Levine and Ludy Levine?

SL: Yes, I have.

LJ: Levine family (9:44). Well my father taught Ludy Levine, he was the oldest of the boys, prepared him for his Bar Mitzvah. So, after a while my father was able to buy a small grocery store with another Jewish man by the name of Shenson, I think it's S-h-e-n-s-o-n, in Winslow. And, they ran that as partners, and then after a few years, Shenson decided to move to California and... I'm not sure what city, I don't know, I think it was Los Angeles. So Shenson moved to California and my father remained in the grocery business in Winslow. And, I was born...we had an apartment above the store, and I was born in Winslow. I have a sister who is four years older than I am, and she was born when my father and mother first got married. They lived in Waterville at the North End, which was the area where all the Jews lived. It was not a ghetto as such, but they all walked within the synagogue, which was on Kelsey Street, right off Ticonic Street. And, Mr. Hains, through my lifetime, was not an ordained rabbi, but he took on the responsibilities of being a rabbi, and he was the cantor, and he was the butcher, in Yiddish it's called the shochet, and he was the mohel, who took care of the circumcision rites for the young boys. So, everything was in the North End. And, I have a brother, Alvin, who is three years younger, and he was also born in Winslow. So, as I said, the store was on the ground floor, we had an apartment on the second floor, and that's where I, my sister and brother grew up. And, we moved to Waterville much later, in 1957, after my father had retired and given up the store, and I was practicing law. So, let's see, where am I? Life in Winslow, in my case, was uneventful. I attended all of the schools there, of course, and there were three Jewish families at

that time, and they all had grocery stores, small grocery stores. There was a man by the name of Cohen, C-o-h-e-n, Cohen, called him Jimmy, his name was James, everybody called him Jimmy Cohen. And that was on, going up the hill we call Sand Hill in Winslow, right after you cross the bridge from Waterville to Winslow, if you continue straight over across railroad tracks you will come up on top of the hill, and on the left-hand side, just on the crest of the hill, was Mr. Jimmy Cohen's store. And then there was a residence, and then my father's store, and then just next to it there was a driveway and there was another... Shriro, Louis Shriro, S-...not related to the Shiros that were in Waterville, but they called themselves Shriro, S-h-r-i-r-o, and they had a grocery store. So, there were three Jewish families and each one had a grocery business. Jimmy Cohen had two sons, and I think two or three daughters, and they all went to Winslow High School, but they were quite a bit older than I was. So when I got to high school, there was no one, no Jew...my brother would have been last year in junior high school, he was always three or four years behind me, three years behind me. So, as I was saying, I was the only Jewish kid in my high school, or in the grammar schools I was growing up. And, life was simple. There were a mixture of religions in Winslow in those days. Now we're talking, Sam, a long time ago. I graduated Winslow High School in 1935. So, I was born in 1917, which makes me 92 years old right now. And so I have very few contemporaries. And, the Shiros had one son, and he didn't attend school in Winslow. He went to a prep school in Waterville called Coburn Classical Institute, which was more or less a preparatory school for Colby in those days. And it was located on the corner of Elm Street and Park Street in Waterville. I grew up with Bernard, except for school, and, unfortunately, he had a very difficult life; he was not healthy and not well and he died several years ago. He moved to Bangor. Am I rambling?

SL: No, not at all.

LJ: So (17:23), I'm just trying to give you some of the flavor of Winslow. It was mostly French-Canadian, the French had emigrated, came from Canada, because Waterville in those days was industrialized; it had cotton mills, and woolen mills, and of course the paper mill, which the buildings are still there, and the other buildings are still there. Hathaway Shirt had taken over one of the buildings on lower, well if you go down Main Street, you come into the South End, which is Water Street, and that building was renovated and made into a very lovely combination of offices, apartments, and on the first floor there'll be some businesses or whatever, stores. And, that area, as I say, was all commercial. There was a large Polish population, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, all that area, that immigrated to the Waterville area and settled mostly in Winslow, solely because there was employment in the mills, and that's where they went. And when I graduated high school, I think that my class was probably 50 or 60 students, I think there were only three of us, no women, but three of the boys went on to college. And, the remainder, I would say, either went back to the farms they came from, or went into the factories, into the mills. My generation, most of them went to work for the paper company, which was called Hollingsworth & Whitney, which was actually owned by several wealthy people who emigrated from Scotland. Their names were Niverson [sp?], and Sanborn and so forth, and they held high positions. In fact, I can remember when Mr. Niverson, who was one of the owners...the mill, we used to refer to as H&W, Hollingsworth & Whitney, had a clubhouse, which had bowling allies, a library, and a small cafeteria, I remember a barber shop, and very nice grounds, and pool tables and billiard, and every Saturday afternoon the room was cleared, reserved for Mr. Niverson, who

