

Maureen and Mike

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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 049-014**  
**Interviewee: Frieda Fligelman**  
**Interviewer: Kathy White**  
**Date of Interview: October 22, 1976**  
**Project: Montana Women's Oral History Project**

Kathy White: Frieda, we know that you were raised in Helena. Can you tell me how your parents happened to come to Helena and where they came from?

Frieda Fligelman: Well that's quite a complicated story. My parents came from Romania from a town called Berlag—B-e-r-l-a-g. It's still on the map. My sister has visited the town, but I haven't. And my father never went to visit it although he went to Europe on a tour once. But he would never go back to Romania, because he just remembered terrible political and economic conditions about it. And I remember as a child his saying – Well, he rarely talked about his life in Romania except about what wonderful parents he had and how his father used to get up at four o'clock in the morning to read, to study not only the *Bible* but the *Torah*, which is commentaries on the *Bible*, and he'd tell us about that to make us want to study and to excite our appetite for study, and he said—I remember him saying over and over—"I would rather live in a tent in the middle of the street than in a palace in Romania."

KW: What were the political problems in Romania?

FF: Well, in the first place the Jews were all persecuted, but when his father first went to Romania they were less persecuted there than any other place, and they came across the border from Bessarabia, which is mostly now Russia-Ukraine—and it's near Kiev partly, I think. My grandfather was one of 12 children, and each one was spirited across the border every day for almost two weeks. You would have to buy passports or pay people that made a point of spiriting little Jewish children across the border from Bessarabia in Russia. So, there could have been a Bessarabia—I used to know this, but I forgot—it could have been part Bessarabia in Romania and part in Russia. What was called...welcomed Jews across the border, because they needed certain skills that they had, like they were very often doctors, you know, and lawyers and merchants. So, one child after...and there was a Jewish reception for the little children on the Romanian side who kept the children until the parents came over, but each child came over.

Each of these brothers of these 12 brothers and sisters had different names, because they came with people who had different passports. So, that name we've only had for...I was a third generation. My grandfather, who had that name from his father, never had to use it, because they lived in a ghetto where they were called so and so the son of so and so. They didn't own any property, so they didn't have to use the last name.

But how my father got to this country. He came over just before the rush, the great rush of immigrants where they started coming at the rate of about a million a year from all over Europe

came in 1880, that's when the great rush came. I don't know whether the whole million came from that time on, but for quite a number of years they came at the rate of about a million a year.

KW: So what year did he come?

FF: I remember that when he told me when he came that he, I figured out right away, because I had already been to college and had studied in economics about immigration, and I figured out that it was two years before the rush, so it must have been in '78.

KW: How old was he?

FF: He was 17. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen...I don't know. He could have been 18. You see, I used to remember all of this.

KW: Yes. He was a young—

FF: He was quite a young man. There were what they called launchmen, launchman, landman—people from your own country, and they knew about these people here. But how did he get here. You want to know that?

KW: To Helena.

FF: How did he get to America?

KW: Well, how did he get to America, yes.

FF: Well, the steamships companies were all over Europe at that time as far as we know, but they were certainly were in Romania, and they gave out a little paper saying to the people on the street. They distributed to people on the street. I always want to say they let them drop from airplanes, but they didn't. (laughs)

KW: They had the leaflets.

FF: They were leaflets that they gave out saying: "Any honest man willing to work can live like a king or a prince in America."

He thought, what? He wanted to go to a country like that. He was willing to work. So he worked at all kinds of little odds and ends, because there were no real jobs, you know. You could work a little at this and get a little money here and little selling this and selling that and going to...getting some stuff from some little storekeeper and selling...going around houses and selling, and you'd get a little of it. So he saved money and with several friends, and they came

to America. They bought themselves a steamship ticket. But he said he nearly starved before he got here, because they didn't tell him that the food...Did Belle [Winestine] tell you this too?

KW: Yes. I think you...I remember—

FF: Did I tell you this?

KW: Or else I've read it so often that it sounds like an old familiar story.

