Bess Arick Transcript

Jennifer Stone: Today is Monday, June 28, 1999. I'm Jennifer Stone, interviewing our narrator, Bess Arick, in her home in Brookline under the auspices of the Temple Shalom Oral History Project. Let's start at the beginning. I understand that you grew up in a rural area.

Bess Arick: Yes. My father and mother emigrated from Russia at the turn of the century. [inaudible]

JS: Yes.

BA: My father, of course, to evade the draft. When the Russian boys were drafted, they rarely came out alive in Russia. He was one of the bright ones, and he came to this country with my mother.

JS: Was that well-known?

BA: I think if you talk to a lot of Jewish families, you will find it was well-known. Actually, I talked to a man who lives here now, and we were talking something about all the mayhem going on in the world. I said, “My father came.” Oh, he's a Russian. “My father came here at the turn of the century.” He said, “My father wasn't smart enough to leave. I've only been here ten years.” At any rate, they came here, and my father went into the cloak and suit business, which he knew nothing about, with a cousin. A few years later, his cousin absconded with some money, so my father had a little money left over, and he bought a farm, a dairy farm, in Millbury, Massachusetts, and that's where we were brought up. We were all born in this country. My mother had two children, a son and a daughter, fourteen months apart, and then seven years later, had us, the twins. The funny story about that is that, of course, they didn't have the machinery they have today,

and so nobody knew my mother was having twins. The doctor came and delivered her, and he left. Thirty minutes later, my father was on his white horse going to find the doctor because I was coming. This doctor, who was a rather well-known name in [inaudible], was Dr. Poscher, P-O-S-C-H-E-R, I think. He used to see me all over town, and he'd stop wherever I was, and he [inaudible], “She shouldn’t be here. We didn't know she was coming,” and stuff like that, which I found rather embarrassing. We had a wonderfully happy childhood. There were four of us. We didn't have any money. When I was born in 1913 – I'm eighty-five now – I always had a playmate: my twin. And my two older siblings had each other, and we just had a very happy time. We had the farm to roam on, and early on, my father made a living from the farm. He had almost forty head of cattle and employed a manager of the farm. What did he know about farming? So, we earned a living, and they were able to educate all of us as best they could.

JS: Can I ask you to back up and tell me where your mother came [inaudible]?

BA: My mother also came with my father from Russia.

JS: Oh, so they were already –?

BA: They were already married, and they came together.

JS: Got it, okay.

BA: She was a very strong woman and a very maternal matriarchal type. At any rate, when we came to 1929, my brother, Harry, was at Harvard Law School. My twin brother went off to Clark, and we had no money. It was the height of the Depression, but my parents had a farm, and so every Sunday, lots of people would descend on us [inaudible] and family to eat. And I remember walking in the fields with my mother and picking the corn, and they'd set up tables outside, and we would have lots of vegetables, and so forth and so on. It was a wonderful time. It gave me a sense of connection, which I've always had, to family.

JS: Yes. Was there an extended family? Cousins? [inaudible]

BA: Yes, absolutely. My mother and father both had brothers and sisters. I'm going to back up a little. My father came over to this country with a brother of his as well, and they had a very long name (Zarrowinsky?) or something. So, my father took the first half of it; my maiden name was Zarrow, Z-A-R-R-O-W. My uncle's name was Ravinsky, R-A-V-I-N-S-K-Y. Now, we found him some years ago, and we got together with him. They live in San Francisco. I've lost touch since then. I thought that was a rather interesting story.

JS: They divided up the family name.

BA: Yeah.

JS: That’s hilarious.

BA: Isn’t that cute? I couldn't go to college. In those days, the culture insisted that the men had to be educated, not the women, and I found that very difficult to take. I'd been offered scholarships all over the city, all over Boston.

JS: I'm guessing that you had done very well in school.

BA: I was valedictorian. And actually, I had to tell you a sad story. We lived in a Catholic community. Lots of French Catholic Canadians lived in Millbury, and lots of antisemitism. I remember walking to school with my siblings and being taunted all the way to school.

JS: Oh, really? [inaudible]

BA: When my twin and I graduated high school, we had the two highest marks in the whole graduating class. The school board had a special meeting because they wanted to take away all the prizes from us.

JS: Oh, my. And they stripped you of your prizes?

BA: Well, they didn't strip me of the valedictorian thing, but they took the history prize, they took the math prize for my brother, and all that sort of thing. We always talked about that, and we were going to get beyond it. Of course, we did.

JS: The way you dealt with it was to resolve that you would [inaudible].

BA: The way we dealt with it was to excel.

JS: To excel. To try harder. Not to give up.

BA: Yes. Before my daughter died, about – she's gone nine years. About ten, eleven years ago, she called me up one day and asked me if I would please come with her. She was going to be lecturing at a symposium at Millbury High School, where we'd all gone to school. I went with her. We were greeted like royalty. They said we were the only family that they hold up as models. We were the only Jewish family there, and we all went through it because we had the best records and so forth. It was such fun being there; we just got such a bang out of it.

JS: How wonderful.

BA: Am I on the right track of what you [inaudible]?

JS: How we deal with grief and loss is part of our history, too.

BA: Well, this will be disjointed, but I do want to tell you that one of the worst things about growing old is loneliness. I was one of four in a family that got together on many occasions. When my kid was bar mitzvah in St. Louis, everybody would trek there. We all got together for all the [inaudible] because we knew we'd get together for funerals. It's been very lonely for me since my – well, I lost my twin brother.

JS: Are you the last one to survive?

BA: Yes, I'm the only one surviving. I lost my twin brother when we were in our fifties. I think he was fifty-four. He had been in the Army. He had a PhD in pathophysiology from Harvard, and the Army took him, of course. He was in the Medical Corps. One of the Southern Pacific islands, New Caledonia, or something – I've forgotten – he picked up a – I think it probably was viral, in his intestines. When he was separated from the Army, he thought he was smarter than everyone, and he didn't tell anybody about it. He promised me that he would see some doctors, but he never followed through. He was a very successful – he was very successful. He published a lot of papers.

JS: He was an academic?

BA: Yeah, he was an academic. He taught. And then they had to call me one morning and tell me that he died. That was very hard for me. It was my first loss.

JS: And your twin?

BA: He was my twin. Twins have a very special relationship.

JS: What was that like growing up?

BA: It was wonderful. Oh, we had such fun. We got into more trouble. I was always the instigator, they told me. I tell you, I have a friend who's pregnant with twins, twin girls, and I'm very pleased they’re the same sex because there's an – you probably know this. My best friend in St. Louis was a Freudian psychiatrist. When my brother died, somebody got a hold of Mary and said [inaudible]. He was teaching at the University [inaudible] School at that time. There's a library dedicated to him at the medical school. Anyhow, Mary spent the day with me, tried to explain to me what it was all about, because there was a certain competitiveness between us. She said, " It's very easy. Girls develop sooner than boys. You probably walked and talked before your brother Mike did, and he probably was always aiming to be as good as you were.” She said it only has to do with gender differences because boys, as we know – is it true today that boys develop a little slower

than girls do?

JS: Yes.

BA: My motor abilities are so much better than his. I learned to ride a bike long before he'd – that sort of thing.

JS: He was always trying to catch up.

BA: Catch up, right? He was very, very smart. I mean, he got lots of acclaim. I think he published like 110 papers.

JS: But what would have happened if you had had equal educational opportunity?

BA: Oh, yeah. [laughter]

JS: What might have happened?

BA: As it was, I read a great deal. I took lots and lots of courses as an adult. I really don't find that I'm losing anything because I read more books than most people do; you know that. We have to keep on learning. That's what life is all about. But my older brother, Harry, became a judge here in town. When he was starting to make a living – I'm still saying it was 1930 – he offered to put me through school, but it was too late. Bill and I met when we were very young. My husband. We were both teaching in Temple Emanuel in Worcester, in the Sunday school. We had started a young dramatic group and fell in love. We married when he was twenty-three, and I was twenty-one. We eloped because it was so bad financially. You didn't have the things you have today. Whoever thought of going to a hotel or motel to have sex? [inaudible] huge – one of these old, old Studebaker touring cars with these [inaudible] glass windows [inaudible]. I'll tell you, I think some of my back trouble today comes from that car. [laughter] Is that in the tape? Did you turn it off?

JS: Don’t worry. Don’t worry.

BA: Isn’t that funny? Isn’t that funny?

JS: That’s hilarious.

BA: I was, of course, the youngest in the family, and I didn't know what to do about my mother, so finally, I wasn't going to keep her in the dark. I was very, very close to my mother, and so we told my mother and father. The only thing my mother really said was, “We're having a reception within the month, and please don't get pregnant for a year because everybody in the family is going to say, ‘Ah, she was pregnant.’” I didn't have my first child until the second year of marriage.

JS: I see. So, you fell in love. You met and fell in love through the temple.

BA: That's right.

JS: And by this time, were you living in the city?

BA: No.

JS: Still living on the farm?

BA: I was living on the farm. Now, by the time we eloped, I had spent some time in the city. I had told my parents that I wanted to be in Worcester, because it was seven miles from Worcester to where we were, and who could have dates and all that sort of thing? So, I schlepped my sister with me, who was very, very conventional all her life, and she came with me. Both of us married the men we knew during that year that we lived in Worcester. Isn’t that interesting?

JS: Oh, no kidding.

BA: Yeah. She had a very happy marriage, too. My Bill had a master's degree at nineteen. He was very bright.

JS: Oh, my. What was he [inaudible]?

BA: But I'll tell you – his major was English, and his minor was chemistry. I want to tell you something. I think if he'd ever been able to get a job teaching during the Depression, he would have lived longer because he never found it really fulfilling. He did very well. When he died after nine years of being sick and eight years at home with nurses and all the rest of it, he was a human being. He was a real great guy. His company took very good care of us. He died, and I had to call them about some papers or something, and I wanted to thank them. They said, “We owe a thanks to you because we're selling and making money on the products your husband designed and produced.” So that was a great tribute to him.

JS: [inaudible]

BA: But he’d had rheumatic fever as a young man, in his teens, had lost his mother when he was fourteen, and his father, who was very Orthodox, [inaudible] would not be allowed to play his violin. He found that couple of years the most painful of his life – lost his mother, and he couldn't play his violin.

JS: Why couldn't he play his violin?

BA: Because you didn't have music in a house of mourning. That was my father-in-law's edict. I don't know how true it was. This is, in retrospect, that Bill and I used to talk about. We were married forty-one years when he died. He was sixty-four, and I was sixty-two.

JS: [inaudible]

BA: He'd been sick, as I said, for nine years, and had three heart attacks. Anyhow, one morning, he got up, and we'd already moved to a large building near the medical school to make life easier for me because my office was in the medical school. “Let's play bridge tonight,” he said. “I feel good.” We were very friendly with neighbors upstairs. So, I called the (Wilenskys?) and said, “Bill’s very good today. Would you come down and play [inaudible]?” They said, “Sure.” “I'll make a little supper,” I said. And we sat and played bridge. And suddenly, Bill said, “I don't feel very well.” And with that, he collapsed off his chair. My next-door neighbor happened to be a physician, and I immediately sent Harry (Wilensky?) over to get him. By the time he gets here, Bill had died. It was a wonderful time for him to go because the doctor had warned me that there was so little left of his heart muscle that he was surprised that he was existing at all. So, I was sort of warned, but you never expect it. I was unprepared. I hadn't chosen a lot or casket or anything. Everybody had said, “You know, it’s going to happen.” But anyhow.

JS: How can you be prepared [inaudible]?

BA: Never.

