

HELEN POZNER

Interviewed by David Schulman

I: I'm in the kitchen of Helen Pozner's home on Two Alclair Drive in Asheville, NC. I'm interviewing Helen, her last name is spelled Pozner. And Helen I thought we'd talk just a little bit right now about your youth, where you were born, a little bit about your family and then sort of generally talk about how you came to Asheville. Okay, Helen.

HP: I was born right outside of Boston in a city called Chelsea, Mass. I came from a family of six children. My father died when I was very young, just about 10 years old. However my mother was a terrific individual who managed to keep the family together and had us all cooperate more as a family. And how she did it I still can't figure out because the children ranged in age from about 18 to about 5 or 6. And she had no education, no schooling, had come here from Europe.

I: What part of Europe?

HP: She came from Poland. And to be able to keep this family together and not accepting any help from any relatives because she was very adamant in her decision of I am going to take care of my children. I am going to bring up my children, I am not letting anybody have them.

I: How old was she when your father died?

HP: They were married about 10 years, so she was probably in her, I would say in her 30s. We all went to work when we were very young, as soon as we could get out and go to work. But education was very important to her and she stressed it all the time and made sure that we went to school and didn't fool around and things like that. And always kept stressing the importance of a good education. And was always very cooperative in anything that you wanted to do and if it had anything to do with schooling, well that was great. So that went on, she kept us together and that went on until we got to be old enough to be interested in getting married and we each one met somebody that they liked. There were 3 boys and 3 girls in the family. She always made our friends very welcome and very comfortable in the house. So actually my childhood, even though we didn't have a father around, was a very nice one because she was a very thoughtful and considerate person. And she did everything she could think of to make our lives happier.

I: So you met your husband about...

HP: I met my husband in my late 20s during WWII. We met at a USO, the JWB, which was sponsored by the Jewish Welfare Board in Boston. And this USO was available for service people and was a very popular one in Boston and that's where George and I met. And we became engaged in about April, I don't remember the year, but we didn't marry until the following, not that August but a year from August because he was going out to sea and he would be gone 30 to 60 to 90 days at a time. So while he was away, I would get things ready for the wedding and all that.

I: Was his family from Massachusetts?

HP: His family was from Denver, Colorado. His mother and father were very religious. My mother was quite religious but she was not a fanatic about it. She knew her religion but she never pressured you. She more or less let you do what

you thought was right. You could come to her for questions and things. And one thing I'll never forget was when George and I married, we lived at home for six months and then he was transferred to New Orleans.

I: This is still in the military?

HP: He's not in the military, he's working for the weather bureau. The war is over. And he's working for the weather bureau. And we went to New Orleans to live after having lived at home for six months. And I felt very badly about going away and leaving my mother because my younger sister and I had lived at home. The others had all married. And although they lived in the same general area, my sister and I and my mother lived together. And I felt kind of bad about going away and leaving her and suggested that she go to New York with me where I could take a train on to New Orleans from there. And I had a lot of relatives living in New York and I had a brother living in New Jersey. And I felt it wouldn't be so difficult for her to take my leaving if other members of the family were around. And I figured we would spend a couple of days in New York and I told her this and said we would not bother anybody, we would stay in a hotel. And we could eat whatever meals out that we wanted to or we could eat whatever meals we wanted with the relatives. And that would give her a treat before we left. I thought it would make it easier on her. Well we did that and the first morning that we came down for breakfast in the hotel dining room, we were sitting there and you know how those hotels are. They have soft music in the background and flowers on the table and white tablecloths and she looked at me and she said, you know, I never knew that people could live like this. It was a real treat. I mean we would go out to eat, but we would go to Waldorfs and she would go with us at different times. And on certain occasions, we would go to different restaurants. But most of the time she was the housewife at home, doing the cooking and doing the cleaning. Since she just lived with my sister and myself, the clothes I took off the day before, when I came home the next day, were all washed and ironed. She took a lot of pride in keeping your things together. So it worked out very nicely. But I'll never forget that, her saying that. And it was a good idea to do it that way. Because, like I say, I had aunts and uncles. They were not her family, they were my father's family and we were all visiting together for a day and all that sort of thing. So it was very nice.

I: So you lived in New Orleans?

HP: For 4 years. I came to New Orleans and I had my first baby there.

I: And that child's name is?

HP: My son Mark. We had a very nice furnished apartment and really had a lovely place to live. We just happened to find it by luck. I met the woman who managed these apartments and became friendly with her, not knowing that she had these apartments. And then when I needed an apartment, we were talking about it. She said, I don't have a vacancy but I have one that I'm holding for somebody and I can talk to him and maybe he'll let you move in. So that's what we did. I had a very nice apartment and when it came time for him to move in, there was a bigger apartment became available which he preferred. So it worked out well for both of us and I stayed there for 4 years. It was a place that had a nice area where you could take a baby, you know, and he'd be out in the sun in a buggy and stuff like that.

I: So you liked New Orleans pretty well?

HP: No. New Orleans was fine. We made alot, alot of friends. And we got along very well. We joined the Jewish community center and it was a very active community center. But the city was too dirty. It used to annoy me to walk down the streets at night downtown and have all these great big tremendous bugs flying at you. I could only take it after a while, you know, we had to stop. And at that point, we made plans and transferred. They asked my husband to go to Washington, DC on a special project that was going to last two years. They needed him for this particular job and promised him everything. So we took it. But we made a big mistake. We didn't get it in writing. He worked in Washington and we did what we were supposed to do. We were there for the two years, but we didn't get the advantages we had been told we would get.

I: And you moved to Asheville from Washington?

HP: We were living in Washington and his job was completed. And they asked him where he would like to go because he had a choice of several different places. And Asheville was one of them. And talking to some of the people that he worked with, they had used Asheville as an R&R center during WWII. And some of these people had been here. They had come and they had been here and they liked Asheville very much. Another city was Albany, New York. Albany, New York is completely different. And there was some place out in Kansas.

