

Interviewee: Sadie Shapiro
Interviewers: Meg Farnam and Alyssa Papia
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Transcribers: Meg Farnam and Alyssa Papia



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Abstract: Sadie Shapiro is a resident of the Jewish Healthcare Center in Worcester, Massachusetts. Sadie was born in Worcester on the East Side in 1922. She lived in a predominately Jewish neighborhood where everyone was “close and friendly.” Sadie attended Commerce High School. After graduating, she had a job for a couple of months that a friend helped her get. Then, at 19 she got married and moved to New York with her husband Jerome for two years. They moved back to Worcester during the war because Jerome was unable to get a job as an automobile salesman. Together they had three children, two boys and a girl. Sadie spent most of her life raising her children, while Jerome worked at Fitz Henry Cadillac as a manager. When her children were older, Sadie returned to work. She was employed for 20 years at Paul Revere Insurance Company. She was as an office supervisor, with responsibilities for seven female employees. Sadie spent most of her life raising her children. The only part of her life that she regrets is living in a nursing home during her old age.

AP: What is your full maiden name and if applicable your married name?

SS: I can't hear you.

AP: What is your full maiden name?

SS: Shapiro.

MF: That's your maiden name?

SS: No, Kaplan. K-A-P-L-A-N. Kaplan.

MF: And your married name was Shapiro?

SS: Shapiro.

MF: When were you born?

SS: January 15, 1922.

AP: Do you have children? Do you have children?

SS: I have two boys and a girl.

AP: Do you have grandchildren?

SS: Grandchildren? How many?

AP: Yes.

SS: Oh God. (thinking) one, two, (pause) I think five, six, or seven.

MF: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with?

SS: (questioning look)

MF: Cultures or ethnicities do you identify with? What cultures do you identify with? Like if you're English or ...?

SS: I don't think there's anything that private.

MF: So, do you know your cultural background, your ethnic background?

SS: What?

MF: Do you know your ethnic background? Like if you're English or Irish or anything like that? Do you know what your cultural background is? Your family background?

SS: It's alright. What are you gonna, you gonna write up on it or what?

MF: Well, we're going to have the recording and we're just jotting down some notes. That's all.

SS: To give it to who?

MF: To give it to the oral history project that I was telling you about.

SS: To Mr. Who?

MF: To the oral history project I was telling you about.

SS: Oh, you can do that.

MF: Okay.

SS: That's as far as it's going?

MF: Yes. Have you ever been married?

SS: (did not hear the question)

MF: Have you ever been married?

SS: Yes.

MF: What was the name of your husband?

SS: Jerome. J-E-R-O-M-E. (clears throat) Jerry for short.

MF: Tell me about your parents. Can you tell me anything about your parents?

SS: Do I what?

MF: Can you tell me anything about your parents?

SS: Anything about my past?

MF: Parents. Your parents?

SS: My parents?

MF: Yes.

SS: They came from Europe. They settled here and had us. (laughs) After they got married, you know? But not that much to tell.

AP: Where have you lived during your life? Where have you lived during your life? Where have you lived, like what cities have you lived in throughout your life?

SS: I didn't hear you.

MF: What cities have you lived in during your life?

SS: Oh, how many cities? Well, I lived in New York and I got married. (pause) For about a year and a half. And then we came here when the war broke out and they weren't selling automobiles, which my husband sold. And he came home, came here, and he got a job here at Fitz Henry Cadillac. He was a (pause) manager there.

MF: Did you grow up in Worcester? Did you grow up in Worcester? Or ...where did you grow up? What town? What ...?

SS: In Worcester.

MF: You grew up in Worcester? In what neighborhood?

SS: East side, Worcester.

AP: What was the neighborhood like generally? What was the neighbor like? What were the people like in it? What did you ...?

SS: What were the people like?

AP: Yeah, what was the neighborhood like in the area you lived in?

