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Interview with Louis Hanson

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Interview with Mrs. Louis Hanson on November 17, 1998 at her home in Mount Vernon, Ohio, as conducted by Christina LeStage

L= Mrs. Louis Hanson

C= Christina LeStage

B= Mr. Burton Hanson

C: Um, you speak into that part. For starters, I'll just label the tape.

L: Sure.

C: This is Monday, November 16th, and we are in Mrs. Louis Hanson's home, in Mt. Vernon and it's seven o'clock in the evening and I am Christina LeStage conducting the interview. Um, for starters, where did you grow up and when did you come to Mt. Vernon?

L: I grew up in Wheeling, West Virginia.

C: OK.

L: And then, my hus--that's where I lived until I went off to college. And my husband and I moved here to Mt. Vernon 25 years ago.

C: Oh. Where did you go to college?

L: I went to undergraduate school at Morgantown, West Virginia, West Virginia University, and then I met my husband there, we taught in Petersburg, West Virginia, for several years. Then we went to Ohio State for graduate school, working on a Master's and almost, you know, I'm an ABD, almost my dissertation. I didn't write my dissertation at Ohio State, and then we moved up here.

C: OK. And why did you move up to Mount Vernon?

L: Um. My husband and I were in graduate school, and Burt knew even then that he was not going to ever get his Ph.D. So we needed a place within commuting distance to Ohio State because I still THOUGHT I was gonna write my dissertation. We both had done our orals, but we still had the dissertation to write. So I still I thought I was gonna write a dissertation, so he needed a guidance counseling job and I needed to be within commuting distance to Ohio State. So, we kind-of drew a circle around Ohio State and he started interviewing for, um, jobs as a guidance counselor, and this is where he got the job, so, the idea was that I was gonna commute then to Ohio State and finish my, ah, write my dissertation.

C: OK. And then you subsequently interviewed for jobs in Mt. Vernon? Or?

L: OK. Ah, what happened. Well, it's kind of interesting. Um, we bought the house up here in June. In July of that year, my father died. And, um, I found that I really couldn't work on a

dissertation. I tried from July 'til about September, but I used to be driving to Ohio State crying. I couldn't, I couldn't deal with it. I just couldn't do it all. So, about December of that year, I thought, I'll just look around, see if there's a job because I'm not getting anything done, crying on, you know, on the way to, on 71. I mean, I'm not doing anything. So I decided I'd try to see if I could find a teaching job, and a job came open in Centerburg, at the first of the new school year in January. So I started teaching in Centerburg then.

C: Oh, OK. I see. Um, so, were you raised in a Jewish family?

L: Yeah. My parents were Jewish?

C: Would you say they were conservative Jew, or?

L: We were raised, we belonged to the conservative synagogue in Wheeling. My parents really, however, were just High Holy Day type of--I mean, we went to the synagogue on High Holy Days. I attended Sunday school, ah, confirmation. When I was growing up, girls really were not bat mitzvah. That just, that's a very reform tradition that then has spread out so, there was no bat mitzvah for girls at that time. Ah, so yes, we were conservative. Were we terribly observant? No.

C: No. Um, so, but would you say it was important to your family? Or...?

L: That sounds like a really simple question, and it's not. Um, there was certainly never any doubt that we were Jewish and we'd be raised Jewish, but simply because of my parents growing up during the Depression, very, very poor, ah, being children of Russian immigrants as opposed to German immigrants who had already settled in Wheeling, my parents were not terribly, it was not...it was...we were Jewish but it wasn't terribly important for them at all that there was any real Friday night observance. I mean, we certainly would never celebrate Christmas or anything like that, but we also never lit Friday night candles. As I said, we went to schol (sp?) really just for the High Holy Days, and then we girls went during Sunday school. So, yes, it was important, but no, the observance wasn't important to us.

C: OK, so would you say for your parents was it an ethnic identity, too? Or were they more religious?

L: Well, talking like that, it would be ethnic. Did my parents THINK of it like that?

C: Yeah.

L: No, I don't think so at all. I don't think that was ever the conversation. The question probably should be, "How did my parents feel about being Jews?" And I think my parents were a little embarrassed about it. Ah, just because they grew up in a fairly small community and as I said, there was just a lot of garbage they carried around being children of immigrants and others

and poor and all this. So were they terribly proud of it? No. I can remember my mother once saying to me rather surprised, "You're so proud of it! You let everyone know you're Jewish!" and I think that was very odd for my mother. My father, I think, was a little different. So, um, as I said, they never separated it. They certainly would never convert or anything like that, but the religion part of it...it was just not necessary to demonstrate it.