FF: He wasn't told that the food was included, and when he saw people eating well he thought that they were rich people—in the steerage too. It must have taken about a month to get here, because I know I had an uncle and aunt and their three children...one of their children was born in America, but the other two were born in Europe. They told me...I remember them saying it took them a month, and they came several years later. The son who was born in Romania became one of the leading doctors of Montana. He came to America when he was about just a child and went all through school in America. His name was Dr. Fligelman. He left...at the time of World War Two...World War One, he took the "el" out of his name, because...“fligel” is wing...is bird. “Fligel” is wing, so it means “wing man.” Well, I said that must mean angel—a man with wings—but my cousins always said it must mean the man on the wing of the army, on the phalanx of an army, you know. It's more likely that it meant that. But each of these baby brothers...my grandfather...but the father of the seven children who came to America, and my father took over his two sisters and four brothers before he ever married. Saved money and brought them over.

KW: You mean he went back?

FF: No, he just sent for them.

KW: Sent for them.

FF: Sent for them one after another.

KW: What did he do about eating?

FF: He just ate the minimum just to keep him alive.

KW: Well, had he brought food with him?

FF: No, because they left...They had to go to England, I guess, and he knew no English. But as far as I know, I never heard...Of course, you might say that it's my silly old respect that I said he had no accent, but I never heard anyone remark about his having an accent. I'm not even sure that he spoke Romanian. He might have spoken Yiddish. But I have never heard...in Helena no one ever spoke Yiddish except five or six words. They spoke English. Then when my father arrived in

Helena there were already...I remember people saying there were a hundred families of Jews. I don't think there could have been a hundred families, it could have been 100.

KW: A hundred Jews.

FF: Yes. I don't see how there could have been a hundred families. But they had a little Jewish community.

KW: Before we get into that, how did he get to Helena? Why did he come?

FF: They were building a railroad out here. He got jobs...When he got to New York he must have earned a living somehow or other through the...There was always the Hebrew Benevolent and Immigration Society—you've heard of that before—who found jobs for these people. Then he went to Minneapolis where there was quite a group already there. Wherever he got a job and he got a little money, he would spend something like 10 or 15 cents an hour—of course, that's almost like a dollar now—and would get a schoolboy to teach him how to read the papers. What do Americans read? All that boy knew was the classics, he didn't know anything else, because he was a new person, you see. I have some old letters from father written in the early days in beautiful handwriting and beautiful English—better English than they speak over the radio now. He would never let us say: "Tomorrow is Thursday." In a sense, you can say "tomorrow is" in one sense. We had to say, "Tomorrow will be," you know, because he was taught the grammar by this boy who went to high school. But my relatives—I never remember any of them speaking...but my stepmother, who was from Germany and who had a little schooling in Germany, she could never distinguish between a "d" and "g." Of course, it's very similar. You see, the past tense in Germany is "g" very often in regular verbs...and in English it's "d." And when she used to...when she'd write a letter she'd say, "How do you spell it, with a 'd' or a 'g'?" We couldn't tell the difference when she said "d" and "g," but she'd say that over and over again. She knew there was a difference.

When he finally got to Minneapolis, he got a job on the railroad as a water boy carrying water around, and he got into Montana. They were building the Northern Pacific Railroad at that time, and so he...But when he came...Eventually, when the railroad came into Montana, he came on that railroad that came into Montana. I mean, as a passenger. I read a story...I read all the newspapers of Helena from the beginning back in the early '60s, and there's a story in there about two young boys who claimed to come from a...young men, who claimed to come from Romania who had been held up on the train. The train had stopped someplace. I think in Dakota or Eastern Montana. I've forgotten when. The passengers, a few passengers on the train and the conductor had gone to the village to get lunch, but these two young men had sandwiches that they had bought before they got on the train. When these people just came back from their lunch, and they saw these young men with their arms in the air. The people were holding the gun—two men—ran away. See, it was a holdup. At the end of this telling about the holdup on the train that they were scared away just before, and the young men could not speak very much English but they appeared to be honest young men. Isn't that interesting?

KW: Is that your father?