almost reminded me of a sort of royalty. I remember he always dressed with a, very formally, with a shirt with a starch color. I can remember that. And he would be driven by a chauffeur, and he'd come in and spend a couple hours playing billiards, and at that point, there was no rowdiness; there was a lot of respect for Mr. Niverson. Well anyway (21:32), after I graduated high school, in Winslow at my graduation, which was in 1935, I was one of the speakers at commencement, and my subject was the rise of Hitler. And, being Jewish of course, we were very much concerned with the things that were going on in the '30s in Europe, because my grandparents were still alive, and my father had family, had a brother, I think he had one or two brothers there. My father also had a brother in Canton, Ohio, oh he had a brother and a sister, they both immigrated to Canton, Ohio, and they each produced large families that we were very, sort of close to them. And the summer that I graduated high school, I had my license, I was seventeen, and I drove my mother and my sister and my brother from Waterville to Canton, Ohio, which took us forever because there were no turnpikes and all I had to go by was a road map which took us through every small town and every large city. I was stopped, I remember, in Albany, because I looked as though I was thirteen years old. I remember the policeman, after I showed him my driver's license, couldn't get over the fact that I had driven with my mother and a sister and a brother, but I did all the driving. And anyway, we were on the road for probably about four or five days. There were no motels, and I'm still trying to recall where we spent the nights. I think we probably just found homes that had rooms to rent. And my mother was kosher, and there were no McDonalds or anything like that, so if I remember correctly, she had prepared enough food to take care of us on this journey. It was like the old days going west with a horse and buggy. So anyway, we arrived in Canton and spent the summer there. We surprised my aunt, who had, I think, six or seven children. And, for years, after we matured and got to realize that you don't walk in on people for the summer without telling them you're coming, and my cousins, who were about, well all of my cousins were roughly around my age, used to rub it in to tell me that while we were enjoying their beds, they were sleeping on the floor up in the attic. So that's reminiscent of how people took family even then (25:32). So anyway, life and living at home during my high school years and at college, I went to the old campus of course and lived at home, so we were always talking about what was happening to our relatives in Europe, and news was hard to come by, there was no television, there was radio, and we had a local newspaper, my father did subscribe to a couple of Jewish papers that were printed in New York. I remember there was the Forward and the Tog, the Day, and my father read those religiously, but we were, you know naturally, very much concerned with our relatives in Europe, and of course no one, very few people in Maine or anywhere had much knowledge of what was happening in the '30s until war actually broke out and America became involved. Until that time, it was as though...the people in America today are not much concerned with what is happening in Nigeria or Sudan or those places where people are being slaughtered by the thousands and thousands. So, I lived a sort of, all Jews in small communities, lived a dual existence. At home you were living a Jewish life. As I said my parents were kosher and spoke to each other in Yiddish. And, then I went out, once I'm out of the house, I lived according to my gentile friends. And, I tried, and I guess...I never had any real problems when, as kids growing up, if something went wrong or some of my friends' playmates would call, in French, they all spoke French, call me a dirty Jew. They didn't know what they were saying, they didn't know what a Jew was, but that was part of their inheritance from their parents, and so it was not uncommon. So, I can appreciate situations that the African-Americans went through in the South way back. But

anyway (28:37), then, as I said, I went on to college, Colby for four years. I joined the fraternity, it was the Tau Delta Phi fraternity, and as you know they were abolished not too many years ago, actually, probably twenty-five years ago, something like that, or maybe longer. And, there was a Tau Delta Phi house on college, on the new campus, as there were all other fraternities, and they were taken over as dormitories, of course, by the college. And, then when I graduated Colby, I went into, I went to law school, that was in 1939, I entered Boston University Law School, where I spent three years, and then upon graduating in 1942, practically three days or four days after I got back from school, law school, I went into...they had given me deferments for three, four years while I was in law school, and then of course I was drafted immediately and then went into the service, and within a few months went overseas. And I spent all of my time, except for a few days, in England in the medical corps doing administrative work. Here I was, a lawyer, and while I was in basic training in Louisiana, I got a three day pass and flew to Portland, Maine, where I was able to take the bar exam and, fortunately, I passed it. They examined the exam and swore me in, I was sworn in by the Supreme Court, I, and I think there were two or three other fellows in uniform. So, I became a lawyer while I was in uniform, and then, as I say, around the first of January of 1943, I went overseas and spent until September or October of 1945, when I came home. And, I didn't see any active service, I was, as I say, I did administrative work in this large hospital outside of Birmingham (31:54). I had one interesting experience being...I was able to speak French, and one day I got a call from one of the doctor's assistants asking me to come to the ward. He wanted me to serve as a translator; they had a young soldier from Africa who was a soldier for the Free French, at that time. A young man, he was probably twenty-one, and he needed medical attention but he couldn't speak a word of English. So, they asked me to translate the go-between, and the doctor would tell what to say in English, and I would try to translate it into French, which was not very good because I spoke the Canadian French, or the Canuck French, which really bastardized French type of language. And, the doctor said to me, or the officer who happened to be the doctor, if I was French, and I said, "No, I'm Jewish." And at that time, this young man, who was a sad looking person, of course didn't know anybody, was away from family and couldn't speak the language, his face lit up and said, "You Jewish? Me Jewish." So, I was able to speak Yiddish to him. And, actually, at that time my Yiddish was better than my French. And here I'd spent, whatever, half an hour or so trying to be a help, when it would be much easier had I been using Yiddish. Well it was just one of the episodes I recall with fondness because after that I saw this young man several times because he was extremely lonely (34:35). ...