I: So what year was this approximately?

HP: I don't remember. I could look up stuff.

I: No, that's alright, don't worry about it.

HP: I would say in the early 50s because we were married in '47 I think, something like that. Mark was born in '49. So we left there about '51, '52, something like that. It was the early 50s when we got to Asheville.

I: Tell me a little bit about your first few days in Asheville or just how it was?

HP: My first few days in Asheville were a horror.

I: Tell me about the horror.

HP: We were living in Arlington, Virginia and we made arrangements with a moving company to come on a particular day and move our furniture to Asheville. At that time, once it started to get dark, you couldn't fly into the city. The airports were not suited and equipped to have flights coming in from elsewhere. So you had to get into the city before dark. George had gone ahead to find a place to live and I had Mark, who was 4 years old, and Marcie was 2 years old. She had been born in Arlington, VA when we lived there. And I was pregnant with my youngest, with Bob. So the movers called up, they were supposed to be there before 8 or something and said, we're having trouble with the truck, we shouldn't be tied up more than an hour or so and we'll get there as soon as we can. And this went on all day. They didn't have the truck and they didn't say so. Finally, around noon one of the salesman or something came over and he said we don't have the truck, we cannot move your furniture today. George was waiting for me in Asheville. I had no way to reach him. I had a two year old baby, very pregnant, and a 4 year old child and he said, I'll wait for you to get dressed and I'll take you to the airport so that you can get on that flight for Asheville. I don't remember what

time it was. It was like about 1 o'clock or so. So I dressed Marcie up in pink organdy where she was so pretty and I thought oh, when her father sees her, he'll love it. And we ran for the plane and I'm running, I'll never forget it, and it was all new to her and the flying was new to her and she wouldn't leave my arms. She just hung on to me. This was a familiar person and she was going to stay with me. So we finally got to Asheville and George is standing there when we got off the flight and he tries to pick her up and she bursts into tears. He'd been gone about a month, she'd forgotten him. And she wouldn't go to him, she wouldn't let him pick her up, she wouldn't do anything. But anyhow, he was there and he picked us up and he had a place for us to stay and we came in and everything got settled. And I really didn't care very much for Asheville at that point because a month after I got there, no, two months after I got there, I got there in September. And at the end of November Bob was born. So I had these three little children, we were living in an apartment. I didn't know many people and I had very busy days.

I: It was a very tough, daily life I'm sure.

HP: It was. And the children were small, I had three babies actually. And George would go off to work everyday and I was home alone. And I said to him, oh, I don't know, I don't like this place. I think we ought to do something about making a change, I want to go home. I want to be with my family, I don't want to be here by myself. And he said, okay, we'll take a trip. My sister was being married and I was matron of honor so I went up there with Marcie for the wedding. And when I got up there, we went up on the train. And I stayed with my sister and I saw how hard it was. Like they had to go into town, they had to go into Boston, it was crowded, it was noisy, you had to take the elevator train. In Asheville I got in my car and in fifteen minutes I was downtown.

I: You had forgotten alot of the hecticness?

HP: Yeah. And couldn't spend any time shopping. It was just too much for me and took a taxi back to my sister's house and said, I'm an idiot. If I don't have sense enough to enjoy what I've got, I ought to have my head examined. I'm going back, that's where I want to be.

I: And so that was sort of a turning point.

HP: That was it and I decided I liked Asheville and we made friends with some of the people in the apartments.

I: Where did you live when you first moved to Asheville?

HP: Dunbar Apartments, they were Coleman Apartments at the time. And some of the people in the next building worked with George and the fellow down the building after that worked with George, somebody across the street worked with George, we had a whole large group. We all became friendly. Anytime there was any kind of social activity going on at the office, we would all go as a group. And it just worked out great. That's when we made alot of friends, met alot of friends and that's the way it went.

I: So when you first came to Asheville the Jewish community was maybe what, 100 families would you say?

HP: I would say something like that, maybe a little bit more.

I: But you also had alot of friends outside the Jewish community.

HP: That's right. These people that George worked with, some of them were Jewish, most of them weren't. I mean, I think he and one other person were the only two Jewish people in the office.

I: So you made alot of friends in all the different communities?

HP: Yeah and with the children small, we tried to get Mark into the program that they had at the center, kindergarten program. And there were unpleasant things because people don't use their head, you know. But we got along pretty well and we were happy there. Several years later, we lived there about 2 or 3 years, in accidently meeting the people who bought the apartments when they went up for sale, I didn't know them, I didn't know anybody about it and these people happened to come by and were looking at the property because they were going to bid on it. And we happened to be sitting outside because George had had a heart attack a short time before and he had just come out of the hospital. And since he was recuperating, we would sit out, it was in the spring, we would sit out in the sun. And this car drove up with four men, looked very nice, and I said, are you looking for somebody, can I help you? I assumed they were looking for somebody, they had a group of buildings there. And they said, we're thinking of buying these apartments and we were interested in looking at them. And I said, if you'd like to see the inside, I don't mind having you come into my apartment and see what they look like. And they said that would be great. There was a manager but he wasn't there and his wife wouldn't let them in. And at this point the apartments were 50% vacant.

I: The Coleman Apartments, were they built by the same Coleman from the mall now?

HP: And he has an office up there. He built the apartments and he built Edgewood Knoll. And he built the one in west Asheville. There were three that he built.

I: So then he sold these?

HP: Yeah, he sold these. Times were bad and people were not moving.

I: This was late 50s, early 60s.

HP: I'd say more middle 50s. And he kind of tried to get most of his tenants in these buildings to move over to Edgewood Knoll, they were a little more expensive. Edgewood Knoll was the newer one and he was keeping it and he was going to sell this.

I: So it was kind of meant almost for you to meet these people that were looking at it?