FF: Yes, and his friend. But part of the family had already been in Anaconda, and they're still living there that part of the family. No only my father's uncle...Now, he could have come later, because we were there in Helena and had gone there, and his name was Brinnick (?). Brinnick's son became a writer. His folks had a little store, the general store in Anaconda, and they sent this boy to Columbia University to be a dentist, because that was supposed to be, I think, the easiest medical, you know. When that young boy got there he didn't want to be a dentist, and he didn't tell his folks, and he studied literature, and he became a very famous Hollywood writer. I'll you the name of a book he wrote that was very fine, except that he mentions the family name and makes them awfully bad people. He makes my father very bad too. My father was a saint. I always thought of that being the typical Jew, because he said when we wanted to do something the way he corrected was always saying, "The Jews are civilized people, and they don't do that."

We said, "Well, Mary did it or Johnny did."

"But we are civilized people. We don't do things like that."

So I just expected everybody to be civilized people. Was that one of the great shocks of my life still. That's one reason why I say...I can't bear it when people say, "I honestly think." Why shouldn't they? Because I've heard that from early times.

KW: Your father just ended up in Helena?

FF: So, the train stopped in Helena, and he saw this big Jewish community. There was a large Jewish community. I could show you the early synagogue that was built in 1889. When there was no longer a Jewish community here, we gave the building to the state welfare. The state welfare...there's a lot of talk about tearing it down and making a more modern building out of it, and it would really be a pity because it's a nice building. They took down the colored windows. They weren't just plain colored glass. They were rough-colored glass so that the light came in differently. They put in two floors, and they took down the turnip towers. There were two turnip towers that were sky-blue with gold, six-pointed stars painted on. Then above it was a metal six pointed star, and in the middle over the doorway was a white...two white slabs. I don't know what they were made of, whether they were just painted or whether they were white marble. They could have been white marble. They had the Ten Commandments on them. Now, it seems to me having the Ten Commandments on a building is very suitable for a welfare building. I mean, I can't see that's a church and state. You know, I mean just as a general philosophical principles. It's all right. But still, some organization put up the Ten Commandments on the capitol grounds.

KW: He saw that there was a Jewish community then?

FF: Yes.

KW: Was the synagogue in Helena built?

FF: No, after he came.

KW: After he came. He noticed though that there was a Jewish community?

FF: There was a growing Jewish, because they...We laugh at it now. It's one of our jokes today. It was the cemetery that kept the Jewish community together. This cemetery is very interesting, because the early stones are all written in Hebrew, but Norman can read it. It usually says, "This man came from someplace. He was a good man," you know. Now, the Jewish community used to be very interesting, because everybody up to say about to about 18...very few people were born in Helena before 18...well, before 1880, let's say. But there were a lot of Jews here in 1884 when my father arrived here.

KW: Did this seem then to him to be a good place for him to settle down, and he would be welcome here and be comfortable?

FF: Yes. Belle said someone called her...Did Belle tell you her story?

KW: Not yet.

FF: Well, how someone called her a bad name, and she came from school crying, and the teacher wanted to know what he called her. They called her "shebay (?)." Have you ever heard that word? Yes. I never remember of anybody saying that out loud, but she said they did. The teacher said, "Did you fall down?"

"No, somebody called me a bad word."

The teacher said, "What is it?"

She said she couldn't bring herself to say the word, and so the teacher said she couldn't...if she doesn't know the word she can't get after the boy for saying it. But I have no memory of anything like that.

KW: And so, what did he decide to do? How did he manage?

FF: Oh, I was going to tell you, the early cemetery had where everybody came from, and they came from all over Western and Southern...I mean Eastern and Southern Europe. I think one family even came from some South Africa or Australia. There was Mrs. Powan (?) who was here, and she was the first piano teacher in Helena. She came before the railroads, you know.

But she had already had relatives in Salt Lake or Denver or something...Denver I guess it was. And so—

KW: Your father.

FF: —and so, there were two other Jews who were here who...they went around with a little pack on their backs, and they would go from house to house too and sell things. There was a fourth...four men formed a partnership, and they sent my father East. By that time my father could speak a little English because he had this boy teaching him. He was the kind of person who paid attention to what he did, and he was going to be an American, you know. So he spoke very good English. He read only the best and everybody did...There was no trash literature. There were a few dime novels, but it wasn't...there was so much good literature that was interesting to these people. When I was young, everybody in our neighborhood...they were certainly today what you'd call middle class people, but they weren't...and they comfortable, but they weren't society people, you know. Another thing is, a lot of these society people had made themselves rich too, — but they seemed to have a kind of simple whole conscious that they all had. Even though they came and worked hard, they had books, and they read the books. They had Shakespeare, and we had Shakespeare and Victor Hugo in English.