SL: Sure. All of this has been interesting to me. But, I guess I have a few questions based on what you've said so far. I guess I'm curious about growing up...you said you spoke some French. Did you learn it from your friends?

LJ: (36:55) I think I had a year of French in high school, but I never was very good at languages. I didn't take to it. My sister grew up and worked in the store, as I did, after school and on vacations, so I would be fluent in being able to talk to customers and so forth, in the store, and as I grew up in school, in high school, of course then I spoke French with all my French friends, and I spoke English with my French friends. Besides, I think I mentioned, besides French, there were a lot of Polish kids, and of course they spoke...so we all spoke English, and I spoke Yiddish to my parents, the French kids spoke French at home to their parents, because their

parents didn't speak English, because they came over from Canada when they were probably in their twenties and had no education in Maine. And, the Polish kids, and there were quite a few of them, spoke Polish with their parents. When their parents came to the store, to my dad's grocery store, and we had a lot of Polish customers because my mother and father were able to speak fluently in Polish and, whatever, Polish or Russian. So, they transacted all their business in Polish with the customers. Does that help you?

SL: Yes, that helps a lot. And so it sounds like you helped out a lot growing up in the store.

LJ: I beg your pardon.

SL: Sorry. It sounds like you helped out a lot growing up above the store and working in the store on breaks and vacations.

LJ: We all (39:24), yeah, the three children, when we were home, whatever, after school or on Saturdays, and we had a couple of people working, we had employees working with my father. But my mother and the three of us, the children, if they got busy downstairs, we had a signal. My father would rap, knock on one of the pipes that came from the store upstairs, I guess a water pipe or whatever, and that was a signal that somebody should go down and help out, that we were busy. So, we all participated in the store; we didn't have certain hours or whatever. After school the first thing we were supposed to do was study, and if we weren't busy in the store, we went out and played, of course. And, I attended Hebrew school, as such, which was not much of a school; again, it was being taught by the so-called rabbi who was also the butcher and the cantor and everything else. And so, to go from Winslow to Ticonic Street in Waterville where the cheder, it was called cheder, which was the name for the school, Hebrew school, was about a half hour walk, about two and a half miles. And, if we weren't busy in the store, one of the employees would drive me to the cheder, and then I had an uncle who lived right next door, who had a business there, and in most cases he would drive me home. I could get out of cheder, if I went, say, from 4:00 to 5:00, come out of cheder at 5:00, and...would take me home, and there were times when I wouldn't get home until seven o'clock, 'cause he had a...he sold, he manufactured soda pop, something that, what we would now call Coke and Pepsi and that, so he made his own. And, on his way from Waterville to Winslow he would always stop to make a few deliveries, so going to cheder for me was an ordeal. And I did that until I was Bar Mitzvahed, of course. So, I spent a lot of time walking, not only from Colby home, but from cheder home, and going across that Winslow-Waterville bridge in the wintertime...if you want to confirm what I'm saying, when you get through this conversation, take a little walk and walk across the bridge up the hill to the top of the hill, and you'll know what I'm speaking about. Okay? But dress warmly, Sam. And then, also the High Holidays, we didn't ride; so, again, all of us would walk to the shul, which was, as I say, on Kelsey Street on the North End. And that was...well, I guess we didn't think anything of it; when you grow up to do something, it becomes part of your life. And, it was no big deal. As I think about it now, nobody walks. So, anyway, okay?

SL: Okay. You mentioned your mom was kosher, you went to Hebrew school, you observed the High Holidays, but what kinds of other Jewish things did you do growing up? Did you observe any other holidays?

LJ: Well (44:13), as I say, the family, we were orthodox. The family attended all of the holidays in Waterville. And what else did I do? You mean as far as community or being active in Jewish...oh we had B'nai B'rith, I was active in B'nai B'rith and I was president of B'nai B'rith for a couple years when I came back to practice law. When I came back and started to practice law in late '45, I opened an office on Main Street by myself... first I worked for an attorney for about two years, a local attorney, and got some experience, and then I went on my own. And, I became active in organizations, for many reasons because... first I would be asked because organizations were looking for young blood, and for a lawyer it was a good way to get some exposure. So, I joined the Rotary Club, and, well, first it was the Exchange Club, which was a Southern organization... and I'll tell you something about that: after it was formed, I became its either second or third president, at which time I learned that the membership in the Exchange Club, which still functions in Waterville, was open only to white males. And, that, of course, I found unacceptable. And, my parents always taught me to not have, to be, I hate to use the word tolerant, because it's a, I think a misnomer. But anyway, I was upset and I got permission from the Club to go... it happened that the following summer, the Exchange Club was having its national convention in Washington, and I was given permission to go and speak on behalf of the Exchange Club to try to get that restriction removed. But, of course, this is in the early 1950s and...you probably don't remember ever hearing Senator Joe McCarthy, the senator who was a real rebel rouser? Joe McCarthy?

SL: Yeah, I've heard about him, read about him.