HP: Well, we were in a position where the difference in the rent made a difference to us. And we felt like we could be comfortable where we were and not have a higher rental to worry about. Because salaries weren't that high at that time. It's amazing when I come across some old papers to see how low the salaries were. So the people came into my apartment and looked around, went upstairs and all that and one of the men was quite interested in George because he had just a heart attack several months before and they were comparing notes and things. And in the conversation before they left, this one that was talking to George, said to me, if we were to buy these apartments, would you be interested in working for us. And I said to him, you know, I had not thought about going back to work. It's

important to me to be with the children, but I think this is something I could handle. I said where it wouldn't hurt my children and where I can handle the whole thing. Because I had had a pretty important job when I was working in Boston with a lot of responsibility. And this looked like it would be a breeze. So he said, great. If we get to that stage, we'll be back in touch with you. And a month later I got a call from them, no, I had a letter from them saying they were coming in to bid on the apartments and if they bought them, they would get in touch with me, to please leave time available that afternoon so they could come and talk to me.

I: Were these people from outside Asheville?

HP: Macon, Georgia. So I started to think about it and thought to myself, now what kind of salary do I want? What do I feel is going to be worth it? I'm not going to be able to give the children the care they're getting now. They're not going to be neglected, but I want to know what's going to make it worth it. And in my own mind I thought about it and I thought, how am I going to do things and how can I handle things? And they bought the apartments, they got them. Their bid was the highest one. They came by to talk to me. And everything that I had said, and thought in my own mind, they offered me. It was amazing.

I: So when they say that things were meant to be, it was really one of those things because you just happened to be sitting outside when they pulled up. What if you weren't sitting outside, and then they offer you exactly what you had been thinking, so it's almost uncanny isn't it?

HP: It was very uncanny. And in talking about it, you know, I asked them how much time it was going to take of my time. They wanted to give me an office. And I said I would prefer starting it at home. If it's not going to take away too much from the house, too much space, I would like to start it at home and see how it works out. Because there, if the children need me, I'm there. If I have to take somebody to a doctor, I can take them. And if it was a rainy morning, I could ride them to school. Bob was in nursery school, Marcie was in some kind of a preschool program and Mark was like 1st grade or something. So it just worked out. But, of course, I had to have the kind of husband that would work with it. George happened to be a very outgoing person. He liked people, he liked being with people. So if somebody came in my apartment at 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock at night and I was fixing dinner and now, mind you, we're 50% vacant, I want to show an apartment. I could say to him, I'll be back in 15 minutes or I'll be back in 30 minutes, and we'll eat when I come back. And he didn't mind. Not every husband would have done it that way. Not every husband would accept it. He was very outgoing and he didn't mind it a bit. So he would go around, he said everybody called him the mayor of Dunbar. It was a large place. It had 112 units.

I: So you started managing these apartments in the mid 1950s and you managed for how many years?

HP: 19 years.

I: Could you talk a little bit about, you said a lot of families came to Asheville, sometimes they would stay at Dunbar for a little bit till they bought a house or found where they wanted particularly. Can you remember some of the names?

HP: I don't remember this particular name, but it can be found. In the same apartment project, there was this man who came who was a rabbi of the synagogue, not Rabbi Gelberman. He was another rabbi, it began with a B.

I: Rabbi Cline?

HP: Something like that. It was Rabbi Cline. Do you remember him?

I: Very vaguely.

HP: He was before Gelberman.

I: He was before Gelberman because he was the rabbi for my brother's barmitzvah. Gelberman was already the rabbi when I came along. It must have been Cline.

HP: Yeah, it was Cline. And we lived in building 17, he lived in about building 10, 9 or 10 or something like that. And he used to like to play chess. And George liked to play chess. So while George was recuperating, he would walk down in the afternoon when he was free and they would sit and play chess for a couple of hours. And they became very friendly, he and Rabbi Cline, although we belonged to the temple. We had been approached, and in the stages where we were getting involved in things when we were first married, when we lived in New Orleans we used to go to services every Friday night to a different synagogue or a different temple with a group of friends. And we decided we preferred reform Judaism. This was what we wanted, so we went to the temple.

I: And that was Rabbi Unger or was there somebody before him?

HP: No, it was Rabbi Unger. Rabbi Unger was the rabbi. He was a very interesting individual. He got his minister's degree from the Southern Baptist Church or something. He had a Ph.D. and I think it was the Ph.D. that he got from a Baptist college.

I: Where at, do you know?

HP: At someplace in the south, not far from here. I think he got it before he took the pulpit here. I think he already had it. He was a very interesting individual. He was a, I'm trying to think of the right words for him, he was a very outstanding person. The non-Jewish community were very impressed with him. He could fit in any place, anywhere, he had that kind of a personality. But he could make mud out of you if he didn't like you and if you did something that he objected to. He ruled with a very strong hand.

I: And he was here before you came?

HP: And he was here long after, for many years.

I: Did he have a family?

HP: He had a second wife. I think he had a child, I think he had a daughter from his first marriage. His wife had died. He had a second wife and, of course, they were middle aged when I got to know them. He liked George very much. George knew alot about religion, he came from that kind of a home where his mother was a fanatic. They were very orthodox. And he knew alot about religion and he would get into discussions and arguments with the rabbi.

I: So was the rabbi open to that sort of thing?

HP: If he liked you, then there were no problems. And he liked George and he asked George to teach Sunday School, which George did. And he gave him the teenagers at the time.

I: Can you name some of them?