KW: Victor Hugo, who was the big hit of the day?

FF: Yes. And Dickens and Scott—I'm just trying to think—and an Encyclopedia Britannica, and everybody had a bookcase like this. I said to my father once: "How do they even...," They all came from different countries. Of course, a lot of them came up after or during the Civil War from Missouri and from even farther South. As I remember, everybody had such nice manners. I don't mean silly, nice manners. I mean snooty...What should I say...snobby manners, but considerate of other human beings, and people were considerate and polite. Now today, very few people say thank-you, I noticed, especially children, and they don't excuse themselves and they let doors slam in your face. I don't think that would have ever happened in the early days. They would look around to see if somebody was in back of them. I'm so conscious of that, because people don't do that today, and I run into them, because I'm expecting them to step aside when the door opens and let the next person go in who just happened to be nearby.

KW: Your father...I'm getting back on track...Your father was selling—

FF: Dry goods.

KW: Dry goods. And they send him back to New York.

FF: You see, there was no ready-made clothes in those days. There were ready-made shoes, and I must say that they were very lovely ready-made shoes. There was a Gaymore (?) Shoe Store. Now there still is in Great Falls...in Butte, and there was in Helena at that time. Such

beautiful shoes! I just can't bear the way shoes are made today, except once in a while. Now, what I was going to say—

KW: So how did he—

FF: Now, Belle knows that story a little better than I do. They had to get back to New York to get goods. There would be traveling salesman that would come with horses and buggies from this farm and then they would go out again to this farm and sell things to local...What did I call these people that...Hucksters you'd say today, but you didn't say that—traveling salesmen. Traveling salesmen came from the East largely, and then there were these people that had a pack on their back and went out. What did they call those people? I said it once before earlier. Naturally he had found out who the Jewish people were, and they all had little shops here, and so he met these other men. One of these men was the father of Judge Lester Lobel. Did you ever hear of him? He was the first juvenile judge in Montana. One them had no children...Two of them had no children. They got together, and they rented a little place to store things. One day, a lady comes down soon after, walking up and down Main Street.

Originally, it was called Last Chance Gulch, then it was called Main Street because it was citified. When my brother-in-law came here with a history major from Yale University—he was a officiator of historical things—he got them to call it Last Chance Gulch again, because every city has a Main Street but there's only one Last Chance Gulch. A lot of people wouldn't talk to him afterwards, because they it was very vulgar to call it Last Chance Gulch.

Soon after they got this little place where they stored there good, you know, a lady comes down and the door was open, and she walks in and said she'd take some of this and she'd take some yards of this and that. They got the idea of opening a store. It was just a little bit of store, way up on Main Street.

KW: Way up on Last Chance?

FF: Yes, way up on Last Chance.

KW: Now, up the hill?

FF: No. It was...I don't know where it was.

KW: It's not near where the store is now?

FF: But, if you want to I'll show you when they first had a real store, and that was in the '90s...in the late '80s. It was in one of those buildings that they tore down, and there's a real photograph of the real building. It was one of those big hotels up there. Were you in Helena when those hotels were up there? Well, the original painting...a photograph of that they have

in the...If I had realized this, I would have taken you there for lunch at the, you know, the Travel Lodge.

KW: Oh, yes. I've seen old pictures.

FF: Well, one of those pictures says the New York Dry Goods Company.

KW: Yes. I think Tony might have had a picture of that around here somewhere—the New York Dry Goods Company carpets.

FF: You see, it's in one of those booths—a beautiful building—because they built well in those days. They were stone masons.

KW: Okay. So this lady came in and said that she wanted to buy some of this and that?

FF: Yes, and so they opened the store.

KW: He and who else?