JS: Were you prepared for any loss you've ever had?

BA: No. The worst one was my daughter. Nobody should ever lose a child. That's not what nature wanted. The generations should succeed each other, and she was a wonderful girl. I’ll have to show some – well, that’s a picture of her right there in a little frame.

JS: Oh, yes.

BA: She had a PhD in American history.

JS: Oh, she's lovely.

BA: And very, very full of vim and vigor and worked with a group called The Network. They're educational consultants. I edited all her work, and I edited all my son's work. It was fun. Nice to know how to edit; you're useful in the family.

JS: So, even though you don't have a lot of formal education, you have [inaudible].

BA: I didn't want to seem immodest, so I didn't pull out some letters that, when I retired, were sent to me [inaudible].

JS: I think when you're talking to history, you don't have to worry about modesty. [inaudible]

BA: I don't know if you know the name Harold Schuknecht here in town. He was the dean of otologists all over the country, maybe all over the world, but I only knew him in [inaudible]. When I moved here, Harold was very sweet to me and asked me to go to parties and whatnot.

JS: This was in the early '80s?

BA: Yeah, when I came here in '83.

JS: '83.

BA: I decided not to do that. That was a different life. I have very little to contribute now, and I really wanted to concentrate on my family. Marty had two young children when I came here, and (Franny?) had Sharon. So, there were three grandchildren. I wanted to get to know them, and I didn't want – but anyhow, when I retired – you should hear the letter stuff. [inaudible] this man, very dignified, very august, and he ends this letter in saying, "You know that my affection for you is everlasting, and I send you hugs and kisses." I remember reading it at one of the parties that was given, and everybody got up and just clapped because they all knew Harold Schuknecht. He never said those things.

JS: My goodness.

BA: Isn’t that interesting? Letters came all over. Robert (Rubin?) in New York wrote a letter. A lot of people did. I knew that I had touched a lot of people because I had to go to all the medical meetings for a long time; I would meet with authors and so forth. People were very nice to me, and I thought they were doing this because I had clout. You know how it works, don't you? Papers, manuscripts come in, you send them out to people who work in the same field.

JS: Would you just tell the tape recorder what this job was? I know, but [inaudible].

BA: Okay, I went to work for a man called Dr. Ben Senturia, who's an otolaryngologist at Washington University, School of Medicine, and his satellites, one of which was Jewish Hospital. I tell the story often about one of my neighbors was a physician, Dr. Goldstein, and had a party one Saturday night. I had a few martinis, and I told everybody in a loud voice, “I’m either going to have an affair or get a job.” And my next-door neighbor, Bob Goldstein, went to Ben and said, “You know, she's very bright. You ought to hire her – I know you're looking for staff – because she'd be great.” So, Ben offered me a job. I thought he was teasing. He had a lot to drink. I waited. He called me. So, first, I started off working with him. He taught me how to do audiology and stuff like that. Then he went on a three-week vacation to Europe. I kept thinking, “Am I testing the right ear? Am I marking on the operating list right?” I remember being left in charge, and off this guy went. I was doing all the pre-op testing. Anyhow, I expanded. It was wonderful. I started to read a great deal. I went to Central Institute for the Deaf, which is a well-known Institute in St. Louis. It's a school for the Deaf, as well as a big research – I don't know what's happened to it in the last fifteen years, but in those days, I took courses [inaudible].

JS: This was when?

BA: Let’s see. I'm trying to figure it out. Bill had been sick. Bill got sick in 1954. He was maybe five years sick before. I had worked for Federation and everything. But I really wanted something to do that was more stimulating, and that I would feel – I felt really exploited. One year, I handled the speaker's bureau for the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, and everybody on the committee, at the last minute, couldn't make the talk. I was running around doing talks all over the community, and I felt exploited. It was time for me to do something and get paid for it.

JS: So, this would have been in the late ’50s –

BA: Yeah.

JS: – that you began?

BA: Early ’60s.

JS: So, you were running this man's practice [inaudible].

BA: Well, just doing the testing. [inaudible] from a medical point of view. But my job – and so then afterward, when he – he had told me he was going to take over this journal. When he took it over, he asked me to come work for him, and I ended up being managing editor for eleven, twelve years.

JS: You said it started in the ’60s.

BA: Yeah, and it was a wonderful job. It was very stimulating. It put me in touch with a lot of interesting people. I loved it, and I was good at it.

JS: And you decided – you would farm things out for peer review, but then you had ultimate say in what got published?

BA: No, the medical staff had the last say on it. Then we took it over. I had a lot of people working for me, a lot of adjuncts. We had a lot of the professor's wives. Washington U, you know, is a very well-known school. They consider themselves the Harvard of the Midwest, but so does everybody [inaudible] does, too; they compete for that. At any rate, we had a lot of – it expanded my horizon. It was really nice. Bill had to stop working about two years into his illness because he had two heart attacks about ten months apart, and his doctor suggested he not work anymore. He was not content not being a very productive person, but he had a lot to do. He started the Israeli Philatelic Society [inaudible].

JS: Oh, my.

BA: Became a big stamp collector. My son has it. It’s all in a ball someplace. When he retires, he says, “I’ll work on it.” He could not even be a consultant, although companies would call him, because his policy, which gave him a lot of money, said you cannot work if you're on this disability policy. So, he would tell people on the phone – we got inundated with wine, art, whatnot. I have to tell you about some of my art. Those were only posters that I picked up in Spain at the Picasso Museum. I’ve traveled a great deal, so I’m not bereft that I don’t go to Paris.

JS: Yes, yes. How many times have you been to Paris?

BA: Twice? Have you?

JS: I have.

BA: Isn’t it a wonderful city?

JS: Wonderful.

BA: What happened to me was very nice. We usually have an author, at least one author, from these institutions, like the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. So, before I'd leave, I'd have one of my secretaries drop a note and say that I was going to be in town, and may I call you? We didn't use the phone internationally the way we do today. I'd get letters right back, and they'd say, "We want to see you. Be sure and call us." So, they'd take me out to dinner, and we'd talk about what's going on in the field, what we've done. We published books, too, what we called supplements. Anybody had a special project on which they had worked a long, long time, and so forth, we would publish that as well. It was a fun job. It had never taken advertising. I decided that it should make money because this culture is based on how much money you make. I don't like that ethic, but it's true, isn't it? So, Ben and I sat down with the rest of the editors one day and said, "We're going to put out a feel." And we started to make money.

JS: Oh, my.

BA: It's an interesting journal. Most journals are owned by societies. The Annals of Otology, Rhinology & Laryngology was owned by a doctor and his family. He had started it as a young otolaryngologist, where nothing was being published about his field. When he died, his daughter inherited, and she was a wonderful lady, very bright and stimulating. What's interesting to me – because she came out of such a different background – she came out of a German background, but always, always had money. So, all of a sudden, I'm thrown in with these people who – her name was [Irene Loeb] Cohn. She'd marry a man called Cohn, and she never could have babies, and she adopted two. I became her buddy because she loved to watch the journal grow. It was a tribute to her father, who was lost and died, and it was owned by – so, they put me on profit sharing, and I became very comfortable.

JS: Oh, my goodness.

BA: Isn't that nice?

JS: How amazing. Now, was she Jewish or German Christian?

BA: No, no, they were Jewish. Yeah, they were all Jewish. I always was so amused by how they celebrated Pesach and so forth. My boss also came out of an Eastern European background, as I did – Dr. Ben Senturia. But he married into the wealth of St. Louis, which was dominated by German Jews. He married a Hellman. The Hellman's liquor. Hellman’s mayonnaise. Her father had come to the Midwest very early, got a lot of land, and became exceedingly rich. So, Ben married Nancy Senturia, and they'd insist we come to their Seders. My husband detested [inaudible]. They would have maybe thirty people. They'd have a butler behind every three chairs. Bill felt the spontaneity of the whole thing was gone. Ben knew that Bill and I had had fairly good Jewish background, and so he'd make sure that we had something to say. Now, [inaudible] Bill's name was Wilfred, and everybody called him Bill. His mother was reading Walter Scott, I guess, when she had him. At any rate, it was an interesting concept for me, because I had come out of a very Orthodox Jewish [inaudible].

JS: Now I'm going to turn over to tape, and then I'm going to ask you to tell me about your Orthodox upbringing.

BA: Okay.

JS: Let's put this on – we'll go a few more minutes on this side and then flip [inaudible].

BA: Where shall I start?

JS: Why is it that only the grandmothers [inaudible]?

BA: Don't forget, Harold's forty years old. He was born forty years ago, and in the hospitals – I'm sure it was true all over the United States – the only people who could come into the maternity ward were the parents, the grandparents. So, Selma Dennis' mother was a New Yorker, and it took her a few days to come in. So, when Harold was

born, I acted as the grandmother. Selma called me. She said, “Oh, come see the baby. Just tell him you're my mother,” and that's what I did. So, Harold now lives in Newton, and he's married to a non-Jewish girl, and they're very active in the mixed-marriage group in the temple.

JS: Yes, the interfaith –?

BA: Yes, her name is Betsy Dennis, but she goes by her mother's name a lot, professionally. She's a lawyer. I'm just very fond of her. She came over and spent the day with me the other day – she has two children – before they went off to camp, and we have a swimming pool. Do you have a child at home?

JS: I do.

BA: Well, why don't you bring her over sometime and go swimming in the afternoon?

JS: We’d love to.

BA: It's underutilized. There are thirty units in the building. A lot of older people.

JS: Do you swim?

BA: Oh, I do, but often I don't go when there are a lot of people around. Anyhow, I have Betsy, and she's just been very sweet to me, and she knows I'm lonely. Nobody can ever take (Franny's?) place, of course, my daughter, but Betsy has been just a wonderful – and so bright and so stimulating. We just sit around and talk about it. I'm always giving her books to read. She doesn't always finish them.

JS: Do you read a lot?

BA: Oh yeah.

JS: Do you?

BA: Yeah. I read a great deal.

JS: Well, let me take you back and ask you what Jewish ritual and observance was like when you were growing up.

BA: Is the thing on?

JS: It’s on. Yeah, [inaudible].

BA: All right. Let me tell you. We were very Orthodox. We did strange things. Don't forget, we were a farm family. When I tell people that we said some of the [inaudible] for Rosh Hashanah by taking a live animal and going around your head with it.

JS: Wait, circling the animal around your head?

BA: Yes. Are you familiar with that ritual?

JS: No, never [inaudible].

BA: Yeah. And I’ve forgotten the name of it, and if I think of it, I'll tell it to you, but maybe the rabbi or somebody will know. [inaudible]

JS: [inaudible]?

BA: I don’t know how to spell it. That was the Yiddish or Russian term my parents used. But we all did that, the whole family. There were four of us, my mother and father – that was six. We would leave the farm in the care of the hired men, one or two. We always had somebody there. We would move in with family and friends in Worcester, so we could walk to shul and observe the holiday.

JS: This was for the high holidays?

BA: Yes, for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We went to the Providence Street Shul in Worcester, Massachusetts. I remember, in those days, my two brothers wanted to go – the ball games were always going on; if you remember, the playoffs. There used to be a bulletin board at the Worcester Telegram-Gazette. The boys would sneak away from the Yom Kippur services, but my father would come in at six o'clock in the morning, take off his shoes, and he was there. So, I would come and sit with him. When I was small, it was okay, but when I got older, no women were allowed to sit with the men.

JS: Now, at what age were you sent off to the women?

BA: Oh, I think when I was eight, nine years old, I could no longer – [inaudible] had to go upstairs with the women. But my father was – I'm going to pull out some pictures sometime to show them to you.