C: So, what would you say, for you growing up? Did you say you had...were you?

L: Um, I need to know more of the question. Was I?

C: OK. Oh, um, I was gonna say, like, um, for you, you said you had a bit of a conflict with your mother?

L: No, it wasn't a conflict. It was just two different ways of looking at it. And I think she, at one point, as an ad--when we were both adults, was a little surprised at how proud I was of being Jewish.

C: So is that how you would say you look at it? You're proud and it's...

L: Yeah, yeah, very much so. I mean, it's certainly nothing that I mean, yeah, well, let me get back to my parents for a second.

C: OK.

L: The question...my parents...I mean, it was very important for my parents that we all marry Jewish men. We didn't. We didn't. So there were conflicts there. OK? So, that kind-of, you know, was where they stood with it. Um, I grew up knowing I was Jewish, being very, you know, very proud of it. I mean, I liked being Jewish. If for nothing else, I can remember as a kid it kind-of set me apart, and I thought that was kind-of interesting. I liked it, you know. I enjoyed it, you know.

C: OK. So, is your husband Jewish?

L: No. My husband is not Jewish.

C: So, um, and you said you had a daughter?

L: Yes.

C: Do you have any other children?

L: No.

C: OK, so was that, how do you deal with that in your family?

L: OK. My family as in presently?

C: Yeah, your present family.

L: OK. Um, when I got pregnant, one of the things we talked about was I said any child, I mean, the child has, I want the child to be raised Jewish. Um, Burt agreed readily because he said, "Well, you're gonna be the one doing all that anyway." I mean, you're gonna be the one, probab--because I knew--he said, "You're gonna be the one giving the religious instruction." So I said, "The child's going to be Jewish." When we knew she was, when it was a girl, you know, that even set it more because in our faith, she'd be Jewish anyway because I am. I mean, it goes through the female line. So, even if she were raised Christian, she'd still be Jewish in the eyes of Israel or whoever you want to ask. So anyway, I knew she'd be raised Jewish. I think...and so that then caused me to become more observant than I ever had been before, because I was raising her in this town, with a non-Jewish husband. So, you know, then, as soon as she got old enough, you know, we started going to services every Friday night up at Kenyon. That's when we had, you know, really good services up there, you know, and I'd do the candles every Friday night. So, I became much more observant so that she could grow up in a household that did observe it. And, you know, it was fine with him.

C: So, your parents eventually got over the...

L: Oh! My parents um...yeah, I mean, by the time my father died, and he died twenty-five years ago, in fact, when we bought the house, I mean there was at that point, I mean, there was just some surprise when, some...Hi! This is my husband, Burt.

C: Hi.

B: Hi-ya.

C: Nice to meet you.

L: This is...

C: Christina.

B: Christina!

L: Um, the conflict between my father and Burt probably would-of lasted, what do you think, about a year, Burt?

B: Conflict?

L: The, the shock that Burt wasn't Jewish and the fear that my father had that if you...my father's fear was that if you were Jewish and you married a gentile was the gentile eventually would...

B: ...become an alcoholic.

L: Become an alcoholic and when...

B: ...and not take care of you.

L: And that...And that at some point, probably in the heat of a battle, that some point in an argument or something, you know, that the non-Jewish spouse would throw the Jewishness up to you. You know, these are things that happened to my father's sister, who married a gentile. So, that took my father maybe a year or so to get over. But, you know, by the time of my father's death, he knew how happy I was. Rachel hadn't been born yet, so I mean, there was none of that. My mother adored Burt from the get-go. She just thought he was wonderful. So there was no problem with her.

C: Oh, good. OK. So, um, yeah, you've already mentioned a little bit about growing up in this town, Mount Vernon. What would you say the Jewish community is like in Mount Vernon?

L: Now?

C: Or was. I mean, you've been here twenty-five years, so I'm sure it's changed.

L: Yeah, even in twenty-five years, no really, twenty-five years ago when we got here it was like it is now. The big Jewish, the Jewish community when it once existed was here in the forties. They, you know, there were a lot of, um, and this is what people have told me, there were a lot of, um, the stores downtown were owned by Jews, you know, I mean, that's when I think you had a community. By the time I got here, once again, as I said, twenty-five years ago, I knew, I fairly quickly learned every Jewish family in town and there were about two of us. So, any Jewish community that Mount Vernon had when we got here was what I found up at Kenyon, by going up there. Um, you know, basically, we moved here and I needed to find a place so I could say ah, Kaddish for my father because he had just died. I wanted to find a place to, you know, go pray and have services, and I heard they were up there, and that was at the time when they were having them in the Episcopalian Church, you know. So, no, even when I got here the Jewish community was gone. And as I said, people told me it had been here in the forties, but I didn't see it.