FF: And Mr. Lobel, Senior, who was from Hungary—and I don't remember that he had an accent either—and a Mr. Heller (?). You know what Heller means in German? It just means bright—if hell is bright, heller is brighter. That's a common German name, and also, it's the name of certain unit of money in those countries too. There was a Mr. Frankfurt (?)—a very handsome imposing looking man—and he was from Germany or Austria, probably from Austria...I don't know. In our early advertisements in the early newspapers, it said, "All languages spoken," and I imagine that two or three people could speak a few Indian words or understand how much of this. Then there probably were around here Scandinavians and Germans and French who came down from Canada, because there's a Frenchtown out of Missoula, you know. If you look through the old Helena telephone books as I have, there were quite a lot of French names, and there all kinds of names in the telephone book. The telephone books are awfully interesting to read, and I understand that was so in all the towns in America...in Montana and probably all over the country. Do you remember seeing that, the New York Dry Goods Company? Beautiful building. It said, "Carpets, carpets." We used to sell carpets.

KW: When did they start that building? Did they have a little tiny store for a while?

FF: This building here?

KW: Well, you mentioned that they had an earlier building that was just a little tiny store.

FF: A hole in the wall, I guess, just what we used to call a hole in the wall—a small shed up there. And then when they—

KW: How long was that in operation? Do you know?

FF: No, but a very short time. And then they—

KW: They had enough capital to get a loan from the bank.

FF: They didn't have enough capital, but banks would lend to good hardworking people. The banks would come and tell you that they will lend you money, you see, because they wanted interest. But people felt that they could expand and expand without...you see, and you could judge character there. Now, I don't know whether I ought to tell this or not. When we built this building down here with McDonalds (?) and Norman went to see Mr. Holter (?) who owned it. You know the Holter family. The Holter family, you ought to interview Jeff Holter, because he's an atomic scientist. Do you know about him? He's a real atomic scientist. He has invented something to put on the heart 24 hours a day. You've heard of that. What do they call it? I can't say the word now, but it will...His grandfather came in a covered wagon, but his father graduated from Columbia University.

KW: Okay, what were you going to say about it?

FF: What I need to say...They all gave their children good educations.

KW: What did Norman do when he went to talk to him?

FF: Well, Mr. Holter said: "Could you use—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

FF: —a lot of people thought...Well, I think Norman is a nice looking man, but a lot of people don't think so. Didn't think so, and so Norman walked out with 10,000 real dollars and only his good looks for security. (laughs)

KW: Wonderful. So your father got set up in the dry goods business, and it became a success.

FF: But it took lots of hard work.

KW: What about your mother? What's her story and how did she come here?

FF: Well, my own mother, my father sent for her when he was ready to get married after he brought over his four brothers and two sisters, and he sent for this...whom he had only known as a little child, with the idea of marrying her. She was quite well educated for those days, and so were my two aunts. No, one of my aunts was quite a bit older than us.

KW: Keep talking, I'm going to go put some more wood on the fire.

[Break in audio]

FF: You know, girls didn't have teachers in this little town, but my aunts and the neighbors were allowed to sit in the corner and listen while the boys got their lessons.

KW: Now, why did the girls not...This might be something people aren't familiar with. Why did the girls not have an education?

FF: I suppose because they just studied the *Talmud* that is in Hebrew, and the *Talmud* is like an encyclopedia. It covers science and law and everything but it is based on the *Bible*, but it is developments and interpretations of modern life—how you use it modern life—and so in doing that it covers the science and knowledge of the day too.

KW: Yes. And what did this have to do with the girls?

FF: And these little girls sat in the corner and listened to the teacher.

KW: But why weren't they allowed to study?

FF: Why weren't they allowed? It was just a custom. I guess it wasn't a matter of not being allowed, it was just a matter of custom. You know, it wasn't consciously not being allowed.

KW: They thought that education would serve men—

FF: They didn't need it or something, because...You see, there are not ordained ministers in...There are today ordained, but a rabbi was a learned man. Every man had to be a sort of...more of...it was an honor to be called rabbi. Rabbi means teacher. It doesn't mean preacher, it means teacher. They always called the synagogue...they didn't call it...I don't know. I've been told, but I've forgotten why they use a Greek name for a Jewish church. You see, synagogue is Greek for together, a meeting place together, and so—