HP: Carol Schryer, Eddie Rosenberg, that's the _____ family, he's brilliant. Larry Rosenberg, the other son, became a doctor. He was a professor at UNC-A, he was a professor at a college in Pennsylvania. He's been a professor in big colleges, he's been a professor at Chapel Hill. He's in finance. George always thought he was great. He said it was amazing to see how his mind worked. He was very impressed with him. He had the Sunday School class with the young children of Asheville. They were like 14-15 years old and he loved it because he could get in arguments with them, you know, and tell them things. I think they enjoyed him. So it all worked out very nicely and my children were going along in school. And, of course, we were stressing school and Mark was accepted in the National Honor Society and there was a piece in the newspaper. And there was a beautiful note from Rabbi Unger telling him how proud he was of him, how happy he made him to know that he was doing so well. Marcie made National Honor Society, she got a beautiful note from Rabbi Unger. Bobbie made National Honor Society, he got a beautiful note. He would pick my children out and if he didn't like you, poor kid.

I: If you look at Rabbi Unger and this is his personality, what do you think, why do you think like some people he really didn't like? It's hard to know...

HP: The only thing that I could see, in several instances, and I'm not going to mention names. Children were not that bright, the children just got by. The parents of those children were the ones that played canasta all the time and played majong all the time and played bridge all the time. He didn't have patience for children that were not doing particularly well.

I: He really responded to the brightest.

HP: Yeah, that was his reaction.

I: And you say he fit in well in the community so he was open to all the different religions.

HP: He had a Sunday morning radio program that he used to give, either Saturday night or I think it was a Sunday morning radio program.

I: He would give sermons.

HP: Yeah and talk about religion and things. It was very highly thought of, very highly.

I: And he stayed in Asheville until he retired?

HP: Yeah, he retired and he was living in Asheville after he retired and he started to get ill. He was a very nice looking man, a very nice man to talk to.

I: At that time, you're talking about the late 50s and 60s, actually the temple was the largest too.

HP: Yeah, the synagogue was smaller.

I: The synagogue may be bigger now would you say in population or are they about equal?

HP: I would say they're about equal from what I know.

I: But at that time the temple was definitely bigger.

HP: Definitely the bigger one. And the temple had the more well to do people like the Lichenfels, well, I don't want to go into names.

I: Did the Jewish community respond to Unger the same way, they either loved him or strongly disliked him?

HP: Well, no, I think the other people just got along alright. He made himself felt. Now Cline was not a strong rabbi. And by that time he had left, he'd gone elsewhere.

I: He didn't stay too long did he?

HP: No, he just stayed like a year or two or three. And at that point Gelberman came in. And Gelberman moved into the apartments, he was one of my tenants.

I: And he had two children right?

HP: A boy and a girl. His wife was lovely. He was very nice. And I don't know how long he stayed, I think he stayed here a little bit longer. But he became ill, he got tuberculosis or something, very serious. And that had quite an effect on him. I had a doctor here in Asheville, Dr. Whitten, who was a very good friend of Rabbi Unger's. Rabbi Unger was his patient. And if Rabbi Unger called up and said, I don't feel so good, Ernie. Ernie'd say, on my way home, I'll come by and see you. Well, Dr. Whitten and I became very good friends. We had children growing up at the same time.

I: Was he in the temple too?

HP: He belonged to the temple too. George was his patient too. He was an individual I admired and a doctor I thought alot of.

I: What was his first name?

HP: Ernie Whitten, he came from around Gastonia. His father was a Jewish junk dealer in Gastonia and his mother was a typical Jewish woman with the family and children and everything. I think it was just he and his brother, I'm not sure. I don't remember. But Dr. Whitten and I stayed friends until he retired which was around the time I retired. And I told him, the one person I am going to miss so much, is you. Because he meant so much to me. Medicine was important to him. His patients were important to him.

I: Do you think your son sort of modeled himself after Dr. Whitten since he became a doctor?

HP: Well, he wanted to be a doctor but he talked alot to Dr. Whitten. Dr. Whitten was fond of him.

I: Dr. Whitten had children?

HP: He had a son and a daughter.

I: And they're no longer in Asheville.

HP: They never were. His daughter, I think is in Charlotte or someplace and his son is in Greensboro or something like that. Marcie was in school with his son and Bobby was in school with his daughter.

I: Were there other families during that time period that you particularly remember in the Jewish community?

HP: Well I became friendly with Rabbi Gelberman and his family because they lived in the apartments and I was managing them. And I would go along, the fact that you were at the other end of the project didn't make any difference to me, I would manage to get down there every day or two and I would walk around there and see what was going on.

I: It gave you a chance to meet the other people in the complex.

HP: You didn't happen to know somebody by the name of Ben Koucher did you?

I: Yeah, I sure did.

HP: Ben Koucher lived there. It was Ben Koucher, this is building 4, Rabbi Gelberman, these are two Jewish families and Charlie Brewer, not Jewish, he sells equipment, this kind of equipment, there's a pen that has his name on it. Anyhow, Charlie Brewer was an interesting individual.

I: Tell me about Charlie Brewer.

HP: Charlie Brewer was not Jewish. And we had a Jewish family that moved in. We're living at the apartments and we had a Jewish family that moved in to Asheville to Elklin Drive. His name was Ed Wolf. You didn't know his daughter, she was in school about the time you were in school. She's about your age. Ed Wolf was a very fine person and so was his wife. And they became very active in temple. And Ed was one of these handyman types, you know. He didn't work at it, he ran a plant that made clothes and things. But if something would break in the temple, something small when he was there, he could fix it. Ed met Charlie and invited him to come to temple. Charlie was not going any place, he didn't have a church or any place that he was interested in. He said I would really like to come, so Ed said you come and that'll be fine.

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HP: Mary is non-Jewish, Maurice is Jewish, they would like to come because it would answer a lot of questions for Mary, you see. So we had a large group that came. We went for years.

I: Anyone else you remember in that group?

HP: Yeah. Isaac Lichenfels, he usually conducted it, Dr. Lerner, Paul Lerner, he loved discussions about Judaism and things, he loved it. He would come Sunday morning. We had a large group that came.

I: What types of things would you talk about?

HP: Current things, basically religion and some certain things from the Bible that there may have been questions about.