LJ: Yeah. Everybody, every person with a foreign name was suspect of being a communist spy, and the country was in a really bad state, and that's when they started the movement for civil rights and all that. So, anyway, I got no place with the Exchange Club, and so when I realized that I was not able to do anything, I resigned. And, thereafter, a couple of years later I joined the Rotary Club, and I think that was in the early '70s. I've been a member of the Rotary Club, now, for about forty years. And, as I said, we had a very vibrant B'nai B'rith group for many years, and I was its president for several. I was president of our shul in the 1960s, I think it was, for several years. And, also there was a Jewish organization called the Jewish National Fund, a branch of the Zionist group raising money to purchase land in Israel. And, this again was in the 1950s and '60s. And, a boyhood friend of my father's from back in Europe was the executive director of the Jewish National Fund for Maine and New Hampshire and Vermont. He came to Waterville, at least yearly, and would stay with us overnight as part of the family. So, his closeness to my father, and knowing me, he used his influence and had me elected president of the Jewish National Fund for the state of Maine for a year or something like that, which was, you know, really not earned by me, but it happened. So, I was involved with the Jewish National Fund for, I think, about a year. And, as I say, I was active in the synagogue, in the temple (50:31). I also was appointed as associate judge of the municipal court in Waterville. In those days, they had municipal courts, which took care of the immediate area, Waterville and, in our case, Oakland and Albion, all of the other small towns around, and in 1965, the municipal courts

were done away with in the state of Maine and the district courts came into being, and which still are, and they encompass a larger area. And, in those days, the judge of the municipal court could also practice law, because we were restricted to mainly civil matters and minor misdemeanors, or minor criminal matters. So, I was the associate judge in the Waterville Municipal Court for sixteen years, from 1950, I think it was 1950 to 1964 or 5. And they were four year appointments, and I was reappointed by two different governors for four terms, which was a great experience for a young lawyer. And, I was one of the founders of what is now known as the Kennebec Behavioral Health Center, which has grown from nothing to where they had treated 12,000 patients last year and have a payroll of a couple of million dollars. So, that was something I always felt good about. There were about a half a dozen of us under the leadership of a psychiatrist and we got that started. I was a director of the local hospital for many years. I was a board director of one of the banks called the Federal Trust Company on Main Street, which is now Bank of America, for several years. And I was a director of the Holocaust Center, which is located in Augusta on property owned by the University of Maine in Augusta. And they just erected a very beautiful building three, four years ago, which I would suggest you go and visit. And so, anyway, from here on in I'm gonna just answer your questions.

SL: Okay. Well, I guess, was it uncommon for a Jewish man to earn the position as a judge of a municipal court in those days?

LJ: No (54:14). Actually, I was the second one who held that position. When I first got appointed, they called that position "Recorder," held over from old English Common Law. And, there was an attorney that I grew up with, fellow by the name of Arthur Levine, who has a son, Robert Levine, practicing law in Portland. And Arthur was a lawyer, and he was appointed as a Recorder for that court about...he was about ten years older than I, so when I started to practice law, he was about ready to retire. So, he probably was older than ten years than I, whatever. But, no, to answer your question, I had no problem.

SL: Okay. What about practicing in town in Waterville, did anyone ever discriminate against receiving your help?

LJ: Oh yeah, you're bound to get into that, you know. I recall, when I was looking to start practice, I was friendly with a young attorney who had been practicing a few years, a gentile, and he told me after several years, we were discussing things, that he asked a very well known, established Waterville merchant in Waterville that he was friendly with for advice, and asked him whether he thought it would be good for his practice if he asked me to join his office. And he was told that he'd be better off not being associated with a Jew. It was strange. For many years, I didn't know about this, but for many years this merchant, this man...well not a merchant, he owned the radio station WTVL in Waterville and, this goes back to the 1950s, and he was always very friendly towards me, very cordial, but he figured that socially you could be friendly, but from a business point-of-view, it might not be good for this other attorney, whose name was Glover, G-l-o-v-e-r, to be associated with Jolovitz & Glover, I mean, Glover & Jolovitz. So that shows you underneath, yes, there was a lot of that, underneath, but on the surface, I adjusted quite well.

SL: Okay. I guess going back to your college years, how did you decide to attend Colby? Was there ever the possibility of you taking over your father's store?

LJ: No (58:15). I think it was sort of accepted, for many reasons. In those days, one did not travel too far from home. Secondly, financially, my first year at Colby, if I recall, I think my first semester was \$300. And I was able to live at home. So, if you stop and think what it's costing you and what it cost me, you can well understand why I...my father was, you know, a simple grocer, had one store, we had three or four people working in the store, but my father made what we would call a sort of comfortable living compared with the people that were our customers, because all of our customers were mill workers, and, you know, in those days a mill worker would make \$25, \$30 a week, and raise a family. So, we were considered by all my friends, classmates...for two reasons: my father was in business and we were Jews, so we were always considered wealthy.

SL: That's interesting that that stereotype existed.

LJ: I'm sorry I didn't get that.

SL: It's just interesting that that stereotype existed, that just being Jewish made you, assumed you to be wealthy.

LJ: That's right.

SL: Was it important to your parents that you attend college? Did your siblings also attend college?