JS: Wonderful. I want to see them.

BA: He was not a farmer, but he was a very kind and loving man. Didn't succeed materially, but succeeded with his children, and I have a wonderful story to tell. There were years when I was home, I would see my mother and father have lunch, and then they would go upstairs, and I thought, “Are they tired? What are they doing up there?” It wasn't until I was grown and started to think about sex that I realized they were going upstairs in the middle of the afternoon to have sex. There's nothing wrong with that.

JS: On Shabbat?

BA: No, during the whole week.

JS: Oh, the whole week.

BA: Because my father didn't work. He stayed around the farm in those days. Can you imagine what a nice memory that is?

JS: Indeed.

BA: Isn't that a wonderful memory to have? They really loved each other. To tell you how much they loved each other, my father died very suddenly. Now we knew that he'd had little strokes. I had a cousin who was a physician in those days, and he used to get out to the farm quite often. He'd say to all of us, “Your father had small strokes, but I can't get him to take medication or anything.” Sure enough, one day, he had a stroke in the barn. By the time I got to Worcester – we were living in New Jersey then – he was dead. Marty had just been born. My Marty is fifty-eight. Just fifty-eight years ago. I had left him in New Jersey. We were living in Morristown at the time. That's a whole other story about what the war did to dislocate us.

JS: Yes, and I want to hear that story.

BA: Anyhow, I flew up. You couldn't fly in those days. I mean, there weren't many planes available. So, we took the – I don't remember exactly, but we got to Worcester in time to be picked up and taken to the funeral. Then we went to my sister's house, which was in Springfield, Massachusetts, and sat Shiva. Three or four days into it, I talked to the rabbi about coming home because I had left a baby that I had been nursing. He said, “Absolutely.” So, Bill and I went there, and I never saw my mother alive again. She died nine days after my father, and I believe – I still believe – that grief is a very real disease. My mother said to my sister, who was having her second child, she was pregnant at the time, that she really wasn't needed. Her girls were married, and two boys were due to go into the Army. She did not feel that she had a place. We had talked – Bill and I talked with her about coming to stay with us. We had bought a very lovely old house in Morristown, New Jersey, and there was lots of room and blah, blah, blah, and we had made that arrangement. The next thing I know, we get a telephone call that my mother had a stroke, and she was gone [inaudible]. So, of course, we went back, and my twin brother was so upset that he ended up in the hospital. That was a very hard thing to bear.

I don't know that I've ever gotten over it.

JS: So, you had Marty, lost your father, lost your mother.

BA: And I had two children.

JS: And your brother was sick.

BA: (Franny?) was the oldest child.

JS: Marty and Fran.

BA: Yeah.

JS: All of that happened very close together.

BA: Very close, yeah.

JS: How devastating.

BA: So, you need to be strong. My house became the center for the family. The boys went into the Army, or whatever was going. When they were separated from the Army, I was still living in Morristown, and shortly after that, we moved. The war was over. They were being separated from the Army, and Bill was offered a job in St. Louis to set up a lab, and we decided to take it. It was a good-paying job, blah, blah, blah. And Bill thought it would be challenging, so we moved to St. Louis. Sold the house and went to St. Louis. I had the only house in Morristown, New Jersey, that didn't have a plaque that said, “George Washington slept here.” I was going to put one up that said, “George Washington did not sleep here.”

JS: [laughter] That’s very funny. All right. I’m going to flip the tape.

[Recording paused.]

BA: So funny. Don't put this on the tape. I want to tell you something.

JS: This is side B of tape one of my interview with Bess Arick on June 28, 1999, in her home in Brookline. And I'm Jennifer Stone.

BA: All right. Turn it off. Do you know the work of Ellen –? [Recording paused.] What was I talking about?

JS: About growing up Jewish?

BA: Okay. We made a big thing of it. I mean, Shabbos was Shabbat in my household. My mother [inaudible] on Friday night, put money in the [inaudible], and we settled in for the Sabbath. We did all the things that was required. We stayed home, we didn't ride, we didn't write.

JS: You didn’t write?

BA: We didn't use pen and pencil to write.

JS: Oh, that was considered work?

BA: Oh, yes. We didn't do any of those things. We sort of played ball and loved each other. My mother would have cooked a cholent, which you can reheat because you didn’t want to cook. It was a very observant Jewish family. I liked it. I rather liked the ritual. Bill's father – his father had been a shochet.

JS: What does that mean?

BA: Meaning, he killed animals. You know, ritually killed animals. When he left Lithuania, he ended up in England, and he stayed there for a while to get papers to come to this country. That's how he earned a living there. He was very well-versed. He taught Hebrew schools and such things when he came to Worcester, and then started a business.

Would you get up for me?

JS: Yes.

BA: Right next to the white book up there is a little red book. No, come forward. Come forward. Come forward. That's it. I think that's the one. Does it say –?

JS: Water Street.

BA: Turn it off for a few minutes.

JS: Well, I want to get this on tape if you're going to describe some pictures.

BA: Okay.

JS: [inaudible]. Let's do it on the tape.

BA: All right. This is my father-in-law.

JS: Water Street. This is a newspaper clipping.

BA: Yes, from the Telegram-Gazette.

JS: And the title is “Water Street Exhibit Reveals Varied Past,” and there’s a photograph, a 1905 photograph of Simon Arick’s cart, which is a wheel cart pulled by a horse. The picture was going to be part of the exhibit at the Worcester Historical Museum.

BA: Right. It's called “Water Street: World Within a World.”

JS: Wonderful. And this was your father-in-law's world.

BA: That's right.

JS: And did he continue being a ritual slaughterer?

BA: No. Oh, no, didn’t do that at all. Started a business with a cart, and then eventually had a big store, which has sold.

JS: Was that the cart?

BA: I guess it was. As far as I know, that’s authentic. Yeah. We got a real [inaudible] out of that.

JS: When was this? When [inaudible]?

BA: Oh, it was published 19 – I don’t know that I know. I was here already, so probably –

JS: So maybe the ’80s.

BA: – the last fourteen years. Now, my father-in-law had two brothers who also settled in Worcester, and several of them had stores on Water Street. His was a dry goods store. One of the other brothers sold something else, but it was dominated by Russian Jews. Had a very huge Russian population, immigrants from Russia.

JS: How much did you feel isolated as a Jewish family? How much did you feel part of the community?

BA: Oh, no, we felt very isolated in Millbury because I was not allowed to date, neither was my sister, because there were only gentile boys around. In fact, I didn't date until I left home when I was about eighteen or nineteen.

JS: When you moved to Worcester.

BA: Then I moved to Worcester, yeah, but I had met Bill at the temple, where I was teaching and all that. We were isolated. We really had very, very few friends. Don't forget, we had a hundred acres of land, so right away, you didn't have a close neighbor.

JS: You were geographically isolated, too.

BA: Right, too, absolutely. But we had each other. That's why I said it was such a happy time.

JS: So, your closest friends and playmates were your siblings –

BA: That's right.

JS: – and not girls and boys [inaudible] school.

BA: Absolutely, absolutely. When my brother, Harry, in 1930 went to – he graduated law school in 1930. They have the Socratic method – I don't know if you know that – in law school. Harry would come home many weekends, and he just learned to play bridge. He'd make us play bridge. So, I know how to play bridge from a young girl. My sister never liked it, but I loved it. Harry and I were real buddies at that time.

JS: Even though he was seven years older.

BA: Seven years older. Now, after Bill died [inaudible], Bill died when I was sixty-two. It's a long, long time. One of the serendipities about coming here was I got to know Harry again because we were separated by so many miles. We saw each other two or three times a year. I used to take a house at the Cape every summer for weeks or six weeks, how long I could be gone, and I would bring Bill here, sometimes by ambulance. We'd fly here, but airlines were wonderfully accommodating. I don't know if they still are, but we'd get Bill on a plane in St. Louis and come to Boston, sometimes with an ambulance waiting for us, or sometimes one of the kids with a station wagon. My brother had a house in New Seabury for a long time, and I would rent very close to there, so we could be together. We'd have a wonderful time. The children would come for as much time as they could. I thought that was a time for them to bond because (Franny?) and Fred had one child, and my son and his wife, Judy, had two children, so there were three grandchildren, and they were wonderful summers, just wonderful.

JS: And Harry had become a judge?

BA: Yes, before he died, he became a judge. Now, in this city, you have to drop out of being a judge. I think it's seventy. So, he went back to his law firm. It's a law firm in Worcester, and his son is now one of the chief partners in the law firm. He was a wonderfully kind guy. I want to tell you a story. I got a telephone call. I'd been here a very short time. The guy introduced himself as Judge So-and-So from Worcester. Did I remember him? No, I didn't remember him. Well, he said, "I'm sure you didn't know this because Harry never talked about it, but he always was there for all the homeless people in Worcester." He said, "He never talked about it, but we knew that he was doing all this pro bono work, and we're starting a fund up for him through the Massachusetts Bar Association, and we wanted you to know about it. Would you come to the first meeting?" And said, "Of course." Now, they were calling me for money, among other things, which I was very happy [inaudible]. But that was a wonderful tribute to my brother.

JS: What a good [inaudible].

BA: Never, never told anybody. He married when he was forty-two. I remember introducing him when he'd come to St. Louis before he got married. "This is my brother, and he's sexually retarded."

JS: [laughter]

BA: He thought that was the funniest thing he had ever heard. You know, today they would have said that he was a homosexual. He went to law school with a whole bunch of guys from Worcester. Two or three of them got into Harvard. Two or three went to BU [Boston University], and these boys, five or six of them, the men, stuck together through the war. One of the reasons they didn't marry early is they were all in the war four or five years. So, gradually, they all got married. My brother got married when he was forty-two.

JS: So, he stayed close to this group of guys.

BA: Oh yes, they did everything together. I remember them coming from St. Louis, and they wanted us to find girls for them. Now, here are five guys in a station wagon with a whole lot of beer and ice there. I wasn't going to introduce them to anybody if I even knew anybody. Gave them all hell. They hated the climate in St. Louis. St. Louis, you know, is a very tropical climate. It's very hot. In those days, we didn't have air conditioning in anything. We eventually built a house with air conditioning [inaudible]. I remember Harry saying, "We're not staying," and they just left. They stayed one night. I was happy for them to go. Did I need to feed five men? Anyhow, I have wonderful stories about him.

JS: So, when he married at forty-two –?

BA: Yeah, he married a Worcester girl, (Evelyn?). I'm still very, very close to her. And then they had two children. They had an incompatibility, the Rh factor, and so having babies was hard. She was a nurse by training, and she had been in Hawaii, the [inaudible] Center there for one of the Army somethings or other. (Evelyn?) had spent some of the war in Hawaii.

JS: Just like South Pacific.

BA: Yeah, she's a great girl, but they had met here in Worcester and so forth. As I said, I'm very, very fond of her. We don't get together as often as we did, because she doesn't like to drive anymore. She's now eighty-three, and I don't drive on highways. I go Route 9 to get to Newton, but I don't go much further than that. So, it's hard for us to see each other. We talk on the phone. She was at the wedding. I gave Suzanne an elegant cocktail party to honor her engagement. Don't ask me what it cost. I could have had dinner for all those people, but Judy said, "Don't compete with me." Judy's my daughter-in-law, and of course, she wanted the wedding to be unique. She did a great job. It was a wonderful wedding.

JS: Marty's wife?

BA: Marty’s wife, yeah. She's an audiologist.

JS: No kidding.

BA: And of course, that's the field in which I worked, and ear, nose, and throat medicine is full of communication. We published a lot of papers, so they used to tease Marty that he married his mother. They’re joined at the hip.