C: OK. And so you said the Kenyon, you used Kenyon as your main outlet.

L: Right. Right.

C: Was there a rabbi ever up at Kenyon?

L: Um, not when I got there. Ah, for a brief period when Lenny, Laurie Lefkowitz was teaching up there? Her husband was an ordained rabbi. He adopted all of us, and took us, and he was wonderful. It was THE BEST time. And it was also the time that I was raising Rachel, so that was great. We had great services. He's now rabbi at King of Prussia, outside of Philadelphia. And, um, I mean, it was great. We had wonderful services every Friday night. We had bar mitzvahs. We had bat mitzvahs. It was great. It was the best you could of ever had in this community, because of Lenny. Because he was up there.

C: So, would you say other people from Mt. Vernon, any other families went there, too? Or...?

L: Um, every...at Friday night services there was another couple about my parents' generation that would always show up for High Holy Days services. I can't remember the last name either. They always came because they needed to say Kaddish for a grandchild who had died...she was a secretary at one of the churches in town, but I can't remember their name. Um, and that was really it. That was really it. Um, you know, Mrs. Zelkowitz was Jewish, she never, she would always go back to Columbus. Like I knew the people that brother and sister act, who built the condos...anyhow...I mean, they were Jewish. They never showed up. So really, there wasn't anybody else who ever would go up there. I can still remember my shock once taking Rachel to a pediatrician in town, and there was somebody else in the waiting room and I looked at her and I realized she was wearing a hi (sp) around her neck. And it was kind-of like, "Oh my G--" I mean, it was like, "Who are you?" You know, so I mean, you know, I accosted her and they were here for like a year, and they owned the Kenyon...not the Kenyon Inn but the restaurant. What's that little ah...

C: The Village Inn?

L: The Village Inn. They owned that for a year, and then they moved on.

C: Interesting.

L: Right. So it was kind-of like, I used to tell Burt I'd kind-of give them the hi (sp) sign. Anybody, people's whose name or I saw a star of David, I really would accost people. "Are you really Jewish?" "No, it's just a chain I'm wearing around my neck," or something. So, here in town there's really not been a community since I've been here.

C: OK. How did you always feel about that?

L: I've always said that I love Mount Vernon. It would have been very hard had Kenyon not been here to give me something to gravitate to. I mean, if Kenyon hadn't been here, I would of really had to, really driven into Columbus and stuff, and I just didn't want to have to do that as often as a lot of people do now, or drive into New Albany or something like that. But it gave me a community, and luckily, at a time when I needed it, we had the very best...I mean, we had

Lenny here, we had families that just bonded together and it was wonderful. But had Kenyon not been here it would have been really difficult.

C: Wow. I didn't realize that.

L: Yeah. Yeah. There was nothing here, in Mount Vernon.

C: Are you still active up at Kenyon?

L: No. When Lenny...I don't know if you know everything that happened. There was some real political, kind-of, stuff that happened up there. And when Lenny left, the group kind-of split into factions before, and when Lenny left it kind-of just, whoa, fell apart. And it's never been back together again. Some people have gone to New Albany. You know, others have gone into Columbus. Other people just say, "Ah, I can't, I just can't be around some of these other people." I mean, it, it just really split what community there was in half. I mean, he was such a dynamic, strong leader, and so brilliant and great that his lost, everything just kind-of fell apart. And then there was another Jewish, another family up there, when they emigrated to Columbus...they went to Columbus first and then they emigrated to Israel, and they had been very, you know, active. So when we lost both of those two strong ones it kind-of left all the rest of us here kind-of middling, you know, kind-of rudderless and, you know, and it all, for me at least I think it fell apart. I don't even go to, you know, um, High Holy Day services up there anymore. I'll go into New Albany or someplace.

C: You go to New Albany now?

L: Yeah. Yeah.

C: OK.

L: Just because it's close.

C: Or, I've heard people go to Mansfield, perhaps?

L: Yeah. I've never tried that.