KW: So anyhow, these little girls, your mother and your aunts—

FF: They'd just sit in the corner and listen, and they did. Studied also something, one of my aunts told me that was called cosmography, you know, or cosmology. Cosmology perhaps, about world affairs and world history. So they just listened, and they were used to discussing things. Sat at the table, but I don't suppose they...but maybe at home they all talked together, and they all heard at the table. I know that as I look back at it now that our table conversation was practically like college lectures. Because, even in Helena, from our earliest days we took the *New York Sunday Times*, but not just the...It had a magazine section in those days. We didn't take the regular section, we took the magazine section and it had wonderful pictures. We took a paper that was called the *American Israelite*, and my father used to call it the *Jewish Israelite* as a little humor. That was a very...a discussion of world history partly as it affects the Jews, but it was about all sorts of things—what went on in science and history and literature and all that. It had other things to acquaint the newcomers about life.

KW: Your mother and your father both, then, were very well educated?

FF: Well, yes. I can't say very well educated, but they were certainly educated compared to the way people are today. They didn't know about sports, but they knew about good literature. And I remember when my...You see, nearly everybody, except those who worked for others, had help in the house all the time. But the wives had to help along, because there was so much housework to do that even if you had 24-hour day help you had to help too. But in the afternoon, especially in summer, they sat on the porches and read good literature. My mother—my stepmother that is—read all of the...read one book after another of those classics sitting on the porch and so did the neighbor who was Irish-Catholic. She read the same books, you know. And then they would discuss. They didn't discuss the literature, but they discussed...and they knew about. I remember her laughing at this and that, and we were always encouraged to read.

My father would read to us on Sunday afternoon. Imagine Thomas Payne's *Rights of Man* when we were perhaps seventh or eighth grade. He'd read aloud, and he read Ingersoll—Thomas Ingersoll [Robert Ingersoll?—who was a Jew. You know who Ingersoll was? I remember us reading tales of Shakespeare. I didn't see any point in that. But I remember...I have still today in my kitchen the sewing table that we had in the 1890s. When we were in high school, maybe going into high school, my mother sitting...It could have been before we went to high school even, because we had a kerosene lamp. That was before the days of gas. My mother would sit

one of the end of the table mending stocking and things, and my father would sit at the other end and my sister and myself on each side all taking part reading *King Lear* aloud. It was a surprise...I thought that was the way American children were brought up to have read all these things. When my father came home from New York, he brought us all kinds of good books. I remember him bringing Emerson's "Essay on Friendship" and Marcus Aurelius' "Sayings" and things like that—always some good books. He'd go into Bring Thomas (?), which was a famous bookstore. Today, Bring Thomas sells any old thing. It was a gorgeous store when I first went to New York in 1910 as a graduate student. I went to New York first in 1910...in 1900. My mother wanted me to...we had heard about automobiles, and I was going to be shown an automobile.

KW: Did you go with your father—

FF: Father and mother.

KW: —on that buying trip?

FF: Yes. But they took me along, because I held my head...I still hold my head a little on one side. The famous doctor cut the wrong tendon in my neck. We could have sued him for malpractice, but we would have never thought of that. But he said he would do it over, but I wouldn't go back to the hospital because I had a taste of ether that was so terrible. Today, you don't taste those things. I wouldn't go back, so I could have been standing straighter. I held my neck on one side a little. I never noticed it, but everybody else did. So they took me there to be operated on. Afterwards we stood on the corner of Central Park West and Fifth Avenue for about...either an hour and a half or two hours one not so bad winter—it was in winter—waiting to see an automobile go by and we never did. That was in 1900. It must have been the end of 1900, because I was 10 years old I remember, and...Yes?

KW: Before we get too much farther, your real mother died?

FF: When my sister was born, because they didn't have sterilization in those days.

KW: She got an infection?

FF: And she died of an infection.

KW: And did she die soon after?

FF: Early cemeteries are full of babies' graves and mothers' graves.

KW: Did she die soon after Belle was born?

FF: At the time.

KW: Right away?

FF: I'd say.

KW: Giving birth?

FF: I think so. I'm not sure. We never discussed it.

KW: Your father never—

FF: No, never mentioned it.

KW: You were how old then? Three, four?