SS: They were very nice people and a lot were Jewish. That's where I grew up until I got married at 19. So, up until then I lived with my parents.

MF: Was it a big neighborhood?

SS: Yes. Yes. (pause) Everybody got along very well.

MF: Do you have? You have other family members? Do you have other family members that live in this area? Live in Worcester?

SS: I have two sisters that live in Worcester and one in Maryland.

MF: If you could change anything about Worcester, what would you do? Can you think anything that you'd change about Worcester if you could?

SS: It was a good place to grow up in.

AP: What changes have you seen in Worcester over time? What are the changes that you've seen in Worcester?

SS: There were a lot of changes, yes.

MF: Like what?

SS: Well people moved away from one area to another area and that actually changed everything, you know? Everyone tried to move to a nicer area than what we were living in. That's what we did. Except for the two years that I lived in New York.

MF: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

SS: What?

MF: What's something that is unique about Worcester? What is something that you think is unique about Worcester?

SS: What can I tell ya about Worcester?

MF: Yeah, what's something you think is unique about Worcester? Maybe like compared to where you lived in New York?

SS: I liked it better than living in New York. It was close. Everybody was close and friendly. When I came back, my husband lost his job. Then he got a job in the automotive field. I was pregnant. So, that's it. That's how we came back. (laughs)

AP: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally? What do you think women's experiences have been in Worcester, generally?

SS: I can't hear you.

MF: What do you think women's experiences have been in Worcester? Like for women, living in Worcester?

SS: What do I think of living in Worcester?

MF: What do you think experience for women have been in Worcester? Women in particular?

SS: Experience for women?

MF: Yeah, experience for women in Worcester.

SS: Well it wasn't the greatest place to live, but we all got along and had a lot of friends.

AP: Where did you attend schools? Like where did you attend schools?

SS: I can't hear you.

MF: Where did you attend school?

SS: Oh, Worcester. Yeah, Grafton Street Junior High. Commerce High. I graduated from Commerce. I was a (???).

MF: Did you go to college?

SS: No, I didn't. I got married. (laughs)

MF: So did you ..? What were your challenges in school? Like what did you have trouble with school? In education?

SS: Did I have trouble in school?

MF: Yeah, did you have any challenges in education?

SS: I had a good education, yeah.

MF: Anything that you can remember?

SS: I had good teachers.

MF: I'm just going to move you a little bit over. (pushes wheelchair closer to recorder) So you don't think you had any challenges in school? You don't remember having any challenges in school?

SS: I had no what?

MF: Challenges. Like troubles, difficulties?

SS: I didn't have any problems at all in school. I was an honors student.

AP: When you finished getting your education, what did you see as your options?

SS: What did I do? I worked for a few months in an office. Then I got married and moved to New York. That was it.

MF: When did you begin working? Do you remember like the year?

SS: When did I start?

MF: Yeah, you said you began working after high school.

SS: Until I got married. (???) I worked six months or so. In the office.

MF: What did you do in the office? What did you do in the office?

SS: I helped bookkeeping. I was just out of school. I was lucky to get a job. And that's where I worked until I got married.

MF: How did you come? How did you get the job?

SS: Through somebody I know. She was leaving. She asked me if I wanted it so of course I did, you know?

AP: Who did you work for? Like what was the office called that you worked for?

SS: What it was? Robins was gone so many years. It was on Grafton Street. Robins were the owners. But I can't give you anything else. (laughs) I can't think of it.

MF: At home, what were your primary responsibilities for housework?

SS: Oh, you mean in my parents' home?

MF: And when you were married, I guess both. Did you share the housework with your husband or did you?

SS: I shared my housework with my husband. I didn't have ... (???) I had a house cleaner. (???) I did the cleaning and he helped me.

AP: How did you balance everything? How did you balance doing all the housework and taking care of your children? And ...?

SS: Well (clears throat) my children were in high school, my two older ones, and the younger one was eight years and he was very good. He could come home from school and he knew not to let anybody in. He was very good, I could trust him. And that's what I did. And then my children came home from school early, you know?