C: I was gonna say, talking a little bit more about the community but on a bit of a different tangent, um, you're a teacher in the public schools, correct? And I was wondering, there's a lot of questions we could, I have about that. But I was wondering, for example, if you've ever...um, well, when they want to bring the Santa, put the Santa Clauses up or have the projects around the holidays. My mom's a second grade teacher. Um, how do you deal with that? What is your take on that?

L: Right. Um, there really have been some changes since, you know, in the twenty-five years

I've been here. For example, at least it's not called a Christmas ah, assembly, at least it's called the Winter Assembly. Ah, where I teach, usually they do the winter, ah, you know, choral thing, they always throw in one Jewish song! So there are 17,000 Christmas carols and "Dradel, Dradel." So I always know that that's kind-of for me, you know? Um, kind-of a long time ago I decided that, I mean, I'd watched that fight be fought be, you know, people up at Kenyon, I mean, people up at Wiggin Street, for the Wiggin Street Elementary, and I kind-of thought that probably wasn't the battle I was going to fight, at least not on a system-wide thing. So, the thing is that, what I do or do not do. When we have a door decorating contest, I'll tell my students, "There are certain things I'm not gonna let you do." You know, "You're not gonna do this, this, and this. It has to be in the spirit of peace or something, it can't be overtly religious." Ah, you know, if I have, I happen to have the winter bulletin board for December. I've got to put it up. Well, I'll make it, you know, for me it will be a non, it probably will just be, you know, peace or something, you know. So, I've tried, I've got my little domain that I have some control in, and in that is where I work. But the other ones, you can't...I mean, it's not worthwhile being the person who got the entire Winter-Christmas Pageant thrown out. I mean, you know, that's not worth it. Um, at all. So, I don't do that. It's just kind-of, "Here's what I can control and here's what I'm...I do."

C: Uh-huh. Um, do you, when you see, like, I've interviewed some kids, and they talked a little bit about that there aren't many Jewish kids and it's hard for them, and that there have been fights, perhaps in school, over that. Um, have you witnessed that yourself, too? Or?

L: No, I haven't witnessed it. I know what my daughter, Rachel, always said, you know. Um, you know, she was still a senior in high school and getting furious at the commencement that they pray in the name of Jesus Christ. I mean, she, she still, you know, it would upset her A LOT. Um, and maybe it did when I was seventeen and eighteen, too. You know, I don't remember. It would upset Rachel A LOT. You know, that they know they're not supposed to be doing this, they know, you know, she'd say, "They know there's supposed to be separation of church and state. Why can't they do it?" Um, I haven't seen, as a teacher looking at, you know, what goes on at the middle school, I haven't seen anything, any fight like that.

B: You mean, physical fights?

C: Oh, just kids teasing each other, you know.

L: Then that certainly would happen.

B: Well, that's the nature of middle school kids anyway, so.

L: Um, I will tell you an incident that happened last year. Um, some of my students came from pre-Algebra, and they came and said, "Oh, we had the best pre-Algebra class." And I said, "What happened?" And they said, "Oh, we talked about God." And it turned out that I think what really had done in there, I think they kind-of, had kind-of begun testifying, you know, and

the teacher, and this all went on with the teacher and everything. And, they, I mean, they were just so hot...a lot of kids were just really pumped up about it. And I listened for a while, and then I said, "I've gotta tell you why I'm really, really uncomfortable with this." And so then I went through a whole thing about how I would of been in the pre-Algebra class with them, had I been in seventh grade, and I wouldn't of wanted to sit, how uncomfortable I would of been to have had to sit in a pre-Algebra class, in a class I thought that I was going into pre-Algebra. And here people and testify and prosthelytize for Jesus. And they said, "Well, you could of left. The teacher gave the opportunity." And I said, "WELL, then I get to sit in the hall, and stuff. You know, OH GOOD." And then, "Why am I in the hall? I'm in the hall because I'm Jewish, not because I cut classes or I didn't do my homework, you know." Stuff like this. So, I told them, and, you know, some of the kids really wanted to tell me why it was, why, you know, why they were accomodating. A couple kids came to me later and said, "When it was going on, I was very uncomfortable about it." I mean, they're Christian. And they said, "I was very uncomfortable, but I certainly wasn't going to get up and leave." You know, just because middle school kids don't get up and leave. You don't draw any attention to yourself. And, one girl, who was very, very, very religious, said to me later, "I understand why what we did was inappropriate, in this situation." Because I said, if it had been at a slumber party or if it had been, you know, where were all gathered, you know, it would have been different. I said, this is school, you know. And, um, and so that's the kind of thing that sometimes I still come across as an adult and, you know, it's more that what some teachers are doing is inappropriate. You know, I mean, I know this is wrong. I know this is not what should be going on in public schools. They should not be prosthelytizing, they should not be testifying. Um, I tend to, uh, pay attention what goes on with the Cross Club, which is, you know, a...The Cross Club. I don't know what they do, but trying to, you know, just make sure that I don't think that they are stepping over any lines that I think are inappropriate. You know, I know that the school is allowed to give them time. I know that teachers aren't supposed to be leading any kind of prayer, it's supposed to be student, you know, initiated. So I kind-of pay a little attention to what's going on there, make sure that I don't think anything's stepping over, you know. But other than that, I don't...as I said, I kind-of pick my battles more with what the teachers are doing, if I find that it's, if I think it's inappropriate or as said, have stepped over the line a little bit.