I: So Isaac Lichenfels would sort of bring up the topic?

HP: Oh anybody could bring up a topic. And they had all kinds of books and things. It was fascinating, we all enjoyed it. I want to bring this up. Charlie Brewer would come to this and Charlie Brewer joined temple.

I: He could join the temple even though he wasn't Jewish?

HP: I don't know whether he converted, I think he converted. And one time I was talking to Charlie and I said, how come you're a member a temple? How come you joined. There are plenty of nice churches. Your wife doesn't come with you. He had one child that seldom came with him. A special occasion his wife might come. He said, because when I met Ed Wolf, I was just going into business. He had just finished at Chapel Hill and he moved to Asheville and he moved into Dunbar Apartments, being exposed to Ben Koucher and the rabbi and me and decided that he was interested in Judaism, so he joined the temple. And he said, my business took off like a shot. I never had a bad day. I mean in his business he was a salesman basically, going all over North Carolina talking to people and selling his equipment, this sort of thing.

I: So he thought he was sort of thanking God in a way.

HP: In a way that he could. And he was very involved.

I: Would the temple be more open to intermarriage and that sort of thing, the synagogue being more conservative.

HP: I would think so. Although the reaction we're getting from rabbis today, from alot of them, especially rabbis who are in reform temples, we get no cooperation about marrying a non-Jew to a Jew. We had a rabbi here, my son's married to a non-Jewish girl, my daughter's married to a non-Jewish man. My feelings about that, my opinion about that, is I don't care who he is or who she is if they're decent people, they suit me. And I am not trying to convert them or anything else. If they want it, they will convert. If they don't want it, they won't convert. As long as they're decent people, because I know some Jewish people who aren't so hot and I wouldn't give you two cents for them.

I: That's the way I always felt too. It's the inner self of the person.

HP: So anyhow, that was no problem. But it was funny, this year I was thinking to myself, I have not seen Charlie Brewer at temple very much. So I called him up one day. I know his wife too. She works for the government too, not in the same office my husband did, another office. But she worked for the government. So I called him up and I said, Charlie I haven't seen you around, are you alright? And he said, I come home on Friday, I've been working all week and I am so tired. He says, my age has caught up with me. He says and it's just very hard for me to get out. And I said, well, you were so good about coming that I just felt like I had to find out why you weren't coming now. So for the next few weeks he did come again. But I think it's just too much for him. So he's not coming.

I: One thing that you mentioned to me that I think would be interesting for the tape is that when you talk about the apartments, you talk about it sort of more as a family, I mean, the residents of the apartments were more like family. And now I think it would be fair to say, I mean a lot of times there are apartment complexes and you don't even know who the manager is or if you know who the manager is, you only talk to them when you have a leak or something like that. But from what you say, it was not like that at Dunbar. It might even be that Jewish families might tend to have come to Dunbar particularly for that reason, more than just the housing. That it would be a good place to start in the community and in the Jewish community.

HP: Right. I got a reputation around town after 19 years, before 19 years, on being somebody that it was nice to rent from. And I told you before that when we took over we were 50% vacant. In 6 months, we had waiting lists of people wanting to move in. I never let a bad situation develop. If it got to be a bad situation and I thought it needed drastic action, I would take drastic action. Like one time, I hear somebody screaming and I go to the door. It's spring or summer time and the door is open and it's one of the tenants lives in one of the other buildings about 3 or 4 buildings away and she's running. And her husband's running after her. And she says, my husband's trying to kill me. And I says, what's happening. And she says, he's drunk, he doesn't know what he's doing, he's trying to kill me. I said, okay, let me go up and talk to him. And George says, don't you dare go up there. He said, he'll kill you. I said, he won't kill me. I said, I am the figure of authority to him, he's going to listen to me. And he had pulled the telephone out of the wall in fighting with her. And I went up there, I didn't go inside. I just stood outside and I called him out. And I said, what's going on. He had lived there 2 or 3 years at this point. I said what's going on? He said, oh, my wife, she doesn't know what she wants. I said, well, if this can't straighten out, I'm not going to allow it. He said, come on in and I'll get you a drink. And she says to me, go on in, go on in, he'll have less to drink himself. You see the logic she's got there. He'll have less to drink himself. So I told him, I said, if this doesn't straighten out, I said, you're going to have to move. And I says, and I'm not waiting very long, I'm just waiting till the first of the week. And if I don't see anything better then you're going. Well, he was still fighting with her over the weekend and I went in and I gave him notice and I said I want you out of here. He said, oh, I have no place to go, I don't know what I'm going to do, I can't go. I said, you didn't pay any attention to me and I'm going to tell you something. I have children of my own and I am not exposing them to this kind of atmosphere. I says, you have children of your own and you're doing this to them but I am not going to stand for it and I want you out of here and he had to get out. I never made a statement that I didn't follow through, never. I think at one point everybody in Asheville at some time or another, in the course of 19 years, had lived in the apartments.

I: And there were 112 you said.

HP: 112 units and we were always 100% full, from the time I took over, we were always 100% full with a waiting list where I could pick and choose.

I: And do you think that when you lived in New Orleans with that lady that ran the apartments, do you think you sort of picked up from her or something, some of your abilities to run the apartments?

HP: I wouldn't say I picked up my abilities, my abilities were my own. I happen to be an outgoing person and certain things don't scare me. I had had a lot of responsibility all of my life. My first job I went to, I was 13 years old in

the summertime while school was out, went back to school, I was in high school, going into high school or something, I don't know, where I was living in a city there that high school was over at 1 o'clock. And I had a job downtown where I had to take a bus into town. And at 1 o'clock I grabbed the bus going into town and I'd work until midnight, at 13. And at midnight my mother would come up to the bus stop to

meet me, to go home with me so I wouldn't have to walk down the dark streets alone, at midnight.

I: So you learned responsibility young?