LJ: My brother attended Colby and graduated Colby. My sister went to a business school, secretarial work, where she learned typing. As I say, in my high school graduating class there were only three men who went on to college. And, in my law school, I think my first year, there were three girls, three females, in my law school, my first class. Can you believe that? Now, they tell me that the women exceed the men in law school.

SL: Wow, I didn't know that.

LJ: Yeah, I read that not too long ago, that the women, especially in law school, exceed the men.

SL: So, it was never suggested that you would take over your father's business? You were always going to go to college?

LJ: First of all (1:01:57), I hated the business. From an early age, I decided this is not for me. And, I always, I don't know why, I just knew that I would not end up working in my father's store, or go into the mill, as 99% of my friends did, go into the factory. I always had an idea there was more to life, there was something out there that I was not quite aware of, and I decided to go to law school. I knew I wanted to get out of Waterville at that point, after I got out of Colby, because all of my friends at Colby...as I say, I joined the Jewish fraternity and I met

some very nice boys, and most of them were very very good students, and some came from very wealthy homes, from nice areas in New York and in Massachusetts, and during the Christmas vacation, one of my friends lived in New York, whose father was on Wall Street, and he invited me to come spend some time with him at his home. And, I can remember my impression was driving into...they lived out on Long Island, and driving into the city one morning with my friend, Dick, in his father's chauffeured automobile. The chauffeur was taking, his name was Franklin, Mr. Franklin, to his office on Wall Street, and we got a ride into the city, where my friend and I just spent the day. But, for me to see...oh and this family had a live-in maid, an African-American lady, and the driver was also African-American, and I saw there was more to life than, hah, Waterville. And, also what influenced me with law school, in particular: one summer, I think it was my junior year, a friend of mine from Newton, Mass...where are you from?

SL: I'm from New Haven.

LJ: Oh okay. Well, you've heard of Newton, Mass and Brookline?

SL: Yes.

LJ: 'Cause that's, especially years ago, it was a very up-and-coming area and I had a friend, whose father was very successful and had a factory, and they also had a summer camp in one of the Belgrade Lakes, and one summer he invited me over for a day. And, at that time his father had a friend of his and his friend's wife visiting, and this person that was visiting was a young attorney, who was at that time working in the DA's office in Boston, District Attorney's office in Boston. And, I was very much impressed with him; he was well-dressed, he spoke beautifully and he had a very pretty wife, and this all impressed me. And, he took a little interest in me for that one day we were there and asked me what I planned to do when I finished my last year at Colby, and I told him I wasn't sure. And he suggested that until I decided what I actually wanted to do, that maybe going out to the city and getting a legal education would be wise, even if I decided I didn't want to practice law. And, he sort of planted the seed, and then I got in touch with a local...actually, there was a French fellow, who was practicing law in Waterville, he was about ten years older than I, that I knew as, because his parents and he lived across the street from my father's store, so we knew the family very well. And, I remember asking him if I could have an interview with him. This was when I was still in college, and I went up to his office, and he had a lovely office which was very impressive. And, he suggested that I go to law school. So, apparently, that's what...but I had no relatives or my family had no idea about me being a lawyer.

SL: Okay. I don't want to keep you too much longer, but I guess I have one more question. We, our class, took a tour of Waterville the other day with Robert Hains, who is the grandson of the religious leader that you spoke of.

LJ: Oh (1:08:11), you know Bobby, Robert Hains?

SL: I met him for the first time yesterday.

LJ: What was he doing in Waterville? He lives in Portland.

SL: Yeah, he does. I believe he has some properties up there.

LJ: Oh yeah. He does have property on Main Street, yeah.

SL: Right. But he kind of painted a picture of Main Street fifty years ago that had many Jewish stores and offices.

LJ: Right, right. Yeah, Robert, or I call him Bobby, Robert Levine, uh Hains, his grandfather was the man I'm speaking of.

SL: Right. Exactly.

LJ: Yeah, and Robert's father was a Colby graduate by the name of, we called him Jake, but his name was Jacob Hains. And, let's see, there was Jacob Hains, who was Bobby's father, and then there was a William Hains, who went to Colby, and he ended up as an accountant in Miami. And then there was another Hains, Benjamin Hains, who was my contemporary, and he remained in Waterville, and, in fact, had a butcher shop. And yeah, Robert Hains, of course. In fact, Bobby Hains visited me in Naples several years ago. Did he say he knew me? Or, did you ask him?

SL: I didn't speak with him personally. He kind of spoke to the class as a whole.

LJ: Well, let me tell you a little about Main Street. Years ago, Waterville had probably one of the finest Main Streets in the state, and we had some beautiful stores. There was Levine's store...what year are you in school?

SL: I'm a junior.