C: OK. And, I'm sorry, you teach what grade?

L: Well, I teach seventh and eighth grade, language, arts, and social studies.

C: OK. Thank you. What would say, so how would you generally describe, you've been kind of touching on it but, the relationship between the Jewish people here and the larger community? Or, how would you?

L: Well, I'd say a lot of people, I'd say a lot of people, if you'd say you were Jewish, they'd say, "OK, that's nice." Because they think that it's just another kind of Christianity, it's just a little strange. It's like the Seventh Day Adventists. "Well, they don't celebrate Christmas either." You know. So, there's a level of acceptance that's based on not knowing. You know, and that's

OK. When, I know, my students are sometimes surprised when push comes to shove, and some light bulbs go on, and we're studying like, the Hebrews. In our social studies book, you get a chapter on the Hebrews and later on, you get a chapter on Jesus and later on, you get a chapter on, you know, Mohammed and Islam. When, eventually, at some point light bulbs go on and they realize that Hebrews don't accept Jesus as God or anything, they're always kind-of a little shocked. Because to them, you know, when they say God they also mean Jesus, so they think when you talk about God and you say Hebrews, they also mean Jesus. So, because of some ignorance, just ignorance, and because kids are young, you know, it's kind-of like, "Oh, OK. That's nice." You know, there's nothing about it. Um, I don't feel, I don't, unless I've become very blind in my old age, I don't see any kind-of what I call anti-Semitism. I don't see people choosing to be my friend or not be my friend because of anything that...because of who I am. What I do still hear in town and what I call people on, you know, like if somebody would use the expression "To Jew him down," I mean, I, I become, I don't let that go by. You know, I'll tell, tell people, you know, you can't say this. You can't, this isn't....And nine times out of ten, they don't, um, they don't even know what they've said. They don't realize there's any kind of offensive connotation to that. I think you're still with an older generation, a generation ahead of me, you know, would still, kind-of say, "Oh yeah, I had a good Jewish friend, you know, at some point," or "I remember so-and-so. He ran that place downtown. He was, he was Jewish." But I don't, I don't...people I meet and run with and know, I don't see any, any kind of problem. And the other people, I just don't know. I don't come in contact with them.

C: Would you say that the assumption is that you're Christian sometimes? That people just aren't aware? Or..?

L: No. I think a lot, I think, I think, I really think people at school know. I mean, kids, kids know before, you know, I've ever said anything. Usually with me it comes out because I miss the High Holy Days. So there I am at the beginning of the school year and I'm gone, you know, for Roshashana and Yom Kippur. So that's, you know, two days within ten days. So kids will say, you know, "Where were you?" And I'll say, "OK. I had a religious holiday." And they say, "Hm. We didn't get one!" You know? "What's, what's this?"

C: It's not fair!

L: Right! Yeah! And so they'll say, "What's that?" And I'll say, "It's Roshashana, the Jewish New Year." "Are you Jewish?" "Yes, I am." "Oh, OK." So, it usually comes up because kids will ask, at least with me. Then there are always kids who on the second day of school come and say, "Are you Jewish?" "Yes." "Oh, that's nice!" or "Oh, that's neat." So, no, people know. People that I come in contact with, they really know. And my husband probably would say that if they don't, I let them know pretty darn quick. That they better be on their best behavior and not say or do anything, you know, that I don't like. Um, bigger than my little world, I mean, I don't know. I assume, you know, people would just assume that we are Christian. We've got a very Christian surname, so.

B: And a man last summer, who I vaguely know, ah, in, for some reason I got in his pick-up truck with him. He's a lawyer. This guy's a lawyer. He's about my age, maybe a little bit older. And we're going around to look at something, and he says to me, "Oh, by the way, I understand you're one of the chosen."