JS: Were you instrumental in Marty meeting Judy?

BA: No. Marty had gotten his PhD and took his first job at a center the army had in Natick, I think, and so that was the first [inaudible]. When he graduated with his PhD – Marty was born in – he's fifty-eight, so he's born in 1935. No.

JS: You wrote it down for me. It’s on your questionnaire. Marty was born in ’41.

BA: ’41. He got his PhD twenty-six years later.

JS: Oh, my. He went through quickly.

BA: Yeah. That was 1941, so it was about ’67. All the boys who came through with him, with PhDs in chemistry, couldn't find jobs.

JS: His PhD was in chemistry?

BA: Yeah.

JS: Like his dad.

BA: Yeah, like his dad. None of the boys could get jobs. One ended up at MIT some years later, and we see him occasionally. So, all the boys scattered, and it was very

difficult for them to find jobs. The country was in the depression and whatnot. At any rate, Marty got the job and didn't like it. I don't know what they were making. But somebody in the family knew Judy. Judy was living in New York at the time and told Marty to look her up. I think it was love at first sight. They are just so compatible. They're joined at the hip. I'm telling you, I don't think they go to the bathroom without each other. I think it's a wonderful relationship.

JS: What you're telling me, of course, marriages run in your family – your parents, you.

BA: Yeah. They set a very good example. But Marty and Judy are really compatible. Their hobby is music. Judy plays the video, and Marty plays the clarinet. They're going to Czechoslovakia for some music in the middle of August. She took a course in Cambridge on Saturday. Marty is a very good clarinetist. He doesn't have as much time. He travels for his job. He's with Kronos; it's a computer company, and he loves it. He's their troubleshooter. He's a real great guy to solve problems.

JS: Let me ask you something. He came out of graduate school in '67. Was the Vietnam War an issue for him? How did he avoid [inaudible]?

BA: Yes, it was, but he was in school, and so they left him alone. Several of his friends went who he'd gone to high school with, but he never had to go because he was getting a degree. Actually, my husband got caught up there, too, because he had a chemistry degree. The army didn't conscript him because he'd had rheumatic fever, but they asked him if he would take a job in New Jersey, where they were making pressure-sensitive tape.

JS: This was during World War II?

BA: World War II. And that's how he started in New Jersey.

JS: Oh, I see. That's how you came to New Jersey.

BA: They were making huge pieces of tape, which they covered equipment that was going over on barges. I had so many closets full of that tape. I remember when we [inaudible] the house, I threw them all out. But that was what he built. Bill had a lot of patents, but of course [inaudible].

JS: So, he developed this tape?

BA: Oh, sure. A lot of them. I'm sorry. When you work for somebody, the patents belong to the company. They were called International. They were very pleasant to him. Very nice.

JS: But it was Bill’s contribution. Bill developed –

BA: Yeah. [inaudible]. We all called him [inaudible]. He was a great guy. I still talk to him. [inaudible] I don't believe there's anything beyond what we – we die and become protein.

JS: You don’t believe in [inaudible].

BA: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. How could I with all the things that happened to me? I don't care what you call it, nature, or God, or whatever – I guess nature is here. But I've thought long and hard about it, and I've read a lot. I've heard all of the great Jewish guys who've been this century, and I have some of their books. And now I'm reading Sylvia Plath's poetry because she committed suicide. She was bonkers. It comes through. Have you read her stuff at all?

JS: Yes.

BA: It comes through [inaudible] poetry. I used to read it at night and cry, so I stopped doing that. But I'm not finding an answer.

JS: So, these Jewish theologians don't offer you anything.

BA: No, [inaudible]. One of the men I was very fond of, Dr. (Goodhealth?), his wife did a commentary – it's around someplace – on the guy who was in San Francisco, teaching there. [inaudible]. I lose names now, but it's part of old age.

JS: I do, too.

BA: Do you really? I'm so aggravated with it. But one of my favorite authors, if you ever have time, is DeLillo, Don DeLillo.

JS: Don DeLillo. I've heard that name.

BA: Yeah, there it is, one of them, right there.

JS: Right here?

BA: Yes.

JS: Libra by Don DeLillo?

BA: Yeah. One of his books, one of his early books, called White Noise, has just come out in paperback. I love his books, but I can't read in bed with them; they're too heavy.

JS: Oh, yes. This is a weighty tome,

BA: Right. So I bought White Noise and gave it to Marty to read. Marty said, "Mother, you're always giving me things to read." I said, "Yes, I'm trying to educate you."

JS: So, what do you like about Don DeLillo's writing?

BA: He comments about what the world's all about and what influences we have. I don't know. Do you go to the [inaudible] at all?

JS: Occasionally.

BA: Yeah, well, they did [inaudible] which [inaudible] he wrote. I saw it [inaudible] weeks ago. It had to do with the effect of the media on the lives of some people who had fallen into this trap. A lot of it is a critique of what our society has done to human beings. Have they stopped us from loving fully? Have they taught us habits that are not creative or fulfilling? I like his work very much, and I think he's overlooked a lot. He should have gotten a Pulitzer Prize when that book came out, and somebody else did.

JS: So, you think he’s really wonderful.

BA: Oh, I think he's wonderful. If you have any time this summer, read his book.

JS: I will.

BA: Buy the paperback, White Noise. That's among his best.

JS: It’s lighter.

BA: It's a paperback, darling. So, of course, you're right. [inaudible].

JS: Tell me what other authors have been important to you?

BA: Reynolds Price. I like his work very much. Do you know his work?

JS: Yes, I do.

BA: Okay, I'm just finishing a book that came out recently, written in the first person about a woman, and how he gets into a woman's skin and talks about it. I always felt men didn’t do a very good job on that. It’s pretty good. And let me see. What else did I buy recently? I buy books about once a month. It’s my big extravagance. I figure what the hell. Okay? What else do I have? I find that they offer me books that Oprah Winfrey says are good, and I don't realize it until I get home, and I often bring them back.

JS: You and Oprah don't have tastes in common.

BA: No, we don't. No, we don't. But any book – did you read Alnilam by James Dickey, the poet?

JS: No.

BA: He wrote the movie about –

JS: Deliverance.

BA: Deliverance. Yeah, that's very good, too. Now, Call it Sleep is by [Henry] Roth. There's a real cult about that. That is certainly not in the mainstream of American literature, but there is a cult [inaudible].

JS: Did you like that book?

BA: I liked it very much. Yeah.

JS: And then he didn't publish anything more for thirty or forty years.

BA: For years and years. Sometime, if you have time, I'll loan it to you. I treasure it. My Bill collected all of the books of the Civil War, here in the last row. Here they are up there. Because there was a group in St. Louis that fought that war over and over again, [inaudible] the soldiers get together with other people who are aficionados of the same thing, and they fight the battle.

JS: They would have little dolls and stage the battle?

BA: That's right. Little statues. Right, right.

JS: And Bill was into doing that [inaudible]?

BA: Oh, he had such a good time, but he read more than the others do. So, he'd bring his books with marks in them, and say, "Remember the Battle of so-and-so?" I usually left

the house when they got together.

JS: Now, were these St. Louis Jews, St. Louis gentiles?

BA: Oh, no, it was a mixed crowd.

JS: A mixed crowd.

BA: Some were Jews.

JS: I know that that was very [inaudible].

BA: Really?

JS: Yes, yes.

BA: What was?

JS: The remembrance of the stand they took in the Civil War.

BA: That's right.

JS: Because they were right in between the South and the North.

BA: That's right. They were ambivalent about their role. It took them a long time to go with the North. Oh, I always used to give them hell about that. How could you even think –? When we moved there, it was right after the war had ended. There was a lot of segregation. Bill was setting up a lab for this company, and I was so unhappy, I cannot tell you, because the street cars were segregated, restaurants were segregated, and one day, his boss called – a very nice man – and Bob said, “Bess, are you going to say? Are you going to go back to Boston?” He said, “Bill keeps telling me, ‘My wife isn't happy here.’” He said, “You know, it will change.” He said, “History is on your side. It will change.” “I'm not sure it will. But if Bill's happy with this job, I will stay.”

JS: So, this made you very uncomfortable.

BA: Very uncomfortable.

JS: This was the first time you lived in a segregated town.

BA: Wherever we went – we stayed in a hotel for five, six months. We couldn't find a house. There was no building or anything going on. Wherever we went to buy, I joined the temple [inaudible] Conservative shul. My husband always said, and I told my children this, “Support your organization.” People who don't get into the role of being a Jew and identifying and supporting and giving money, you're not real Jews. You don't know what you are or who you are. Bill always said you better support your institution. So, when I came here, Francis and her husband had joined a Christian temple in Natick. You know who wrote [When Bad Things Happen to Good People]?

JS: Harold Kushner, yes.

BA: Very, very articulate man in terms of writing, and his sermons were wonderful, but he was not a people person. I made a real point of being introduced to him and said to him, “I'm new here in the community, and I wanted to know you.” I remember saying, “I don't think I'm going to live a long time. Nobody in my family ever does. My parents were in their early fifties when they died.” He was very sweet, but I never heard from him. Now, when (Franny?) died, she had been so attached to that temple [inaudible]. He was out of town, but the cantor [inaudible]. When her daughter was married, her daughter used the cantor.

JS: So, the cantor was more the people person than the rabbi.

BA: Yes, much more.

JS: Were you disappointed though [inaudible]?

BA: Oh, I was. I was always used to being active. I was president of the Sisterhood of Bnei [inaudible] eventually. I always got into a leadership role because I had a lot of energy in those days. I needed to do things. I was president of the Sisterhood at one point and got very, very close to the rabbi then. Then we had a falling out. They had an assistant rabbi who came in. His name was [inaudible], and he was wonderful. And of course, (Halpern?), the rabbi, felt a lot of competition and wanted very much to get rid of [inaudible], and he did. We tried to start another temple to retain – another synagogue – Rabbi [inaudible]. We couldn't raise the money. Nobody had a lot of money in those days. Today, the Jews in St. Louis are very wealthy. Well, mostly the Eastern European Jews didn't have the money the German Jews did.

JS: So, what was the schism between –? Why was (Kling?) so good [inaudible]?

BA: Because he was very forward-looking. He wanted to try new things. He wanted to be close to the younger members of the congregation, whether they had money or not. Bill was a working man. He was working for this company, and most of the people we were involved with were either chemists, engineers, doctors, or lawyers. In those days, they weren't making this kind of money. We had a wonderful group of friends, and I used to have a New Year's Eve party every Rosh Hashanah late in the afternoon of the first day, and everybody would come. We'd serve wine, cake, and so forth. We had a very nice old English house in St. Louis, in University City, and it would spill over [inaudible]. We loved it.

JS: And you were the young, not yet wealthy, members of this congregation. Who were the established members?

BA: The people who helped start it. Don't forget St. Louis – I don't know now how – the change was dominated by the Reform movement. There were five big Reform temples and lots and lots of money. When I went to work and got to know the Senturias, I became interested in what their philosophy was and so forth, and went to services [inaudible],

especially after Bill died with the family, with the Senturia family, and they were like Episcopalians to me. They had organ music, and everything was in English, not Hebrew. All right, let's go back. I want to tell you about growing up Jewish in Millbury. Of course, my two brothers had to be bar mitzvah, and so I would tag along with my twin. I want you to know that the rebbe who taught us didn't discriminate at all. He hit me across my legs like he did the boys.

JS: Aren’t you lucky?