FF: Let's see I'm a year and half older than my sister, a year and three months older. I'm 15 months older. So I was just a baby. Then our aunts brought us, you know. My aunt lived in Marysville. It was a booming town at that time. Marysville—there was a long piece in the paper about Marysville the other day, a whole page ad, because it was a 100th anniversary or something. I don't know. All it tells about is the mines and the saloons and the brothels. In about 1897 or '98 or '99—I don't know just when—we played *Hamlet* in Marysville, all the children in our neighborhood. There was a boy that went to high school, and he wanted to be an actor. He put on *Hamlet* in his back barn, and he got Mamie Cruz (?), the daughter of the man that gave the millions and millions for most of the cathedral...But another enormous a lot of money was gathered from the townspeople, because it was going to be something that was a honor to the whole town to have that beautiful building. So all the merchants gave money for that too. But he gave about eight or nine million dollars to that. He was reported to have had ten million. Whether that's so or not, I don't know, but he was very wealthy. He had a valet who read the newspaper to him while he had his meals, and they said that he couldn't read or write. But he made his money out of the Drumlummon Mine, the famous Drumlummon Mine in Butte—in Marysville. And then he started a bank here.

KW: So you performed *Hamlet* in Marysville?

FF: So Mamie Cruz, whose real name was Mary Elizabeth or something like that, was Cordelia. She was the head person, because he felt that...I heard later that by doing that he got all the money he needed for the lights and for this and for that and the girls in the play could wear. We all wore, all the ones I knew wore different clothes of Mamie's on the stage. I remember wearing a gorgeous real...Of course, there was no...there was only silk or no silk, and I had an accordion petticoat as we'd call it with a top to it of beautiful lilac silk and all accordion pleated. I wore that underskirt of hers as a dress on the stage. But all I had to say was "Look to the queen." I don't know whether I said that or my sister said that, but we each had one phrase, you know, or so. But he wanted a lot of people on the stage.

KW: How old were you?

FF: I was maybe eight or nine or ten...No, or maybe I could have 11.

KW: Was this before your father remarried?

FF: What?

KW: This was before your father remarried?

FF: My father remarried when I was four years old.

KW: But you were still were brought up in Marysville by your aunts?

FF: No, we were not in Marysville. We were in Helena. They came to Helena, but we were going to school here in Helena.

KW: But you did live in Marysville for a short time?

FF: No, we never lived there.

KW: Oh, I see.

FF: The aunts came here to take—

KW: To take care of you.

FF: Yes, but the youngest sister of my father's sister was here by that time, and she was married. The other one came over a little later with the parents of a man who was already here working for my father, and she finally married that man.

KW: Do you want some water?

FF: No. And so, she went...there was a school right down here a ways called the Eperson School (?). Today it's called the Lee Butler School (?), and it is closed up. She said the teachers were simply marvelous to her. They had to put her in the first grade, because she didn't know English, but she was about...I've forgotten how old she was...maybe she was 12 or so, but they put her in the first grade. But before the end of the year she was already in the fifth grade. She said they helped her so beautifully. She said it was just wonderful. She married the uncle that started the Terrace in Great Falls with another uncle of mine.

KW: And so, you father then remarried. Who was this woman that he married?

FF: Oh, she was the niece or cousin or someone he did business with in New York, you see.

KW: So she was from New York City?

FF: Yes. But she had come there...When she was 17 or 18 they brought her from around Munich in Germany. They were Germans, and they brought her.

KW: She was Jewish too?

FF: Yes. My father wouldn't have minded what church we belonged to if we really believed in it, but he was against intermarriage. At present, and I know another man—I don't want to mention names—who wouldn't let...There were so few Jewish young men in town that a lot Jewish girls didn't get married at all and others married non-Jews. One of them married a non-Jew.

Say look at the shadow on those curtains. Isn't that...? Looks like birds up there.

He wouldn't allow her husband-to-be—this is not my father, this is another man—to be buried in the Jewish cemetery—this other man. My father was all for having him buried where his wife's family were, because his wife wanted him buried there. But now, none of his grandchildren belong to the Jewish community, and they all belong to the Episcopal community. Not only that, but my cousin the doctor, who married a non-Jewish woman whose daughter married the owner of one of the great publishing companies of New York City, is buried there, and she's not Jewish. There's quite a number of non-Jews buried there today, because the Jewish wives or the Jewish husbands wanted the spouse...one spouse wanted the other to be, and they were willing to be.