L: Yeah.

B: And it took me a couple seconds and a couple beat to figure out what he was talking about. And I said, "Well, you mean you think I'm Jewish?" "Yeah." "Well," I said, "I'm not. You may have, you know, you may, somebody may have said that I was Jewish because my wife and daughter are." And so, you know, you got to clarify that. I don't think it was meant as, you know, it wasn't an anti-Semitic remark or anything like that. This guy's fairly well-read and probably was fascinated more than anything else.

L: And I'd say that that's the other thing. That people assume that he is, because they know I am, they know my daughter is, so they are just assuming that he is. So I think that it would go that way. You know, there are always people kind-of surprised. "Oh! You're husband's not Jewish?" "No." So that's the way it goes.

C: Yeah, I was gonna say it doesn't sound like, it sounds like you are saying to me sometimes people are just curious.

L: Oh definitely.

B: Oh yeah.

L: Definitely.

B: Because there's a, you know, there aren't very many Jewish people around here, but there is, if you watch the news, or if you're reasonably well-read, or, ah, if you're reading the Bible, you're oh!

L: And there are a great many, at least in the last twenty-five years, you know, a lot, there's much more acceptance and understanding of the background from which Jesus came, that he was Jewish, that he was raised Jewish, that the Last Supper was a Passover Seder. A lot of the churches in town at Easter time will hold their own Last Supper, which they will re-create the Passover Seder. So there are a lot of people coming out of this now, you know, who see this, and it might be that you really are the first real Jewish person they've ever met, you know. And that at least is what kids tell me. Although, a lot of them also, you know, um, I mean, this year, in the seventh grade there are two Jewish kids. Now, that's a lot. That's a lot in seventh grade. So, you know, they say, we also know Zeva or Hannah, who are Jewish, so they'll probably say, "Well, gee," you know.

B: There probably are as many non-real Jews in the middle school as there are Jews. I mean, people who are of, you know about the Church of the Bloody Hand over on Harcourt Road?

C: Right.

B: Then there's a couple other groups that consider themselves Jewish, who, Louis says they're not, but they consider themselves Jewish. And there's probably as many of those kids in the school as people who are quote-unquote traditionally thought of as Jews. In fact, there's some down here on the next street down.

L: Um-hm. So, you know...

B: They've got the mesozoa (sp) on the door and they wear, they've got um, I mean, they, they almost look Orthodox!

L: Yes, but they think they are Jews. Anyway, there's a running battle with them.

C: Oh, I didn't...

L: It's not a battle. It's just that you can't be Jewish and also accept Jesus. You've got a basic problem there. But they think because Jesus was Jewish they're just, you know, celebrating...

(Change tape sides)

B: ...Dude Conway, he's a city councilman, he knows everybody in town, and I used to sit next to him on city council. And periodically we talk about Jewish things, because he knew that my wife was Jewish. And he would start going on about all the Jewish people that were here when he was growing up. Speaks very positively, you know, about some Jewish merchant in town when they were struggling in the depression gave them stuff. He came from this huge Catholic family and stuff like that. Kind-of an interesting guy. If you can get him going, you know, you will find more names. He'll know every, every Jewish family that's been in Mt. Vernon since probably the nineteen-thirties.

C: That's, yeah, that's where we need the most work. I mean, we've talked to Mrs. Zelkowitz, but she didn't come until 1932? '38? Something like that, and she's not...the community that was in place before that, she's...

L: Right, and as I said, that bit I know nothing about. I mean, absolutely, 'cause as I said, there wasn't a Jewish community.

B: Yeah, but the Epsteins were the only people in town.

L: Yeah, the Epsteins.

B: They are either gone or moved or dead, I'm not sure.

L: Yeah, there was not when I got here.

C: Uh-huh. Yeah, I was gonna say that, we found at Kenyon, the one, I was gonna ask you about, how does it, how do you deal with, well, now you're not going any more, but the fact that people at Kenyon, the problem with Kenyon is that kids and come and leave after four years.

L: Right. Right.

C: Is that a problem for you?

L: Well, when I was up there, my bonding was never with the students, it was with the faculty, and they tend to stay. And so it was adults, with me, adults bonding with, you know, and being with the staff there. And they've all stayed. Um, so, I mean, Rachel, you know, at certain ages would make friends with some of the older kids, you know, who would teach, you know, classes and stuff like that. That, that, that's not there because for several years the permanence was in Lenny the Rabbi and in the adults organizing everything and helping, you know, they really weren't Hillel, but helping who the student leaders were to organize, you know, break fast and stuff like that. So...