BA: With a switch. With a switch, dear. That sort of thing. Isn't that funny? I have not retained a lot of my liturgical Hebrew. I think maybe because of that.

JS: Maybe because of fear.

BA: Really, really. Anyhow, now comes my brother, and he's going to be thirteen. So, the families all gathered, and we have a big [inaudible]. But nobody paid any attention to me, and I was very angry. At one point, they made me sit next to him during the dinner. I spilled a whole bowl of soup [inaudible] in his lap. Freud did it to me, I told them.

JS: [laughter]

BA: Isn’t it a lovely story?

JS: It’s wonderful.

BA: I used to tell all these stories about me, and my brother used to introduce me to all his colleagues, and he would say, “This is my sister. She's smarter than I am.” I’d say, “I am, Meyer. I really am, Mike.” His name was Meyer, and everybody called him Mike. He got great grants from the government. He walked around for years. Did I tell you this story? Walked around for years with a lab animal in his lab coat. I remember we lived in St. Louis, and he, at that time, was at Purdue. Was a five-hour drive, so there was lots of

movement back and forth. I remember visiting him. They built him a beautiful, big building. One of the great scientists of England came to help dedicate it. Who's the guy that's related to an author, too? Oh, I'll think of it. At any rate, we went to that –

JS: (Orwell?)?

BA: Huh?

JS: (Orwell?)?

BA: No, no. I'll think of it. I recently got a note from an old colleague of mine. He said there was a new syndrome among older people. We call it "tip of the tongue syndrome." I thought that was the funniest thing. I've had copies sent to a lot of my friends, so when I can't find a name, I say "tip of the tongue syndrome." At any rate, Mike was walking around with [inaudible] – I think it was a guinea pig, but I'm not sure – was flourishing, and he thought that hands-on, this kind of fondling made animals and people flourish. So, he sent in a grant application for a million dollars, but he never, ever executed it because he died very, very suddenly. When we were fifty years old, he was on sabbatical at Oxford, and he had written and said, "I'm going to come home for our fiftieth because it's a landmark." So, he and his wife and his one child came to St. Louis, and we spent – I have pictures of all [inaudible]. We spent our fiftieth together.

JS: How wonderful that he [inaudible].

BA: All the years, the few years that he was alive, while Bill was sick, he would stop by whenever he could. I remember he had to go to a conference in Italy, and when he got home, right away, he called and he said, "I don't want you to eat chicken for a while. They're putting growth hormones into chicken, and we don't know if they're deleterious to a human being." [inaudible] because all animals today get grown hormones. You know that. Anyhow, I have two brothers that were great achievers. It was wonderful. The only member of my family who wasn't interested in achieving was my sister. She was fairly

passive. She married a man who made a million dollars, so maybe that was her contribution. I don’t know.

JS: [laughter] She lived vicariously [inaudible] vicarious.

BA: I’m very fond of my brother-in-law, and I don't put him down in any way.

JS: Are you close to your sister or not as close as to your brothers?

BA: To my brother-in-law or to my sister?

JS: Yeah.

BA: Oh, towards the end of her life, we were. But before that, we were not.

JS: You were not?

BA: We were separated by a lot of miles, but now her family thinks I'm one of them, and my brother-in-law talks to me two or three times a week. He's going to be eighty-nine years old, and every time he calls me, he says, “You have one more year, and then you can do whatever you want. But I plan to celebrate my ninetieth, and if you're not here, it won't be a celebration.” Isn't that cute?

JS: Yes.

BA: I'm very fond of him. Anyhow, I'm convinced that he made a lot of money because he didn't have any college degree, and his brothers-in-law all had several. Every once in a while, I'll have enough to drink, and I'll say, “See [inaudible] absolutely right.”

JS: No argument there. [laughter]

BA: No argument at all. But he's been a good friend.

JS: But your sister was very different from you.

BA: Oh, totally.

JS: Because you're very active.

BA: And very outgoing. She hated when I told all these stories. You know the word [inaudible]? Just to really aggravate her, I used to tell the stories whenever I went to Florida.

JS: Tell the tape what that word means.

BA: [inaudible]? Aggravate, tease her. [inaudible] She was really, really a good person, but she would tell her daughters, “Don't believe all the stories.” And they said, “But we do believe them. We know Aunt Bess.” She had one daughter that anytime she got into trouble, everybody would say, “You take after your Aunt Bess.” And my niece, whenever she sees me – I have all these aging spots. She says, “Is that going to happen to me?” She feels my skin. She said, “Yeah, I have the same skin you have.”

JS: [inaudible] claim you.

BA: They do. They were all up here for Suzanne's wedding, and Marilyn was going to be sixty that week. My Sharon was going to be thirty-eight, so I gave them a big party in Cambridge – Bella-something-or-other. Do you ever eat there? I'll have to give you the name. It's really, really good. So, I gave them a party [inaudible]. I love to do that.

JS: How lovely.

BA: Huh?

JS: What fun.

BA: Yeah, I love that. At the drop of a hat. Don't do it at home anymore because I’m too tired, but I have it out.

JS: Did you do a lot of entertaining in your St. Louis years, in your New Jersey years?

BA: Oh, yes. See, I can't understand how all you young people live. My Judy really entertained. Now, she works. She runs [inaudible] Hearing Services, and she's very busy, between that and her music and so forth. She has a very big, lovely old house in Newton. It’s off Morton Street. You know that [inaudible]. In fact, her upbringing was totally different than mine and our family.

[Recording paused.]

JS: Okay, I want to hear about your son's children.

BA: Okay. I was here already. Suzanne is twenty-six, and Michael’s twenty-five. I was here when they were very young, and when they got bar mitzvahed. They belong to a group called the Harvard Hillel something-or-other. Are you familiar with it?

JS: Yes.

BA: In Cambridge. It was a very different kind of situation. I wanted them to go to real Hebrew school. But, of course, they didn't do that. But they did go and got bar mitzvahed and came away with a great love of the Jewish festivals. In fact, when Michael was here, and he brought his girlfriend with him, who was not Jewish, he wanted me to have Friday night, and I was very happy to because she would be very interested – as it happened, in the end, they didn't come. But I wanted to [inaudible] and say the [inaudible] because whenever there are more than just the three of us, we do it every Friday night. And Judy has learned the songs, and I think she kind of likes it too.

JS: [inaudible]

BA: I buy a fresh challah, and [inaudible] slices, and we do it at the table. But there was a time when there were eight of us every Friday night. But of course, it's not [inaudible]. So many deaths. So many changes in the whole family structure.

JS: What is it like for you to go from an Orthodox childhood to a Conservative synagogue in St. Louis to a Reform temple in Newton?

BA: Very difficult, and I don't care. We’re not recording, or are we?

JS: No, I would like to record this. I think it's very important. You represent an important historical shift.

BA: I don't feel very comfortable there. I like the service that has a lot more of the traditional Hebrew in it, a lot more of the singing at the end. I know that Reform temples are going with more Hebrew now, and I think that's a step in the right direction.

JS: Does that seem like an Episcopalian service to you?

BA: Progressional.

JS: Progressional.

BA: I lived in Millbury, and Millbury was a little New England town with the most beautiful congressional churches. I remember going into them as a young kid, and they were very plain and so forth and so on. We haven't made any friends there with anybody. I think that's not good. I think a temple – and maybe it's our fault. Judy and Marty don't have much time, and it’s a long drive for me, so I haven't done anything about it. I used to always be very active in whatever shul I belonged to.

JS: But you volunteered for this project?

BA: Yes, I thought it was going to be a wonderful project. I thought I would like to be part of it because I feel women are very overlooked in our society. That's one of the big gripes I have with my doctor, is that – and it’s a woman doctor, and she understands well. I have attempted to write a letter to the New York Times – I can't tell you how many times – to tell them that the medical profession had better get with it.

[Recording paused.]

JS: Testing tape number two. Testing. This is tape number two of Bess Arick’s interview with me, Jennifer Stone, for Temple Shalom’s Oral History Project on Monday, June 28, 1999. This is tape two, side one. Now we're back in business.

BA: Okay. Well, shall I tell the story about my mother?

JS: Please.

BA: Okay. My father would make wine. We had lots of elderberry bushes, and we had a cranberry bog – nobody knew what it was in those days – on the farm, and we had blueberries and stuff. He would make wine every year. And he would also – we had a big apple orchard. He would make cider, and he was supposed to make sure the side had never fermented by putting in some kind of stuff, but often he left out some. At any rate, my father became a crony of two priests who didn't live too far from us, and they used to come over to have a glass of wine with my father periodically. One day, they said to my mother, “We'd like some hard liquor too, but we can't seem to get a hold of it.” My mother said, “What would you like me to do about that?” They said, “Well, maybe you could get it for us, and we would buy it from you.” That's how my mother, the bootlegger, emerged. Now we also could use the money, because it was during the late ’20s and early ’30s, and my mother was a very large woman. I’ll have to find the pictures to show you. She had a large bosom, and she used to hide pint bottles in her bosom, and she would sell the booze to the [inaudible].

JS: To the priests?

BA: To the priests.

JS: Where did she get the booze?

BA: I have no idea. I don't remember that, but I do remember sitting there one day, and one of the priests came by and greeted me, greeted my mother – “Hello, Mrs. Zarrow, how are you?” And she'd say, “[inaudible], go in the house.” In Yiddish, she’d say that to me. So, I’d go into the house. She was selling some of it. My brother Harry, after he became a judge, and we talked about this story, he thought it was the funniest thing in the world.

JS: That's wonderful. That’s absolutely wonderful.

BA: My mother, the bootlegger. Isn't that a great story?

JS: Yes. But your family did not become a distillery. You didn’t make the liquor.

BA: Oh, no, no. My father made wine, as I guess a lot of Jewish people did in those days. It was reasonable, and he had wine. Now, my father –

JS: Is that the wine you used for your celebrations, your ritual –?

BA: Sure, we’d use some of my father’s wine, absolutely. Really, never used hard liquor. Friday night, my father would have maybe an ounce of whiskey before we had dinner. My mother [inaudible] and all that, but no boozing. I learned to drink because I was in a man's world, and when I had to travel to see authors or lecture, I was part of a group of people who had gotten together – editors – to set up standards for how papers should be written. I was a small cog. There were a bunch of us that represented many journals, and so we would get together, sometimes in Boston, sometimes in New York, for three or four meetings, and we'd all go out to eat, and everybody would have a drink. I learned to like it

very much. I still like a couple –

JS: So, you were well into middle age when you learned to drink hard liquor.

BA: Oh, sure. Bill and I never drank. We'd have a glass of wine or something, but I really enjoyed it very much. Anyhow, you learn to do those things to fit in. And women editors were very, very few and far between.

JS: What was it like? You were part of quite a minority there.

BA: Oh, I used to give lectures all the time. I remember one of the last meetings I went to before I retired. Bill was gone by then. It was at one of the hotels in Manhattan, right in the middle of the city. And there were maybe five hundred editors. I think there were ten or fifteen women.

JS: Wow.

BA: I had been asked to do something or other. I got up and said, “I'm going to stop this conversation by saying, ‘Why are you eliminating women? We’re fifty percent of this population, if not fifty-one percent.” They would all go, “Boo, that's Mrs. Arick. Boo, Mrs. Arick,” that sort of thing.

JS: They were up front about booing you?

BA: Yeah, we had a great time, and they knew me well enough.

JS: It was teasing?

BA: Huh?

JS: It was teasing?

BA: Oh, sure, absolutely. They knew me by then. I was one of the guys. I remember that weekend particularly because I didn't go to many meetings after that. Bill had died. I stayed home for years, but it was time to retire. I was seventy-two when I came here, and I had some discomfort. I wasn't feeling wonderful. (Franny?) came to one of my parties when I retired. She said, “You've got to think about coming to us and not staying here.” She was right.