LJ: Okay. 'Cause Levine's been closed for several years so you wouldn't know. But at one time, Levine's was the hub of all of the activity, sports activity and political activity, in Waterville. It was a big store, and they had a beautiful, beautiful store, beautiful merchandise, and I would say 100% of the Colby students traded there. They had a Colby section...the two brothers, their father founded the business over a hundred years ago, and then when their father passed away, the two boys took over, and then there was a nephew, Howard Miller, who took over from the boys when they got a little older, retirement age. But, the store was lively, there was always somebody there from the college, and, as I say, this was a hub. And, there was another Jewish store called Sterns' Department Store on the corner of Castonguay Square, where, the back of it, has the City Hall. And, they had a very nice store, in fact, I think they had three or four floors, and that was run by, there were two brothers, one was Herbie Sterns, who was my contemporary, and there was a Fred Sterns, also a brother, who had a very fine clothing store in Skowhegan, and Mr. whatever, I can't think of his first name at the moment. And then, also on Main Street was a very fine men's shop called Dunham's of Maine, which catered to the real upper-class; they had very expensive lines of Hickey Freeman, and suits in those days that would sell for

\$200, which today, for Hickey Freeman, it's \$1000. That was a very fine store. So, Main Street was very lively. And, there were a couple of chain stores run by Jewish managers, and there was a jewelry store owned by a Jewish family by the name of Russakoff. There were two brothers, one had a jewelry store in Skowhegan, and the one in Waterville. They were very fine stores. Oh, and then there were two shoe stores owned by two Jewish brothers, the Hillson brothers, each across the street from each other. One was called Specialty Shoe, and the other was Gallert Shoe Company, shoe store, G-a-l-l-e-r-t. ...

SL: Well, the strong Jewish presence on Main Street just fascinates me.

LJ: Yeah, and there were a few more minor stores. I had an uncle who had a beer outlet. I had two uncles in Waterville, one came over much later just before the war broke out, and my mother and my other uncle put him in business. And, there were three or four that were...there was a Jewish shoemaker, a cobbler, and another one had a small restaurant. So, yes, there was a large presence.

SL: Yeah, it just seems like there was a very strong Jewish community in Waterville at that time, much different from what it is now.

LJ: Yes, you're right.

SL: Okay, well, I don't think I really have many more questions. I don't know if there is anything else you wanted to touch upon.

LJ: Well, I could go into my other activities as a lawyer, because I know you're interested mainly on how my being Jewish affected me, or I being Jewish affected the community. Is that right?

SL: Yes.

...

LJ: There's always, let me tell you, Sam, there's always a reason for people doing something, always a reason. Very seldom is anything done purely out of, well whatever, friendship or...it's usually done for a reason. Anyway, if I've helped you, I'm glad. If you have any other questions during the night, don't call me. Wait 'til morning.

SL: Okay, yeah this has been very helpful. And I just might be contacting you again if I have any more questions.

LJ: Okay, I'd be glad to help.

SL: Yup. Alright, thank you Mr. Jolovitz.

Follow-up
1/21/10

SL: Today is Thursday, January 21, 2010. This is Sam Levine from Colby College in Waterville, Maine, calling Lester Jolovitz at his home in Naples, Florida. So, could you just tell me a little bit more about your experiences growing up? Last time you talked a lot about your father's grocery store, but I want to know a little bit more about memories that you have of your mother.

LJ: Okay. As I say, we lived in an apartment above the store, so we were all involved in the day-to-day activities in the store, and especially my mother. She took care of the house and everything – we didn't have any help, any maids – and besides that was very active in the store. My mother was a very, very hard worker. I don't recall my mother going to sleep before any of the family. She was always up doing something. In those days, nothing was thrown away. You had use for everything. If my socks started to wear thin around the heel, she would darn them. I have a sister, and she would make a lot of my sister's clothes. And, in the early days, laundry was by hand. And, to heat the house, this is again in my early youth, was by coal in the kitchen stove, and then we had a stove in the living room on the other end of the house. You had to bring the coal up from the basement, so you'd go from the basement to the first level, which was the store, to the third-floor apartment. My mother didn't do that, but she had to keep the fire going. Then, later, we had an oil stove. We had to bring oil up from the first floor. As I say, my mother did... cooking in those days was from scratch, and the custom was to have the big meal at noontime. And, my father liked to have a large meal, and we had usually the main meal, which would be mostly some kind of meat product. And so, my mother would have to spend all morning cooking and then cleaning the house, making the beds, sewing and whatever. My mother had a sewing machine and that was being used constantly. In fact, when my mother first came over from Europe, she worked in New York on the Lower East Side making buttonholes in shirts in a so-called sweatshop. So, as I recall, my mother, she always was busy doing something or working. She was... in Yiddish there's an expression, a *balebuste*. That was a complement, a very good homemaker. And, the kids, myself, my brother and my sister, were always neatly dressed. And, let's see. My mother was very charitable. She had a great sense of humor, and she and I, we'd banter around a lot. She knew exactly what I was thinking. Growing up was wonderful with parents... my father was a hard-working man, good father, and a little strict, disciplined. My mother always tried to protect us. As I say, growing up in a nice home where charity was always important. What else can I tell you? Does that do it? (5:33)

SL: Yeah, that's wonderful. That sounds like a great home to grow up in.