B: Has the name Arlene Landers come up yet?

L: That's it. That was it. She and her brother.

B: She and her brother ran a, a, well, early on it was a scrap yard and then it went into a plumbing and then it was a wholesale plumbing. And, ah, she and her brother, developed this place across the street, bought the property and built the houses. They own where the Ford dealership is and several, um, businesses around there. She lives way up north and raises horses. She's kind-of an interesting character.

L: When we got to town, if you had said, you know, "Jewish" people in Mt. Vernon would have known Helen Zelkowitz and the Landers. I mean, those were the people they knew. You know, the Zelkowitzes and the Landers, brother and sister. They were the ones.

C: I was just wondering, about your daughter. Was she confirmed into the church? I mean, bat mitzvahed?

L: No, she wasn't bat mitzvahed. I, I, you know, gave her the option, if she wanted to do it and she said, no, she didn't, so, although, her senior year in high school, about February, she spent February, March, April, May, May, four or five months in Israel. She, um, I sent her to, over there and she finished up her high school senior year in Israel, so the interest kind-of grew.

C: Uh-huh. And you said she took, did she take Hebrew? Or learn Hebrew from other students, you said? Or...?

L: Um, she did some, that wasn't, wasn't...

B: She took it. I don't know whether it took, but she took it.

L: That wasn't great. It wasn't great. She took it in Israel. Ah, she says, I think, she's probably at the point where, given, given, you know, the prayer book, she can decode, not comprehend, but I don't think anybody can comprehend. But she does decode.

C: Oh, OK. Yeah, that was just one other area.

L: Yeah.

C: Um, I don't know. Did you ever know Professor Rutkoff?

L: Oh sure. Peter.

C: Yeah, because he was talking about how...

L: Oh, his kids!

C: Exactly.

L: Josh and Rebecca. They were the first bar mitzvah, bar and bat mitzvah here. They were wonderful. They just set a standard by which everyone else had to measure up. They were excellent, yeah. Josh started it all, and they were wonderful! And then we went through the Fenigsteins, and, ah, Andrew Sharp. Jimmy didn't have one. Yeah, I mean, I don't know if you knew Peter's wife, Jane, but Jane was wonderful. And, I mean, yeah, they just had wonderful bar mitzvahs. So did the Fenigsteins. They gave great bar mitzvahs. In fact, I remember being here when the Fenigsteins' last child was born, and getting a frantic phone call, I mean, trying to get enough people to have a bris. You know, and just trying to round up enough people so that um, who was the youngest? Not Steven. Is it Steven? I don't know. Anyway, just trying to have enough, you know, to get enough so you can have a bris and stuff like that. Yeah. Oh yeah, yup. Rutkoffs...was wonderful. Really great. Really wonderful.

B: Mrs. Lander has SHALOM on her license plate. Did you ever see it? She drives a Ford Bronco.

C: Oh, that's wonderful.

B: Who is that, the lady that runs the mental health?

L: Cleighton.

B: Cleighton.

L: She just married a, your friend.

B: I don't say married. Do you think they're married?

L: Yes. I know they're married.

B: She just married a fellow who...oh, gosh, what's his name...

L: It'll come to me. I'll get it.

B: It'll come to me, too. But he's a long-time Kenyon guy. He's in development or the summer school program. Lou Troulevin. He's not Jewish, but she is.

L: Yeah, Cleighton. I forgot about her.

B: They came here, her husband's a doctor, to work at the Developmental Center. Her husband subsequently became seriously mentally ill, and I think he's in a home someplace now, and they're divorced or something. I'm not sure. I remember her kid in school.

L: But I think that's what living in Mt.Vernon is. You really could, you knew who the other, or you know who the other Jewish families are. I mean, you know, OK, one, two, you've got five here. That, that there they are, in Mount Vernon itself. That's not counting, you know, the Kenyon connection. But I mean, you would say, "OK, We're Jewish and here's somebody who's Jewish and here, someone is." Uh, yeah, OK. That's just kind-of, like I said, you find out. You know who the Jewish people are.

C: Yeah, so, is there anything else you'd like to add, then? Besides...

L: Not that I can think of. Unless there's anything else.

C: No, I mean, we really hit everything I think. But if there's anything we didn't touch on that you think should be mentioned.

L: Um, No, I can't, I can't think of anything.

C: The question we've been asking everyone, so it's the \$100 question I suppose, is just what does being Jewish mean to you today? Now?