JS: She wanted you to live with her, or close to her?

BA: No, she wanted me to live in the neighborhood. I never wanted to live with anybody.

JS: She lived here in Brookline.

BA: No, the children had both moved here. That was why I could come here. You can't make a choice. They had bought a house in Ashland because Fred was teaching at Quinsigamond junior college, and (Franny?) had gotten this job, so she was going to someplace in Andover. So, it was a compromise.

JS: In between.

BA: Yeah, and so they bought a house there. Marty and Judy had been living in Andover, but by the time I moved here, they were living in Newton, which they found a much better place to bring up the children and so forth. So, I could make a choice to come here, and I had both children. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to do it. I wouldn't have hurt anybody’s feelings.

JS: Is that when you retired when you moved here?

BA: Yeah, yeah, that's when I retired.

JS: Did you experience much resistance because you were a woman editor?

BA: I think there were times when they didn't take me as seriously as they could, but I turned out to be a very good editor, and so they were calling me for advice and questioning, and “How are you doing this? and “How are you doing that?” Which was wonderful.

JS: This is the same solution as the high school discrimination.

BA: Absolutely.

JS: You decided to try harder –

BA: Absolutely.

JS: – and show that –

BA: My daughter (Franny?) was a great feminist. She helped start the NOW [National Organization for Women] group in Pittsburgh when they were living there, and she published a lot of stuff. There's a book up there called Our Mothers. I should show it to you. Now, look at that red book that's right there. Is that a computer –? No, come forward. A computer book. Those are the books my son wrote on computers. There are four of them up there.

JS: The Key to the [inaudible]? Oh, this book here in the leather cover?

BA: No, that's somebody's dissertation. Pull it out. I want to see whose dissertation it is. Oh, this was when we had – at Radcliffe, we had a memorial service for (Franny?).

JS: Oh, my. This is a speech that somebody gave at her memorial service.

BA: Yeah, I kept it all together.

JS: And copies of articles about her death.

BA: Yep, New York Times and all the rest of it. People sent them to me.

JS: Francis A. Cole, 53, education consultant. Oh, and in this article, she was a founder and former board member of the Pittsburgh chapter of the National Organization for Women.

BA: Yeah, that's my (Franny?).

JS: What an impressive woman.

BA: Established a memorial fund, Francis Arick Cole, at Schlesinger Library. They're the archives for a lot of the feminist material, so Fran got a big grant from them to write the history. When she died, she hadn't quite finished it; a lot of it was in her computer, and I offered to do it. I'm paid fifty dollars an hour, even in those days. I said I would do it for nothing. Just give me a little cubby hole and a machine. They had a meeting, decided, no, they wanted one of their own staff to do it, so it will never be done. But I still send them money every year on her anniversary. They did tell me that one of these days, a book would come out, and there'd be a chapter in the book, which would be the history of the feminist movement, and she will be named, but it's not like having a book of her own.

JS: It says in this article she was a Bunting Fellow at Radcliffe to write the history of the first ten years of the National Organization for Women, and that's what she was working on.

BA: The funny thing was, and it makes me want to cry, that when we had two Shivas. They, of course, sat Shiva at her home in Ashland. No, they had already built a house in Marlborough, and Sharon asked me if I would have a Shiva day here because a lot of her friends came from Brookline.

JS: Sharon is her daughter?

BA: Her daughter. She was working for a large law firm at that time. I said, “Sure, no question about it.” We published in the paper. We published the death notice. To that Shiva came a woman who was the head librarian at Schlesinger and spent a lot of time with me, and she died two weeks later of lung cancer, and she never told me.

JS: Oh, my. She was walking and talking?

BA: Walking and talking, moving around. Yeah. Can you believe that? Maybe three weeks later.

JS: What an effort.

BA: I was very fond of her. She had never told me. She said, “Oh, you'll still come to [Schlesinger].” I just go with (Franny?) to Schlesinger and stuff like that. And she died. Maybe she would have [inaudible], but it's gone. Now, (Franny?) is gone going on ten years.

JS: What did you think about her involvement as a feminist?

BA: I loved it because I felt that way too, and particularly after I started interacting with all the jerky editors. I would tell her the stories about it and so forth. Also, women were not in research. I see that we get more. I still get the journal every month. I see that we have more and more women doing research than we ever did. In those days, we never got on as a lead researcher, and sometimes not mentioned at all. You know how it works. You and your husband are professionals. The guy who's head of the department puts his name on it, whether he worked or not. I resent that. Really, really resent it. They haven't done the work. So, the women who did a lot of the scut work were often brandished – if there were six authors, they were always the sixth author or the fifth author. Annoys the hell out of me. Here's a copy of the last journal. Pull the blue book out. I used to send a critique into it until Marty said, “Mother, it’s not your journal anymore.”

JS: This is the Annals of Otology, Rhinology & Laryngology, and this is the June 1990 issue. And do you still read it cover to cover?

BA: I read it, but I don't read this carefully. Furthermore, the research has gotten away from me. I'm out of the field now, what, thirteen, fourteen years? I used to go over it very carefully and call and tell them what I thought was wrong, because when I retired, the man I had been affiliated with for all those years, Ben Senturia, and I had become very good friends. And aside to that is that his two children each came to see me within six months after their mother died. She died just about three or four years ago. Each child asked me separately, “Did you have an affair with my father?” And I said, “No, I did not have an affair with your father because I was always deeply in love with my husband. Furthermore, I didn't find him physically attractive at all.” He was a tall, thin man, very elegant and so forth. But it was interesting that they would come and ask me that.

JS: What did you make of that?

BA: Well, we had a very close relationship.

JS: You and Ben?

BA: When he had bypass surgery about six years before he died, he was [anoxic]. I'm sure he didn't get oxygen or whatever, because he was having trouble writing and his memory was going, I wrote all his stuff on him for years. I have a letter that his wife wrote to me when he died. She insisted I go to the funeral. I don't go to funerals very much, but I flew into St. Louis. Nancy wrote me this letter when she said, “You kept Ben's reputation at a very high level, and we all thank you for it very much.”

JS: So, he was anoxic. His brain was deprived of oxygen. He couldn't write after that?

BA: He wrote, but disjointed, not well structured.

JS: I see. And you made it make sense.

BA: Oh, indeed. I wouldn't let anything go out –

JS: You were his ghostwriter?

BA: Yes, for the last couple of years of his life. I liked him very much. Was very fond of him, but I never was sexually involved. But it's interesting. The man who was his doctor was a good friend. His office was at Barnes Hospital too. Dr. Alex met me one day. Bill had been gone like eighteen months. When I saw Alex and brought back all those memories, I started to cry. He said, “Come and have coffee.” And he said to me, “Bess, why aren't you having an affair?” Because I had told him how I felt. Should I put this in? I really felt sexually deprived because Bill was on all kinds of medication, and they didn't know what they know today. He just couldn't function. I said, “Alex, I couldn't do that when Bill was alive. I wouldn't do anything to hurt him, and I haven't met anybody I like very much.” He said, “You're still comparing them to Bill. I don't blame you, but you should stop doing that.”

JS: Did you ever have a relationship after Bill died?

BA: Oh, yes. I traveled a lot and met a lot of people, but nobody I wanted to spend my life with. I'm not taking manicures anymore because my nails are splitting. I remember I did a book with a man who was a dermatologist, and he saw me put on nail polish. He said, “Stop it.” He said, “Buff them, but don't use polish.” He said, “They're very bad for nails.” And he was right. They split. And now my nails are splitting. I'm starting to have manicures for a while. But I remember Ted Marcus saying that to me. Ted and I were very good friends, but I never wanted to marry him. He was almost asexual. Then somebody fixed me up with a man who had published a novel. He was at Washington U in the English department. We became good friends, and we would go out. But he turned out to be a homosexual.

JS: Oh, is that right?

BA: He was very bright and very charming, but I didn't want to marry a man who was a homosexual.

JS: No, that wouldn't meet your needs.

BA: Absolutely not. I was only sixty-two when Bill died.

JS: So young.

BA: But there's never any – (Franny?) used to give me lectures. “You're comparing everybody to dad. You shouldn't do that.” I said, “Oh, come on, honey. It has to be.”

JS: Hard not to.

BA: Turn it off. What else do you want to tell me? What else do you want me to tell you?

[Recording paused.]

JS: All right.

BA: Now, we were an Orthodox Jewish family, as I told you, and Kashrus was observed. Now, even though we had chickens and all sorts of things on the farm, they were always taking them to Worcester to be kosher-killed. My earliest memories are of riding with my father in his wagon, in his buggy, and he had two white horses that were the love of his life. That's when we had a little money. So, Dad would ride into Worcester, which was seven or eight miles from where we were living, and have the horses killed.

JS: Have the horses killed?

BA: No, I mean the chicken.

JS: The chickens.

BA: Pesach, my father would take one cow and feed her certain things, certain grains, so the milk would be [inaudible], and we would give it away to everybody in the family.

JS: What was wrong with regular milk?

BA: I have no idea. There was some grain that you couldn't use, and my father knew all the ins and outs of it, and he made sure that [inaudible] our family all got – my mother used to make – she used to call it homemade cheese. It was a kind of cottage cheese. You made it in a bag, and it would drip out.

JS: Oh, yes.

BA: So everybody got cheese, and they got milk for Pesach.

JS: Made from this special cow?

BA: Yeah, because the cow was fed only those grains.

JS: Amazing.

BA: But I don't remember the details.

JS: You don't remember the recipe.

BA: Not at all. You know that [inaudible] products now in the milk field are all available at Pesach.

JS: So, your family went to great lengths to observe the dietary laws.

BA: And to make us know that we were Jewish because we lived in an alien community. We saw a lot of our families and extended families. Of course, I told you about going in.

JS: Your parents had friends who –

BA: The [inaudible] were wonderful. My brothers had both gone to get extra degrees at Harvard, and they would bring their professors to my father's house for Pesach, and my mother would have these wonderful big Seders. It was a big old farmhouse, and you could get a lot of people in. One year, I'll never forget, my poor father was exhausted, and it was after the meal, and was saying the [inaudible] at the end, and he was skipping pages [inaudible] – I've forgotten his name – was sitting next to my father and said, "Mr. Zarrow, you skipped that page." My father was so chagrined. He was trying to hurry it. You know how long that can be.

JS: Poor man.

BA: So, I have wonderful memories of that. My brother Harry went to law school with three boys that were what we call – they were the Heller family from Webster, Massachusetts, and two of them ended up lawyers, and we were friends, but there were five boys in that family, and they would come to our seder and sing. They had wonderful voices, and they would sing Hebrew songs with us. Isn't that wonderful?

JS: Oh, what fun.

BA: Evelyn just told me last week the last of the men had died. I hadn't seen them in a long time.

JS: Now, did your family speak Yiddish at home?

BA: They spoke Yiddish at home and Russian to themselves when they wanted to make a secret. But we all knew how to speak Yiddish, and I knew how to read it. I used to read The Forwards.

JS: So you would subscribe to The Forward?

BA: When I lived in New York, I would subscribe to the [inaudible]. (Franny?) was four years old when Marty was born, and that's when my mother died, my father died. But up until then, I would talk to them on the phone, and we would talk about what was in The Forwards, but I lost it all.

JS: When you were a child, did your family get The Forward?

BA: Yeah.

JS: And that's how you learn to read Yiddish.