LJ: And, studies were paramount. When we came home from school, first thing we had to do was our homework, and then you could go out and play if you didn't have to go to the store and work. So, priorities were school, education, and then work together. Growing up we never got

paid for doing anything in the store. We all shared, and if I needed any money, or my brother or my sister, the custom was... we had a cash register in the store, and, I'll always remember this, we were told go and take what we needed and just make notations so that when my father did the accounting at night, it would come out even. So, if I needed 50 cents or 25 cents, I would take it and write it down. So, we were brought up to trust each other. Sundays in the summertime was the day when we usually went to a local beach where a lot of the Jewish people went on North Pond, called Smithfield, it's out in Oakland. And, my mother would prepare sandwiches. The daily ritual would be that she'd make donuts, and by the time we got to Smithfield, most of the donuts were already gone. I have fond memories of that, of our youth.

SL: Okay, thank you.

LJ: And, our famous sandwich on the Sunday afternoon was rye bread and canned salmon in the sandwiches, canned salmon salad, sort of, in rye bread. And that was the standard meal for picnicking.

SL: It sounds pretty delicious.

LJ: Pardon.

SL: That sounds good.

LJ: It was good.

SL: And those donuts sound good.

LJ: And also, I don't know whether I mentioned this to you, but in the early days when I was just 10 years old, my father had a, what we used to call, a Model T Ford. Did you ever hear that word before?

SL: Oh of course.

LJ: And, you had to crank it from the front, from outside, to start it. And, I remember going to the beach on Sunday, and in Oakland, as you leave Oakland going towards Smithfield, I think its Oak Street, there's a long hill. It's probably almost a mile long, and in those days, it appeared very steep. I had a friend, about my age, who was very, very heavy, very obese, so the five of us would get in the car, and, invariably, we got to the hill on Oak Street. The Model T couldn't make it, so we'd all get out except my father and mother and walk up the hill, and then we'd get back in the car on top of the hill. So every time I drive up Oak Street in Oakland, I always think of the difference between the modern-day automobiles and what I grew up with. So, that always is in my mind, the difference that I've seen in a lifetime. Alright, what else? (10:25)

SL: Could you tell me a little bit about your involvement in Tau Delta Phi?

LJ: My what?

SL: What it was like to be a member of Tau Delta Phi.

LJ: Oh, well, it was, as you know, a Jewish fraternity. Of course, fraternities very early were gung-ho and restricted, and each fraternity usually was known for its members and what it accomplished. The Tau Delta Phi was usually known for its scholarship. It always was top amongst the fraternities. Yes, some of the other fraternities such as the Dekes were known for their athletes and so forth. I forget, there were probably six or seven fraternities, all on campus. And, fraternities were very strong. People lived there and ate there. I didn't because I lived at home and ate at home. But, I spent a lot of time at the fraternity studying and socializing. In those days it was not always easy for a Jewish boy to get a date, because there were only probably maybe half a dozen Jewish girls on campus. A lot of the gentile girls, although very friendly, but frowned upon becoming more than just friends. So, getting a date for a dance at the college sometimes was difficult. Things have changed, eh? (12:32)

SL: Yeah. It's a different world.

LJ: Yeah, you just said it all, Sam.

SL: Yeah. Can you tell me anything about Jewish Colby students from away and what it was like for them at Colby? What was their relationship to the Waterville Jewish community?

LJ: Well, as probably now, there were some of the Jewish students were religious and holidays they would attend our synagogue. I had especially one close friend from Revere, Massachusetts, who was religious, and he'd spend holidays, have food with us at our home. I think, yes, I can say that I think on the whole the Jewish boys enjoyed Colby. It was a new experience being in a small community. And, I think they learned a lot. Of course, the college was small. The enrollment was probably four, five hundred in all, if that many, so you knew everybody intimately. You knew the professors. I think they enjoyed the town. The town was small, so they would always [?] favorite hangouts. We had a diner that was well-known for its hamburgers, on Main Street, called Park's Diner, which was open 24 hours a day, and that was a hangout for the students. We had dances, the city, public dances, and the fraternities boys would participate and meet a lot of the town girls. They called them "townies," mostly disrespectfully. Some of the boys from the larger areas, especially from the Manhattan, New York area, felt a little superior to the townspeople. I had a Maine accent, probably still do, and they would kid me a lot about my pronunciation, to the point where I became very sensitive and tried to improve my grammar. I remember that very well. Okay?

SL: Okay. Would you say, though, that maybe these Jewish students from away stood out more, though, because they were not from the local area?

LJ: Oh, definitely. Oh yes, definitely. Especially the way they spoke, and I think they dressed a little more formally than some of the locals. And several of the boys were, in those days by our standards then, were what we call, loosely, wealthy. And, after their first year, especially their junior and senior year, several had automobiles of a rather low vintage and so forth. But, they

had transportation, which was a big deal. And after, when I was in college, we had a fairly decent automobile which I was able to use on occasion, and, needless to say, when I was able to have the automobile, I was quite popular. (17:15)

SL: On the subject of the relative wealth of those students from away, I remember from our first conversation, you recalled spending vacations in New York with your friends, I think you said the Franklins.

LJ: That's right.

SL: And you also said that at the end of your time at Colby that you were ready to get out of Waterville. Is that correct?

LJ: Yes.

SL: I want to know a little bit more about why you ended up returning to Waterville. What changed your mind?