MF: What about when they were younger? What about when you had infants?

SS: What?

MF: What about when they were younger? When your kids were little, infants or toddlers?

SS: When they were little?

MF: Yeah, how did you ...?

SS: I didn't work then.

MF: You didn't work then?

SS: I worked when they got older and (clears throat) you know in high school. And my younger one was 8 or 9 years old, he was very good and he would call my mother so my mother knew he was home.

MF: Did you have any interests when you were married? Did you like to do any hobbies or anything?

SS: Well I knitted and crocheted. I made afghans. (looks at blanket on bed) I think this is one of them. I'm not sure. But I made afghans. I crocheted. I knitted sweaters for the kids. Hats, gloves, mittens. That's what I did for them.

MF: Useful.

AP: What did your husband do for work?

SS: What did he ...? He was an automotive salesman. He drove a big, step van. And so and he had put shelves in there. He had it all automotive. It was like a store in the back of the truck. It was a big truck and he went to different places. He had customers out of town. (???) I can't tell you the whole ...? (laughs)

MF: How long did he work as a salesman? Do you remember?

SS: How long did he work at that?

MF: Yeah.

SS: Until he retired. I can't tell you the years, but he retired. He sold the big, step van. That was it.

MF: Do you consider yourself active politically? I said, do you consider yourself active politically in politics? In voting and stuff like that?

SS: Was he?

MF: Were you? Do you consider yourself active politically?

SS: Yeah, I was active. I liked what he was doing. I enjoyed ...I enjoyed his work.

MF: But, do you? Were you involved in politics? Did you vote?

SS: No, I voted yes, and my husband voted, but we weren't involved (???)

MF: Yeah.

AP: Have you been involved in like community or volunteer work? Did you like volunteer for your community? Do things for others?

SS: Did I volunteer?

AP: Yeah, like in the community?

SS: (thoughtful pause) I suppose I did. I can't name at all.

MF: Can you remember anything you did? Any volunteer program you were in maybe? Or something you worked for?

SS: I was busy raising two babies and then a third one. And I didn't get involved in any activities that way. Then when they got older, I got the job and that was it.

MF: What role did religion play in your life? What role has religion played in your life? Has your ...has religion been very important in your life?

SS: Was what?

MF: Has religion been very important in your life?

SS: Was my husband (???)?

MF: Has religion ...your religion ...been very important in your life?

SS: I don't know what you mean.

MF: Religion?

AP: Like your beliefs?

MF: Just you're (pause) Jewish, right? Has that been a very important part of your life?

SS: Oh yeah. Belonged to the synagogue and a couple of organizations, but I wasn't big at it, you know?

AP: Did it play any role in raising your children?

SS: What?

AP: Did your religion, being Jewish, did that play any role in raising your children?

SS: (confused look)

MF: Did it affect how you raised your children?

SS: Oh yeah, I raised them Jewish.

MF: How have health issues impacted your life? How have health issues any health issues impacted your life?

SS: What have I had?

MF: I said, how have any health issues you've had impacted your life?

SS: Yeah.

MF: So, you've had health issues?

AP: Have they made you like see things differently? Or how have they affected your life? The health issues?

SS: How'd affect my life? I lived according to my religion. That's all I can tell you about it.

MF: Have you had any health issues in your life? Medical issues or anything?

SS: I did have health problems, but not major, minor. (???)

AP: Were you always able to get healthcare? Were you always able to get healthcare? Have support when you go to the doctor? Affordable?

SS: Did I always have a doctor?

MF: Yeah, did you always have a doctor and healthcare?

SS: I always had a doctor.

MF: And healthcare? Did you always have healthcare?

SS: Yes. I worked for Paul Revere Life Insurance and that was a big part of the healthcare issue. Yeah. I worked ..I was a superv ...office supervisor. I was there for twenty odd years.