BA: Yeah. But I don't have it anymore, and I'm sorry I've lost it. When my office was at the medical school – I think you're aware that when people have strokes, they often go back to their first language. They knew I spoke Yiddish, and they would always call me up to talk to these people because my Yiddish in those days was very fluent. But you don't use it, and I'm forgetting –

JS: You don’t.

BA: – normal English words, so I don't. But that was really nice. I enjoyed doing that.

JS: Did you understand any of the Russian that your parents used for secrets?

BA: A little bit. A little bit. You started to pick some stuff up. But that was their private language, and I think in a way, we respected it. In a way, you know?

JS: You didn't cross that boundary.

BA: No, no, that was their secret. That was theirs. Parents sometimes do have that. They had had a wonderful marriage. I see Marty doing the same thing. Now, my (Franny?) had not a successful marriage. When she was in graduate school, she married another student. She had gone to Brandeis, and then she ended up in St. Louis, finishing her

degree. Don't ask me why. She had come home. Oh, she came home with her baby, Sharon, when Sharon was thirteen months old, to divorce her husband. She met this man at the University of Pennsylvania, and he was very sharp and very sophisticated. He was an Israeli, fifth-generation, and he had taught in England, whatnot, and was getting a degree. He's a graduate of the Technion, and he was getting a degree in architecture and engineering or whatever. She was getting a master's degree in women's studies. She told us she was in love with him and that they wanted to get married, and we never met him until maybe the week before the wedding. His parents came in for the wedding, and immediately, my husband and I realized there was something very wrong with this. First of all, the night before the wedding – they were in St. Louis – they wanted to know what she was getting for her dowry, and Bill had already settled some stock on her. But Bill said, “We don't do those things. We don't deal with cows and horses and whatnot. It's not done in this country.” I realized that that was one of the worst things that they could have said. And they were not kind to her, and he was just dreadful. I think a lot of Israeli men still retain their contempt of women.

JS: He was contemptuous of her?

BA: Yes, he was. Here, she had a master's degree already and on her way to a PhD. Anyhow, he knew she was unhappy. I think he got her pregnant, my own personal feeling. Anyhow, she came home with a thirteen-month-old baby. He went to Israel and didn’t take her with him to see his family. She said enough was enough.

JS: Had he mistreated her?

BA: I think so … [Sharon] became a very successful lawyer. She worked for one of the big companies here in town and decided after a while that she wasn’t going to do that anymore. They took over your life. She is now of counsel to Bradley's, and she enjoys her work very much and so forth.

JS: But she doesn't know her biological father?

BA: Oh, yeah, he surfaced when she was about eleven, twelve years old, and wanted to know something about it, but I knew that he'd been very cruel to (Franny?), and I knew also that he never supported the child. Now, we didn't want anything from him. We were able to support her, but our lawyer said you've got to get something on these papers, otherwise you can't sue for maintenance after that. So, he made us. I think it was fifteen dollars a week, some very [inaudible] –

JS: Small.

BA: – which he never paid. Anyhow, now he marries for the second time, and he wants Sharon in the picture. That was written in that he had rights to see her … At any rate, oh, (Franny?) was the love of his life, and I don't [inaudible]. At any rate, Sharon didn't have very much time with her father at all until many years later, when she was about eleven, twelve years old, and then he became such a big idol father. Now Sharon finds [inaudible]. Sharon finds Evan. I told you the story. She called me up and said, “I've met a man here.” [inaudible]. Anyhow, they're in love, and they want to get married. So, she had a stepfather, Fred Cole, and had been married to (Franny?) for twenty years when (Franny?) died. I called Fred up, and we had a little conference, and I said, “Fred, I would like to give this wedding for Sharon, and I know that you were [inaudible].” That was a terrible mistake I made. And I said, “I'd like you to be half provider, and I'll pay half.” Anyhow. It was my fault. But how do you tell your child you're terminal? Why don't you make a new will? I couldn't. I couldn't. She had told me that she had I don’t know how many hundreds of thousands of dollars into her retirement fund and stuff like that. At any rate, Sharon had now started to see her father. Her father had married again and divorced, and he had a son from that relationship. Sharon [inaudible] – handsome, tall, gorgeous kid – had become very good friends. He would often come here and see Sharon and stay at (Franny's?) house, because he wanted to be with his sister. Anyhow,

Sharon said, “Well, my father, they tell me he’s become very rich. He was a builder. He built it with Pei,” P-E-I, the architect.

JS: I.M. Pei.

JS: Yes, built with him. So, you know that he's pretty well off because he used to come into town to meet with him, and Sharon would always arrange dinner for him. She said, “I chose all the most expensive ones” because we were told that he’d gotten very rich. He was head of Israeli bonds for Greater Washington. That tells you something, doesn't it? Okay. So, anyhow, she called her father, and she laid it on the line. She said, “I'd like you to give me a wedding.” So, he did. He gave her a gorgeous wedding. In fact, he was so pleased with it when it was all over that he gave them a big check for their wedding, too. And now, he’s in and out of town a lot. He found his third wife. At the wedding, he got up and made a speech, and he said, “Sharon, I don’t want you to do as I do. Do as I say. Find the right partner, and I think you have, and stay with him,” which I thought was interesting … But when they came for the wedding, I didn't know how I was going to handle it. And (Franny?) had died, of course, and so I waited until he came into the [inaudible], which was the first thing we did. They were married at Temple Emanuel [inaudible].

JS: In Newton?

BA: In Newton, yeah. They wanted everything kosher.

JS: That's a conservative –

BA: Yeah. Sharon keeps a kosher house. I'll tell you about her. She's just wonderful. She knows liturgical Hebrew. When they need somebody for a minyan, they call Sharon.

JS: Oh, my.

BA: Isn’t that something?

JS: Times have changed.

BA: Yeah. Anyhow, she was wonderful. I knew he was coming to town. How was I going to handle it? I said I would take the bull by the horns. I got up where I was sitting, walked over to him, extended my hand, and said, “I’m Bess Arick. I don't know if you remember me, but I want to welcome you to Boston.”

JS: Aren't you a gracious lady?

BA: Sharon said, “That was a class act, grandma.” But I wanted it to go without any animosity. I did ask Evan – his brother was master of ceremonies at the wedding – to give me some time. I wanted to eulogize Fran. His father had died. They put the wedding off for a year because his father was dying. Evan talked about his father. I got up, the last one, and toasted to (Franny?). I said all the wonderful things. Sharon came over and hugged me. She said, “Grandma, that was wonderful.” I was used to public speaking. It was no difficulty.

JS: But public speaking on such a topic.

BA: Yes, I cried. How could I not? I couldn't eulogize her. I knew I would break down. I wrote the eulogy for one of my nieces from Florida. I said, “I want you to get up and do it.”

JS: She was your voice. They were your words, your thoughts.

BA: I wrote it for her. So, turn off your machine.

JS: Okay.

BA: I just want to tell you –

[Recording paused.]

JS: These are such wonderful stories. I'm having the best time. I think there’s more for us to talk about. [inaudible]

BA: I have quite a lot of this written myself.

JS: Do you?

BA: My therapy after Fran died. I went to a psychiatrist, and I found him quite incompetent, but I'm a terrible judge of these people, and maybe I was unfair.

JS: Or maybe he was incompetent.

BA: Maybe. I went to four sessions and realized it wasn't working, so I cut it off, bought myself another yellow pad, and write every morning.

JS: Do you still to this day?

BA: I found it very cathartic, and it kept me [inaudible].

JS: What gave you the idea?

BA: I really wanted to kill myself.

JS: Did you really? After Fran died?

BA: I had been collecting medication. I knew what would do the trick. I'm that sophisticated about it. But after (Franny?) died, I knew I couldn't do that to Marty. He was so broken up. You can't do that to your kid. I wouldn't do that. That's the worst rejection there is. You know that.

JS: So, you had to find –

BA: I flushed them down the toilet. But writing helps me a lot. However, Marty knows where I keep it, and has promised me to destroy it when I die, because I've said all the things about the family. I came here as a virtual stranger, and I watched the dynamics of my family, and I saw the weaknesses and the strengths, and I saw the problems inherent in this situation. I talked about it. It’s the only way I could cope with it.

JS: And you don't want to give that –

BA: No.

JS: – wisdom to somebody?

BA: If I have time, I may go over it with a red pencil and get rid of –

JS: And edit it?

BA: Yeah, because I don't want some of the things I have said about some members of the family. It would hurt them.

JS: You don’t want Marty to read it.

BA: Marty has read some portions of it. I don't want Judy to read it either. I want her to have good thoughts about the family. I think she's a pretty good – I'm very fond of her. We get along just fine. I'm very fond of Judy, and I don't want her to know these things about the family. She still sees some of the cousins. I don't see them very often, and they socialize with them, and she should have positive feelings about them, not my take on it. Don't you agree?

JS: Absolutely. Let's stop here. May I take your picture?

BA: If you'd like.

JS: I would like to.

BA: Can I just sit in my chair?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Jennifer Stone: Today is July 19, 1999. I am Jennifer Stone, interviewing Bess Arick. This is our second meeting. Let’s stop. [Recording paused.] Here we go.

Bess Arick: Indeed, getting up every morning and writing in my journal gave me back my sanity after a while. I found that I couldn't leave the house without crying, and so it was a godsend. But I want to say to whoever reads it and who's approaching the end of their lives as I am, that getting old is a very lonely proposition. Not only are family members gone, but friends are gone. It's inevitable that not all of us live into our eighties. Maybe that will change in the next generation, I'm not sure, but I found that the loneliness is really terrible, and that's why I immerse myself in books all the time, and you lead a different life that way. Turn it off. [Recording paused.] I don't think one ever recovers from the death of a child. And this child – of course, we all think our children are special, but she really was special. When she died, she was fifty-four. She'd been sick for three years. She worked in the feminist movement and had made quite an impact on her communities, etc. She published several very interesting pamphlets about feminism and helped a documentary come to fruition, which talked about how women can do everything, and minority women can also. We all viewed it and thought it was a great achievement. She was not ready to die. Forty-eight hours before she died, she was making appointments, thinking she would recover, but she didn't after the last set of chemotherapy. I was living now here in Boston, and I had given up my job, but I did do one or two books, which kept me going, and I tried to keep as busy as I could. But it was always as though something was there, nagging at me. Fran isn't going to call anymore, and you're not going to see Fran anymore, and you never get over it. One never gets over the death of a child. I think I probably filled my life with non-essentials. I know I didn't do any more books anymore. I felt that my powers of concentration had been damaged,

and I couldn't give the book all the stuff that it needed. I decided that medical publication has to be very precise. A decimal point in the wrong place can be very damaging in terms of medication and so forth. So, I decided not to do any more books, which may have been a wrong decision for me, but I was not sure of my own ability to do them properly. So, I decided not to do that anymore. My life now revolves around seeing my son and his wife and their children, and the one grandchild that my daughter, Fran, left me, and she's a very important part of my emotional life, but her life is very separate from mine. She has a husband, a career, and so forth, but we stay as close as we can. My children have been very much of a plus in my life. I love children and being able to talk with them and somewhat mold their lives is great. So, life just seems to go on without my playing a major role and being productive, and accepting non-productivity makes me feel like a slouch, a sloth, somebody who's not giving anything to the community.

JS: Because that's never happened in your life before.