LJ: Well, when I say I wanted to get out of Waterville, because Waterville at that time didn't offer very much. Either I'd go to my dad's grocery store or go into the mill, the factories, which were predominant in Waterville. There were cotton mills and woolen mills and [pulp] mills and all kind of factories. And this is where most of my high school friends ended up. And somehow, my parents instilled in me and my brother that there was more to... well, it was generally understood we'd go to college. I don't think there's any question about that. And once I got in college and realized there was a big world outside because of the friends I made from away, I was determined to improve myself. So, I went to law school, and then from law school I went right into the army and was gone for three years. So, after being away three years in law school and three years in the army, and I had passed the Maine bar, the only sensible thing for me to do was to practice in Maine. Of course, I could have chosen Portland or some other city, but again, I came out of the army, I didn't have any money, so I naturally stayed with my folks. And I knew people in Waterville, my family knew people in Waterville, and it was a natural progression to stay where you're known. And that's what I did.

SL: And, after that, once you established yourself, did you ever consider moving anywhere else?

LJ: Not really, no. No, I built up a nice practice, and I enjoyed the practice a lot. After a few years I acquired a partner and we got along very well. And, it was a nice experience. (20:28)

SL: Okay. I guess another aspect of your life in Waterville was your large involvement in civic organizations and Jewish organizations. And last time we spoke, you also said that getting involved in such things was a good way for a young lawyer to get exposure.

LJ: Right.

SL: But, just from talking to you last time, it seems like you really took those organizations seriously, and it was something to feel good about.

LJ: I did. You're right.

SL: Could you tell me...

LJ: And it's continued to this day.

SL: Right.

LJ: I'm active...did I mention Camp Tracy, the Harold Alford Youth Center?

SL: No. No, you didn't.

LJ: Okay. Harold Alford Youth Center on North Street, you must have gone by it, it's a beautiful building. You know which one I'm talking about?

SL: Yes, of course.

LJ: I've been active in that for...I became a member of the board of directors of the YMCA in the middle '50s when it was just a small organization and in the small office. And finally, that grew, and I belong to the Boys Club, I was on the board for Boys Club. And finally, not too many years ago, they merged at the behest of...you know about Harold Alford.

SL: Yes.

LJ: At his behest, the two organizations merged, and we have probably one of the finest buildings in the country when it comes to Boys and Girls Club and the Y. And, I think I mentioned this to you, back in the middle '50s, some property out on McGraw Pond in Oakland was bequeathed to the local YMCA that was a shore property. I recall going out there with the executive director, a fellow by the name of George Keller, and another Waterville man, Richard Hughes, and going out there to visit the property that was just given to the club, to the organization. And, in order to get there from the main road, we had to cut the brush and the executive director had some machetes with him. So, the three of us used the machetes to cut our way to the waterfront, which probably took us an hour to go maybe an eighth of a mile. And that was an experience. I had just come out of the office. I was wearing a suit and a tie and shirt and so forth. So anyway, I have been known now as one of the founders of Camp Tracy, which has grown to a camp for young kids, especially those that can't afford going to camp. We have all during the course of the summer, I think they have about two thousand over the period, for two week periods, that go there. It's a beautiful camp. It has all kinds of activities and... anyway, one of the spots is a theater, and it's named the Jolovitz Outdoor Theater, that my wife and I donated. In fact, that was several years ago, and just this past year we added to the building and made it into a very nice building that we're looking forward to utilizing it in many ways for the arts and so forth, and we're all enthused about it.

SL: So, what does it mean to you to be involved in these organizations?

LJ: It's a good feeling.

SL: And, is it the same for Jewish and non-Jewish organizations?

LJ: Yes.

SL: Well, you're obviously a very generous man.

LJ: Well, I've been blessed that I've been able to do these things. And, as I say, I grew up in a family that believed in charity. I'm actively involved in the Holocaust Center in Augusta. A new building was built there about five, six years ago on the campus of the University of Maine in Augusta, which is a very beautiful building, and my wife and I donated for that. (26:44)

SL: Okay. One final thing, Lester: could you tell me a little bit about your own sense of your Jewish identity?

LJ: Say that again.

SL: Could you tell me about your own sense of a Jewish identity?

LJ: My...I didn't get that. Friends you say?

SL: Your sense of your Jewish identity.

LJ: Oh, my sense.

SL: Yes.

LJ: Well, I'm not sure...I guess you want to know whether I'm proud of being a Jew?

SL: Yeah.

LJ: Yes, I am. The name Jolovitz tells it as it is.

SL: Right. Do you feel that your parents played a big role in making you feel that way?

LJ: Yes. Yes, I'm sure. I think I mentioned when I was in high school, I was the only Jewish boy in high school. And, you know, it was well known. On Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, I didn't go to class. At my graduation, I was one of the speakers, and my topic was the rise of Hitlerism. And, I know I mentioned this to you that most of my, not most, I guess all of my relatives in Europe were part of the solution that Hitler was looking for.

SL: Right. Okay. Well, that's all I have, Lester.

LJ: Yeah. Take it easy on my quotation marks being a benefactor, okay?

SL: Okay, I will.

LJ: Thank you, Sam.

SL: Yup, thank you. And I hope your back feels better.

LJ: Thank you, thank you. Bye. (29:21)