L: Um, it still is a, um, really great source of pride. Um, I look forward to when I can, when I'm retired and I can take advantage of all the things that I know go on in Columbus, like at the (not clear) community, and you know, just things that I want to do that I think, "Oh, I can, you know, when I'm not working, I can drive to Columbus and I can do this and I can do that." Um, I want to go to Israel so badly I can't stand it. I want to visit there. I, um, I don't know, I guess it would just be, when I think about the, the, the history of it. You know, somehow, we've managed to survive and be Jewish for all these, you know, 5,000 years. It's like, whoa, that's very impressive! You know, that we somehow still, I mean, I'm, if you said to me, I can't trace my genealogy any father back than my Russian grandparents. I mean, I can't go any father, because I don't, you know, who knows. But I thought, "Whoa, there is a connection all the way back." I mean, we never left it and we didn't change. I mean, here we are. So, there's that kind of a, a real pride, a real pride about it. You know, the other thing is, I really like the ritual. I like the services. I the ritual. I like the prayers. I mean it's not just, it's not like, just being ethnic Jewish like a lot of, you know, Israelis are, when you're Jewish but there's no religion. It's like, "Oh, I really like the ritual." I like the prayer, I like the liturgy. I like all that, too, you know. So, um, I can't imagine being anything else. I accept that in many ways it has formed who I am. You know, really, somehow being Jewish made me this person. Um, yeah, just a great sense of satisfaction. Yeah, I'm happy. I like this.

C: Uh-huh. So, you feel part of a community through it.

L: I don't feel part of a community here, because there isn't one. I don't feel part of a Kenyon community. What I feel is a heritage, is, you know, these lines going back and back and back and back, saying, "Oh, OK." So, when I read a book about life in Eastern Europe, I think, "Yes!" So, they don't have my grandparents' name or my great-grandparents' name, but that's, that's who I am. That's where I come from. One shock of my life is when I was, I mean, I started cooking the traditional Roshashana meal that my mother had cooked. You know, I just did everything my mother made. And once I, I finally at some point, someone gave me a, a Jewish cookbook, and so I'm looking at the same recipes for Roshashana, it's exactly the same recipes, it's everything my mother cooked! So, it wasn't that it was my mother's recipe, it was traditional Eastern European, what everybody, you know, what everybody fixed. And I thought, "Oh! This isn't just what my mom thought up, it's what her grandmother did, and her mother and grandmother and back then. This is everybody in Eastern Europe was doing this, making this meal the same way I'm making it." So it's that kind of connection, what I like a lot, you know, really, really, like it.

C: Good! OK.

L: Anything else?

C: No, I mean, unless, I wanted to say, if you wanted to get maybe a little more into how you think it has shaped you because you said that in passing it's kind-of...If you can talk about that?

L: Hmm. I don't know. I think it's given me a defensiveness that I kind-of like. Um, I don't know. I think in many ways, it's given me a way of being, um, a little different. You know, I don't mind in some ways being an outsider like that. I think it's given me a real, um, feeling for the outsiders of the world, the underdogs and the, you know, a genuine empathy for people who in some way are, you know, not blue-eyed, blond-haired, the whole thing, you know. So, that's about the only way I can think of. And I like what, I like what, I like what Jews believe. I like, you know, what, what, our credo. I like our faith. You know, yeah, this is what I believe. This is good. I like this.

C: OK.

L: I really think that Rachel would of said that it was harder here than I think it was. I can remember once asking her, "You know, should I have brought you up Christian?" And she looked at me, like, "What are you talking about?" And I said, "Well, I mean, you could of been raised a Christian." And she said, "Of course not." Like, "That's ridiculous." And then later on she said, "It would of been different." And I think she felt more the outsider. I mean, I grew up in a town, but where I grew up, in my class, there would of been ten or twelve Jewish kids. So, she, she grows up in a class that has two or three. So, I think she felt more of the outsider growing up here than I ever did. I think it's harder for her than I am aware of. I remember the first time she went to, I think she'd gone, she was in high school and she had gone to Northwestern for the summer for some kind of camp.

B: Her junior and senior year she went to some kind of summer program and she took rural history or something like that.

L: So I remember calling her at one point and she said, "Mom! There are eight people in my room and they're all Jewish." And it was like, "Can you believe so many Jewish people in one spot?" You know, that kind of thing. So I think it was a little bit harder for her.

C: OK. Yeah. Um, OK, I think we'll turn off the tape.

L: OK.

(End of tape)