MF: So ...

SS: I supervised seven girls and ...so don't ask me what I'm doing here now. (mumbles)

MF: Do you remember how old you were when you were allowed to date? Be in a relationship? When you were younger?

AP: When your parents would let you go out with boys?

SS: I didn't hear you.

MF: I said do you remember how old you were when your parents let you go out, have a boyfriend, and go on dates?

SS: Oh, I was 16. I had my first boyfriend.

AP: Where did you go when you went on dates?

SS: Where did I go?

AP: With your boyfriend?

SS: Well, the first one I was 16. Then when I met my husband, I was 17. He lived in New York and I lived here. He would come up here and we would go places and then I would go out there to New York and he would take me places there.

MF: What kind of places did you go to?

SS: Chinese restaurants (laughs) different restaurants. The theater.

MF: What was considered fashionable when you were a young woman? What was considered fashionable for like clothes when you were a young woman?

SS: Well, skirts, sweaters, nylons, and I didn't wear high heels, you know? Maybe about that high (shows height with fingers)

MF: Like an inch? Maybe?

SS: What?

MF: Like an inch?

SS: Maybe.

AP: What was your favorite musical group or song? What did you listen to for music? What did you listen to for music?

SS: What did I like for music?

AP: Yeah.

SS: Well, once I met my husband, he liked classical music, so I went along with that.

MF: What did you like before you met him? What kind of music did you like before you met him?

SS: Well, well you know. Music that young kids liked. I was 16 when I met him so I liked the music that the 16 year olds liked at the time. I was 19 when I got married.

MF: While you were in school, were you involved in any clubs or anything like that? Any extracurricular activities?

SS: Latin Club, a couple I can't remember them all. A couple of clubs.

AP: Do you have any memories of any historical events while you were growing up?

SS: What?

AP: Do you remember any historical events that happened when you were growing up?

SS: (thinking) I don't know (???) There was a lot of things. I can't remember them all.

MF: Do you remember any of the wars? Remember any wars while you were growing up?

SS: Wars? Not while I was growing up. I was ...I was 16. I got married. (voices in the background) I had children. And that's what I was involved with. Then my husband went in the army and I was involved with taking care of the kids. So, yeah ...

MF: Do you have any hobbies that you like to do right now?

SS: Not really right now, but I knitted a lot and crocheted. I made afghans. (looks at blanket on bed) This is one I made.

MF: Very nice.

AP: How did you get through tough times? What did you think of when things were hard? How did you get through?

SS: What did I do?

AP: When you had tough times in your life? If you had problems or ...?

SS: I lived with my parents and my sisters so I didn't go to work and life was easy for me. I didn't have too many problems.

MF: But when you got older, when you got married, how did you deal with any problems that you had, just in life?

SS: I dealt with it. I mean it seems very young to me now, but I got married, 19 was average.

MF: So, when you weren't at home, where did you spend most of your time?

SS: I was born at home.

MF: No, when you were at home, when you weren't at home with your children, where did you spend most of your time? Did you go anywhere in particular that you liked?

SS: Did I go where?

MF: Anywhere in particular that you liked to spend time besides your home?

SS: Well, I was busy with my children.

AP: Are you happy about the choices you made in your life? Do you have regrets or anything? Are you happy with the choices that you've made in your life?

SS: Yes, I was happy with them, my choices.

AP: So, you don't regret anything? You don't regret anything or see anything as a mistake or anything like that?

SS: No, I was glad to stay home and do what I did, raise my kids, the first two were only a year apart. Then a few years later, I had another one. I was content. I wish I was doing it now. (sniffle)

MF: So, based on the experience you had in your life, what advice would you give women of our age? What advice would you give women of today?

SS: What I would say today, don't get in the situation I got in and come here. Just don't come here. (cries) This is the worst part of my life. I need a tissue.

MF: You need a tissue?

AP: Let's stop it. (background noise)