BA: Because in the past, even though I had a sick husband and had a full-time job, a very creative one, I still managed to be president of the Sisterhood in St. Louis, run the public speaking and that sort of thing for Federation for two years, was very active in the League of Women Voters. It's interesting. I'm not interested in any of that anymore. [Recording paused.] My move to Boston was good in that I felt I needed to be near my children, and so even though Fran's death was devastating – it took a big chunk out of my life – it was good for me to be here to watch my grandchildren grow up and come to fruition as young adults. But I now was interacting with a group of people that were very different. Two of my best friends in St. Louis – one was a psychiatrist, a woman, and one was an OBGYN, both women and both, of course, highly educated and interested in things I was interested in. For instance, my office at one time was right near the office of Masters and Johnson, and I often had lunch with them, and we'd all wait in the general cafeteria at the hospital. When he'd walk in, we'd all bang our spoons and say, “Here comes the dirty doctor,” and he loved every minute of it. We often had long conversations

about sex and stuff like that. I was very free to admit that my husband, who had his first heart attack at fifty-four and a second heart attack at fifty-six and was on all kinds of medication for his heart problems, became impotent, and it was a loss in my life that I really felt very deeply, because we had had a wonderful sex life. We had met as young people and had married when he was twenty-three, and I was twenty-one, and you're at the height of your sexual appetites at that point. Now, all of a sudden, Bill is fifty-four, fifty-five, fifty-six, and by fifty-six, no longer functioning. The medical profession, the researchers that I was able to interact with, did not know what effects all of his medication had on the blood flow to the penis, etc., and so he was not able to perform. We learned to get along using other methods and read a lot of books on sex and how you can compensate for these things. My twin brother had gotten his PhD at Harvard, and he had a big library of sex books, which he loaned to us, so we learned what to do about getting some modicum of sexual satisfaction. I'm not sure that other women feel as I do. I have found that a lot of women of my age were never awakened sexually, never had an orgasm, never knew what it was all about, and hated to discuss sex, which I found very interesting because my two friends, one a psychiatrist and one OBGYN person, always wanted to discuss things that were going on with the women they were treating and so forth, and all of a sudden there's no one I can talk to. They don't even want to go to movies where there is overt sex. So, I find that very interesting, and I found it very narrowing of your life. I feel sad for these women who can't face the reality of who they are. We're sexual beings, we humans, and yet, most women don't see that. [Recording paused.]

JS: Okay.

BA: Was that being recorded?

JS: No, that was off.

BA: Okay.

JS: That was off.

BA: What else would you like to know?

JS: Let's see. You've talked about how your friends have changed, that you don't have friends who have the same –

BA: They're not intellectually stimulating.

JS: – lively intellect –

BA: They don’t read.

JS: – and comfort with sexuality.

BA: And they don't read.

JS: They don't read.

BA: Which I find – how do you go through life without reading a couple of books every week? You're busy. You probably don't have time right now.

JS: Oh, I read.

BA: Okay, but I understand that when you have small children – Sharon was saying last night, “Gosh, when am I going to read now?” So, Evan said, “Don't worry, we'll get you a nurse.” I mean, he wants to do all these things she doesn't want to. “I don't need a nurse. I don't want a nurse.” But the point is, I have lots of time now. I know these women have lots of time, and they just fritter it away. Oh, put this on. I want to tell you one thing I'm doing.

JS: It’s on.

BA: One of the things I'm doing with my life right now is trying to be a volunteer for a woman who is legally blind. She's a good friend of mine, and she has macular deterioration, and we've talked about it a great deal. She lives at the other end of Newton, so it's a chore for us to get together. But in the last three months, I was going to volunteer to do something because I needed to give something of myself. But I called her up one day, and asked her if she'd like me to volunteer – drive her, read her mail for her, or read to her, take her out to lunch or dinner, etc., but fill up her life a little. She's done remarkably well with this. She's now running a vision group for the city of Boston. She goes to all the meetings that the state has. She's bright, and she wants to give. She is giving of herself. She's made a good adjustment to her lack of sight. That had happened to me, I think I'd commit suicide because reading is a very important component in my life. But she's managed. She's okay. So, I do spend every Thursday with her. I get there as early as she wants me to in the morning. We go over her mail. Sometimes I help her write out checks and so forth, and then go out for a meal, take her to the doctor, the dentist, the hairdresser, or whatnot. I find that it's very satisfying to be able to do something for my friend Pearl. And it's heightened our relationship very much, and we communicate almost every day, which is nice because I'm lonely. I think one of the real components of old age is loneliness. So, Pearl fills a very nice part of my life, and I think of hers. So that has worked out very well.

JS: And you know you're being productive and useful.

BA: Yes.

JS: Right.

[Recording paused.]

BA: I think that the big thing in my life was the terrible depression of the late '20s, 1927 on to about 1935. I graduated high school at sixteen in 1930. My oldest brother

graduated Harvard Law School in 1930, but it was so terrible that people we knew who wanted to be productive, people who took care of themselves, had nowhere to go. My parents' families were all immigrants. They'd all come over from Russia. We had quite a lot of family from Russia, and what they call [inaudible], people that lived in the same communities that came from the same land you came from. We had a farm, and we were growing lots of things, and we had a dairy farm, so we had milk in those days. We sold milk. It was a pretty viable farm until the Depression got it. Every Sunday during the summer months, we held an open house, and everybody out of the Worcester area, where all our family lived – we lived in Millbury – would come to us to eat. I remember walking with my mother out in the garden, picking cucumbers, tomatoes, radishes, and all that stuff. And then when the corn season came, we would have these big, big kettles of water outdoors, and we picked the corn and boil it right away. And whoever was there was welcome to eat. Every Sunday, we'd have family, and we would feed them. My mother was a large woman, a very wonderfully giving, warm person, and I hope I'm like her, but we just had a lot of fun with that, feeding those that we loved. And every Sunday, they would come.

JS: Were people going hungry then?

BA: Yes, indeed, people were going hungry. That was very sad. I remember my father had two horses long before them. He never really learned to drive a car, but by then, we had a car. He and I would go on Friday morning to have the chickens kosher-killed. That was part of my girlhood. My sister wouldn't go. She hated driving in the buggy. I loved it. My father and I would take the two horses in the buggy, and we would go in to have whatever we were having for Friday night. But had to be kosher-killed. It was seven to eight miles from Millbury to Worcester to the shochet, and we'd have them kosher-killed and do whatever marketing we needed. And we'd go home. My mother would cook all the stuff for Friday at Shabbos. Of course, she didn't cook for Shabbos. They were observant Orthodox Jews. That part of the family being there and getting to know all my cousins

under these circumstances and eating [with] them was a wonderful memory, and I tell it to my grandchildren, because I don't think that this generation who've been smothered with the material goods of the world know what it is to go without food.

[Recording paused.]

JS: You had an ill husband, you had a full-time job, and you were still active, doing volunteer work.

BA: Oh, absolutely.

JS: How did you do that?

BA: Well, you have to use your time appropriately. You know that. The early evenings were for my Bill. I would try to get home from the office between three and four, and if Bill was feeling pretty good that day, had not had any angina or anything, he'd get in the car. We'd go out and eat, or we'd go to an early movie. Then, of course, he had to be in bed because he got very tired by eight, nine o'clock. Then I'd make my calls or do what I was doing. I didn't do as much public speaking as I used to, but I ran a course at one time, teaching a lot of the women in the Jewish organizations in St. Louis how to do public speaking.

JS: Oh, really?

BA: Yeah. Very easy. You get accustomed to it. There are some rules to follow.

JS: How did you get started doing public speaking?

BA: I don't know, I'm just a big talker, I guess. Don't forget, I was a twin. And therefore, a sort of competitiveness comes through. The one who speaks first gets the attention, so you learn to cope with that. Now we were the two youngest. My mother had two children, and then seven years later, or six years later, had the twins. So, there were like two

separate families. As we all grew older, we became good friends, especially after my sister married. I had been married a year or two when she did. So then you become friends. It all equals out. My twin and I, of course, always kept in touch with each other, but our lives were so different. He was an endocrinologist and traveled widely, and so forth and so on. But we kept in touch, of course, and life goes on. You do the best you can. He died – I don't know if I've told you this – very suddenly in his sleep, when he was fifty-four. He had been in New Caledonia and picked up some viral something or other in his intestines, and I don't think he had proper care when he went to sleep at night and didn’t wake up. That was the earliest and the hardest, probably, to bear. I had lost my parents before that, but he was my contemporary. Somehow, the generations do follow a pattern. You lose your parents, but you're not supposed to lose your brother. You’re certainly not supposed to lose a child, but my brother Mike went to sleep one night and never woke up. And that was a big loss. I remember going – he was at the University of Connecticut Medical School then. I remember going to his funeral and getting off at Bradley Field, surrounded by a bunch of people, and I didn't know who they were. Well, my sister-in-law had sent them to pick me up. They were some of his interns and students. They talked to me about him and presented me with a totally different person than I knew. I knew him as a brother, and I knew him as somebody I argued with and fought with and loved. Now, here they talk about him, putting him on this pedestal, which I think, “Is that my brother Mike?” I can't believe that one. But it was, and that was a real eye-opener for me,

JS: How they saw him.

BA: How they saw him.

JS: So different.

BA: It was just so interesting to me. But at any rate, he was gone, and that was a part of my life that was over. That's what happens with life, if I may get philosophical.

JS: Please do.

BA: There are certain times when your life changes. My life changed when my parents died, and they died rather suddenly, nine days apart, and we were all very, very upset. It really made a big difference to the four children. Then the second thing was my twin dying a few years later, when he was fifty-four, and that really was a tremendous impact on me. I was very depressed from it, very difficult to be with, and really a bear; I knew I was. By then, Bill was sick, and I had to put a big face on for him of optimism all the time. And then, of course, Bill died a few years later. He died when he was sixty-four. I was sixty-two at the time. There's another phase of my life. Now I'm a widow, and how do I adjust to my role as a widow? So, I decided to stay on in St. Louis and run the journal. And everybody told me it was essential that I do it, and I believed them. But nobody's essential. You know that. We can all be replaced. But at any rate, I did stay on for six more years. Then one day, one of the doctors came down to talk to me about something or other, told me about a mistake he had made. So, I realized that it was time for me to leave. I was then seventy-one or seventy-two.

JS: How did that story make you think you should leave?

BA: Because he was a very competent physician and had made an error in surgery. And they used to come and talk to me. I was always older than everybody, you understand, so they'd often come and talk to me. I was very fond of him, and I know lots of mistakes I made in surgery and in medicine, and I'm sure everybody knows, but this guy started confiding in me. I realized that I could make a mistake very easily. I didn't feel I was quite as acute as I had been when I was fifty. And so I gave my boss a year’s notice, and they replaced me with three people. We realized that [inaudible] came out of a work effort that, when you went to the office, you worked; you didn't talk on the telephone. If a manuscript had to be worked on and there was a time that it needed to go to the printer, you took it home and worked on it. It never occurred to me not to. But today's world is very different,

very different. And so, I enjoyed my work very much.

JS: And you worked hard at it.

BA: Oh, I loved it, and I felt productive and needed. I think that's one of the important elements to being satisfied with your life, to feel productive, to feel that you're really doing something that is necessary, perhaps, and very fulfilling for you. And so, I encourage my children to get in anything they wanted to, but something they found interesting, and it was fun to go to work. I loved to get up every morning and go to the office. I never knew what was going to face me. An irate author. Doctors get very irate if you fiddle around with their written word, which is really not Shakespeare most of the time. Or I would get a call from somebody who said, “I'm going to be in town. Will you have dinner with me tonight? And let's talk about this book I'm doing.” It was wonderful. I found it so intriguing. So, when I hear some people talk about how bored they are with their work, I say, “Gosh, you missed an important part of your life. Change your job immediately.”

[END OF INTERVIEW]