HP: I learned responsibility from the time I was at least 13 years old and it never scared me. For some reason or other, I don't know, it became familiar to me, it never scared me.

I: It's interesting to me, now they got a fancy name for it, they call it synchronicity, but synchronicity is, are things meant to happen the way they happen, you know. Are there any other things with the apartments because that was such an important part of your role in Asheville, important to you in your life, there may not be, we talked about you happened to be outside that day when they came over.

HP: Well, I evidently pleased them enough to stay with them for 19 years. And they pleased me enough for me to stay for 19 years. It was the same owners the whole time. I worked directly with one individual. I didn't work for all these 3 or 4. I mean occasionally they would be coming through Asheville, they would stop and see me. But all of my work tied in with just one individual who was a man that I admired very much. If I needed anything or wanted anything or needed help on anything, all I had to do was call him. They had a beautiful situation here then. They came once in 6 months.

I: Well, you were certainly good for them.

HP: And they were good for me. I would think about something and I would say to myself, or I'd say to George, I think I ought to get a raise, this is happening, that's happening, I think I ought to get a raise. So next time Mr. Dunlap comes in, I'm going to ask him for a raise. And I don't think I would settle for anything less than \$5 a week. Remember this is a different period in life. And Mr. Dunlap would come in and we'd talk about business and we'd get everything straightened out and he'd say, anything else you want to talk about. And I'd say, just one more thing, I said it's so long since I had a raise, don't you think I should be getting another one. He said, what do you want. I said \$5 a week. He said, you got it.

I: So it was a good working relationship?

HP: Very good. I mean he'd come, we'd talk business, we'd go have dinner at Grove Park Inn. And he was a man that liked my family, he liked my husband, he liked my children, he loved Marcie. He had one little girl and she was the same age as Marcie and he used to think that Marcie was so beautiful when she was a little girl. He just was fascinated by her and he was constantly comparing her to his daughter. And he was a very, extremely well to do man. The other brother, there was a second brother, if he was going to be working with me, it never would have been like that. He was a different personality completely. This one, we just could understand each other.

I: That's a rare and precious thing.

HP: We just could understand each other.

I: Even the length of time, when you think about how people change jobs now for better or worse, but you don't see people staying in the same job, really, for 19 years very often anymore.

HP: He wanted me to buy the apartments. He said, you could have a nice nestegg out of this. Who can run them better than you can, nobody. I'll give you a good deal, we'll work it out. I'll give you a good deal, I'm telling you. You buy them, you have them for your future. He left, I talked to George, I says, you know, I don't want them. He says, what's the matter with you, he would have loved them. He says, what's the matter with you? He says, you know everybody, you know everything, you have your maintenance people, you have everything, why don't you want them? I says, you want to see me as a patient in Highland Hospital? He said, of course not. I says, well, that's where I'll end up.

I: So you know where you were comfortable at?

HP: I knew where I was comfortable.

I: Which is good because alot of people, you know, have a hard time, they think they want to be at another level and maybe when they get to that level, they were sure they're not.

HP: I knew I was heading for Highland Hospital, take me a while to get there, but I knew I was heading for it.

I: Let me ask you this, can you talk a little bit about what you remember in general about the Jewish Community Center? I think you've been active in it for most of these years.

HP: We were active from the time we came. We had some very fine people running it from the community. We've had some nice directors. We've had some poor directors. But, you know, but we've had some very nice people. I worked for the community center as a volunteer. At one point with, do you know Abe Freidman, well you know what he's like? When Abe Friedman was president of the Jewish Community Center, I was membership chairman and I worked with him. And he is a fine man and he's somebody I could work with. See I could work with him like I worked with Mr. Dunlap. But some of the others, I wouldn't give you two cents for. He asked me if I would take on the presidency of the community center when he was giving it up. And I said, I'm flattered but no thank you. I didn't think that my efforts would be appreciated. I just couldn't see it, there were too many people that were too interested in what they wanted, how they wanted it and I wasn't going to get in there and fight with them.

I: Something that I've notice now, I don't know if it was like that before and this is just sort of my vision of it. But how do you view how the Jewish community did work together or not work together.

HP: Like I say, we had good directors, we had bad directors. They had a director at one point who came from the Boston area who I knew during the war. He was a lieutenant or something and he used to come to the USO that I was involved in when I met George and he would sit there with his nose in the air or his nose in a book, wouldn't talk to anybody, very impressed with himself. He went to Harvard,

graduated from Harvard and just because he lived in the Boston area, he didn't need it as much as somebody who came from Texas or someplace else. And I came up to the center for something and was introduced to him as the new director of the Jewish Community Center. He got the job as director and moved to Asheville. And I met him and I went back to some of the people who were important and I said, he's the last man in the world that is suited for this kind of a job. He finds it difficult to talk to people, he doesn't like people and how can you be a community center director if you don't like people? And I was told to mind my own business. So I did. He lasted about a year. It was very obvious, there was no question about it. I mean you don't put a person like that into this kind of a job. Sure, you give them an accounting job or something, he probably would love it. But you don't give him something like this.

I: Has the Jewish Community Center generally been like bringing the temple and the synagogue together? Or a place for them to meet?

HP: There's always been a feeling of one for the other and certain ones in one group and certain ones in the other had a tendency to try to keep things together and try to do things together. But a new rabbi would come in and he would change it. A different center director would come in and he would change it.

I: But overall it survived as a cohesive unit?

HP: And it has survived, I don't know, I mean you've got to understand that my judgement is going back a long time. People don't act the same way that they did at that time.

I: Tell me about that. How do they act differently now?

HP: Well, you wouldn't be aware of it because you're like one of my boys.

I: I think I have a feel for it being different but I'm not sure exactly how it's different. But I do feel a difference personally.

HP: There is a difference. When I was involved, I was younger naturally, you came into a community center and you wanted it to go well because your family was involved and other people were involved and this was going, remind me to tell you one story which I think is very interesting. And everything we did, we didn't do for the almighty dollar. We did it for free because we wanted to, we wanted our children to have a nice place. And we were friends with the people from the synagogue and if there was an occasion over at the synagogue, we would go there. More of them met here and they are different.

I: More factions now, like, the synagogue stays together and the temple stays together.

HP: No, they try very hard to get involved, they try very hard. But I don't think they're using the right things.

I: They're coming from another direction?

HP: They're coming from another direction.

I: And you think back then, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but were they like working from the heart, is what you're saying?

HP: Yes, more so than today. Today they want the glory. Today they want to be acknowledged. I was thinking about this, talking to you. And I thought to myself, I don't want to sit down there and tell him all my past, he's not interested and neither is anybody else going to be. And then I thought to myself, you're an idiot. You have a chance to speak about some of these things, why not take it. Why not take it? I've been telling you how I'm thinking and how I'm feeling and that's when I called you and said, and it was only a day later, that's when I called you and I said, I want the chance to speak. Now whether anybody will even listen to this or anybody will ever look at it, I don't know.

I: I'm sure they will. It's important because what we're looking for and what I'm looking for in this tape is personal experiences of how it was. Only you can tell me that and only the next person can tell me that. I mean, we can guess, we can read in a book, but what we're looking for is what you're telling me. You said you wanted to tell me a story, to remind you.

HP: Well, we're living in the apartments. We had a Jewish family from Maine moved down to this area, a husband and wife and two daughters. They were very nice people. And, of course, _____ came in was Jewish. You know, I was temporarily their mother. So, these people were very nice. He was the same age as George and they were very nice and they lived in the apartments about six years. And he was having a difficult time finding work. They belonged to the synagogue, they felt more at home. He got a letter, he had worked for the government when he was living in Maine and he got a letter from the government. He used to run their PX in a certain city. They said that they had one out in California that if they could interest him in taking that job, they felt he could really bring that PX up to the way it was supposed to be. And they were offering him a job with a half decent salary, except that he was going to have to go out to California. He had an old run-down car that he didn't know how much longer it was going to last. He had about 60 or 70 dollars, all that he had in money. And he came and talked to George. And he said to George, you know most cities, alot of cities will have a fund from a synagogue or from a temple, from a religious place, where they will give you funding to do a particular thing. And I remember Earl Shryer was the man who handled this. He belonged to temple and he belonged to the synagogue. I think alot of them belonged to both. So George got in touch with Earl and talked to Earl about this man and he said, I feel he needs several hundred dollars. He can't go out to California with this beat up old car, with \$70 in his pocket. There's no telling what will happen. But he needs several hundred dollars. Do you think you can let him have this several hundred dollars? And mind you, we're working from hand to mouth ourselves, we don't have an awful lot at this point. So Earl said, well, I don't know, I don't mind giving \$25 to help somebody out, but I don't like the idea of giving so much. And George said, well, you give him what's necessary and I'll be behind it. If it gets to a point where you're not getting paid, I will eventually see that you're paid, I will pay you. But I don't want to give him this money, I don't know how good he will be about returning it to me. So Earl gave him the money. And that man went to California and that man, the first paycheck he got, he sent part of it to Earl. And in a very short time he paid it all back. And Earl called George and said, I never saw anybody pay back anything so fast. Six months, nine months later, he comes through Asheville. He still has a job, he's still doing well, wanted to see George and me to tell us how grateful he was because he could never have made it without that funding and who was he going to go to. He didn't know anybody. And he was on his way back home to visit, I don't remember if he had the same car or not. But I think that's a very interesting story.

I: It's how a community can work together when they want to.

HP: Yeah, if somebody's willing to get in there and fight for it. Because if it was up to Earl, Earl didn't know him, he would have said, we'll give you \$25. Because there have been times somebody has come in and says, I'm down and out, and they give them the \$25 or the \$50, I don't think they ever get it back. But I thought that was very interesting. And I wanted to be sure and tell that to you.

I: We're going to have to end in a minute, but can you tell me what you think your children got out of living in Asheville. Obviously one son still lives in Asheville and is a doctor.

HP: He was born here. When he finished his residency and everything, we didn't know where he was going to go. He was already married. He came home and he says, you know what mother, he says, I would like to settle in Asheville. I was born here, I've lived here all my life, I've always liked it. And I don't see any reason why I should go off to another city and start a practice when I can start a practice here in Asheville. I said, I think that's great. I think it's wonderful. I said, there are a couple of new doctors in town. I said, I have heard of this doctor, this Joel Rosenberg, I have never met him, I don't know him. But the things I've heard about him are all very nice. And he seems to have a lot of Dr. Feldman's patients. Now I don't know whether he needs anybody to share the office, but I would suggest you get in touch with him, talk to him. And there were some other people that he knew. So he went and he talked to the different people. And when he went to Joel, they hit it off. They're very much alike.

I: He's been back in Asheville a while now?

HP: Joel has been in Asheville about 8 to 10 years. Bob's been here about 6 or 7. Joel was here a few years before he was. They think alike. They act alike. Bob's very big, he's big and heavy. Joel's a small person. Joel has a good mind. I think Joel's one of the best doctors in town.

I: He's not related to the _____?

HP: No, he's not related to them at all. He comes from Connecticut. I think he's a great person and he said to me when we first met, when this was all going on, you know, writing and contracts and all that business. He said to me, I suppose you wonder what there was that Bob and I got so interested in each other. And I said, well, I was wondering. He said, well, first of all, I needed somebody. He said, and secondly, and Bob wasn't going to be available like for 6 months, he was just finishing up. I don't think he had graduated yet. He said, I liked where he studied, where he went to school. Bob was a Duke undergraduate. Mark was a Duke undergraduate. This is the result of stressing education, see, what I did with my kids. Stressing the importance of education.

I: Education is something, particularly I hear that quite a bit from Eastern European families, particularly wanted an education for their children. They either didn't have it or they at least realized the importance of it. But I hear that from a lot of East European immigrant parents.

HP: You're definitely hearing it from me, same way, and that's where my parents came from. My mother, I don't want to digress, but this is just a short thing. My mother came from a family where education was important. She came from a large family, 5 or 6 children, where all the boys were given an education.

I: Do you remember the town that she was from? My mother was born in Poland

also.

HP: _____. _____ means certain kind of area or something like that, it has a special meaning. Because I use the word _____ in different things. Her father made sure that his girls were educated too, his daughters were educated.

I: And that was probably unusual too?

HP: This is in Europe. But the one thing that he did, he made sure that his daughters were educated which may have been learning Hebrew or something like that, I don't know. So anyhow, Joel said, I liked where Bob went to school, I liked where he went to medical school. And most of all, I liked the fact that he comes from Asheville. He's not going to say to me in a couple of years or in three years, I'm tired of this town, I'm going to a bigger city.

I: He knew what Asheville was and is. In ending the tape, what would you say would be well, number one, is there anything that you want to say?

HP: I wanted to tell you this other story which I can't seem to remember right now. It just went out of my head, but that's the way things are going lately.

I: So looking back on coming from Massachusetts and New Orleans and Washington...

HP: We did all our socializing and business things out of Boston most of the time.

I: So looking back through all of that, what does Asheville feel like, I mean that's sort of a strange question.

HP: I like Asheville. I'm happy in Asheville. I will never go up north to live. I have a sister that lives up there. She's a widow, I'm a widow. I could go back there. I have a friend who, the last time I talked to her on the phone, got very angry with me. We've been friends since 10 years old. She said, when are you moving up here? When are you coming back? I said, I'm not even coming back for a visit. Because it's so difficult to get around and if you have to take a limousine from the airport, it's \$50. Who needs it?

I: So Asheville's comfortable?

HP: Asheville is a place that I enjoy. Asheville has alot of things. Now maybe it's because of my children that I enjoy it so much. Mark loves the mountains. Mark comes home to see me and to see Bob and he doesn't go back happy unless he's spent a day riding around the mountains.

I: So maybe there's something about the mountains.

HP: These are the things that are important to us. He'll say to me, mother I want to go up on the Parkway today, you want to come with me. And if I have the time, I will. Most of the time I have because I enjoy going with him and we'll come to a certain place and we'll stop and he'll say, you know, in such and such a year this was such a kind of a place. He knows the history about it. He follows it through because it's very important to him. He loves it.

I: He lives where now?

HP: Atlanta. But he also likes being in a city that is a big city, that has a university. This is what he wants.

I: Asheville, can we end the tape by saying that Asheville grows on you? Is that a good term?

HP: No, it's true, it does grow on you. But I think Asheville becomes a part of your life. I mean you can change whatever you want and anything that I've said. I don't mind you changing it if you think it sounds better another way.

I: No, I want it exactly the way you say it. But I'm just wondering, you know, just as a summary of looking back on Asheville, if there's anything that you want to say.

HP: While George was here, he took courses, this same thing with education. At that time, when he started, it used to be up on the...

I: UNC-A was at the Sealy Castle.

HP: That's right, that's where he started to go.

I: I've not been in the Sealy Castle. Was the college small or is Sealy Castle large?

HP: The Castle is pretty good size. And the college was small, extremely small. And they called up one day, the woman that was the registrar or somebody, and said, do you know that you have enough credits to graduate? Do you want me to put you in this year's graduating class? And he said no, I'll be the old man, everybody else is young and I'll be the old man. And I said no, you've got to do it. I says, your children can see you in a cap and gown and the honor of graduated, don't take it away from them. And we went up there and my kids were saying, that's my daddy, that's my daddy.

I: So he had taken night classes or Saturday classes?

HP: He was taking night classes. There weren't Saturday classes then. He was taking night classes and they had special classes for the people that worked there, you know. They had particularly good professors. But these were meteorology courses that they were taking, see. George was a meteorologist. These were meteorology courses.

I: That's pretty specialized for a small school to be teaching.

HP: Yeah. Well they had a German professor who was working as a meteorologist, who gave one of the courses. George said he was the best person he'd ever met in giving that kind of a course. And George wasn't easy to please because if he didn't think you were doing what you should be doing and how you should be doing it, he didn't mind telling you about it.

I: I think we'll end now, but I again want to say thank you Helen Pozner for telling us about your life in Asheville and your contributions to the community of Asheville and to the Jewish community of Asheville. And this is March 10, 1994. Helen Pozner of Asheville, NC, thank you very much Helen.

HP: You're very welcome.

I: Helen wants to add one more thing to this tape. So, Helen, would you go ahead and tell us what you wanted to add.

HP: About five years ago, my children decided that they wanted to give me a special birthday party and they all came into town and didn't tell me what they were doing. We were going out to dinner. We were all dressed up, you know, going out to dinner and one of them said, oh, I have to go over to the college. I have to do something. And so we drove over to the college. And they said, I have to go in the library, I have to see somebody, why don't you come in and look around. And, mind you, this is my whole family and Josh is a baby, that's my little grandson, yeah, because he's 6, going to be 7 and this is five years ago. And we went in there and somebody came over, the head librarian came over and greeted us and some woman came over and greeted us. I didn't know what was going on. My children were making a contribution to the Judaica Library in my honor, for my birthday. And I think since it's the Judaica section that's working with you on this, I think this should be brought up.

I: Well I'm glad that you added that.

HP: I don't know how much they spend but I would say 5 or 600 dollars was spent on books that the librarian picked. He wasn't Jewish I don't think, I don't know. I went up there one day for something and he gave me a lifetime card to use the library at the college, which I think was very nice.