KW: Is it even kept up as a Jewish cemetery anymore?

FF: Yes, it is. It's called the Home of Peace, and it is a very beautiful cemetery. I'll show it to you because these old Hebrew...But it used to be on every gravestone where they came from, and it was very interesting to see the variety of places, and those people were born as long as 125, 140 years ago. And so, what were we talking about?

KW: We were talking about your mother to begin with... about how she ended up marrying...Your stepmother.

FF: Oh, no we were talking the cemetery. It no longer tells where these people come from, and I think that's terrible, because it got suddenly to be style to have nothing on a tombstone but the name. So, my stepmother had all this...wanting to be real American, wanting to do everything the way it's done, and she took all those tombstones out and just put the names down. I think it would have been so interesting to know how people came from all over. The children cannot speak those languages at all, and they stopped speaking those languages. It just

seems like a big ghetto in a big metropolitan area where they could...They were amongst themselves, you know.

KW: Now, your stepmother then was in charge of—

FF: My stepmother and my father spoke German when we were little ones, and we got to understand it and then they stopped. By the time we got into school they stopped. We tried to get them...We were always anxious to learn a different language when we heard about somebody that could. We used to love to stand in front of the Chinese laundry and listen to Chinese and try to pick up something but we couldn't, because they spoke completely different tones in their tone language.

KW: In terms of your upbringing at home, who made the decisions in your family?

FF: I never remember a single fight or a single raising of the voice to anybody, and I never remember any difference of opinion between my mother and father. If it was something to do with business, my mother always thought it...she would ask him or something about rent. She got so much a month, and it was to run the house with. I never remember of her going over or under it and whatever had to be done. But I remember this, we were never given spending money, because my mother always said, "Children who get enough to eat at home don't have to buy things, and you get what's proper to eat at home and you don't have to buy things. And when you need clothes you get them. You don't have to buy them. But when you get old enough to buy your clothes you will have money to buy them." My mother used to like to save the best part—what was thought to be the best part—of the roast or the best part of food for my father. He always refused to eat it without dividing it up. It really didn't make anything difference. It wasn't anything we particularly cared about. Oh, we had wonderful food. I always remember that.

KW: Did your mother cook?

FF: Yes. She cooked, and as soon as she'd teach the girl that came around. We didn't call them servants, we called them help. They got married.

KW: Your mother did have help?

FF: Yes, 24 hours a day. You always lived in a house with 24 hour...everybody did. What we called everybody.

KW: Everybody in your neighborhood. Everybody in your class.

FF: Yes. Well, the people who owned our house didn't, because they had three children who were old enough to do...They were Bohemian people. The girls were artists too. They could paint beautifully and they could sew beautifully and they sewed miles of lace together.

KW: But now, who was this girl that your mother had that helped her?

FF: Oh, they were always girls that came in from the country to the city to get a job. They used to come in to go to school and live with people also, and go to school and then help in the house when the children were little. I don't ever remember ever having anyone that ever went to school, but then we had a lot of immigrant girls. Those immigrant girls knew more than these domestic science graduates today. I want to tell you, they were trained.

KW: You didn't have a nurse though. You didn't have somebody who specifically took care of the children and somebody who did the cooking?

FF: Well, after I grew up and we had our aunt and her baby came to visit us from somewhere, we'd have a girl come in. If our aunt happened to come during...and we were too little to take care...You see, 12 years old was considered too little to take care of a baby. Today, they are sitters. It's unbelievable to me now. But we'd get a schoolgirl then to come after school or...I don't know what we got, but I remember...or women or alone. I remember once an aunt, and we had three people—I don't know how we put her up—how we could put her up in house when we had our regular girl and then we had someone come in. My aunt and her baby came to visit us, and then we had someone come in so that when they out to stay with baby. Why did the cook...because the cook in the house couldn't do it. I don't know how that was. Then we had somebody to wash the baby's clothes, because it was such a lot of washing.

KW: Somebody came in to do the washing?

FF: Yes.

KW: Did you send some of your washing out?

FF: But in the early days, we sent our so-called heavy washing to the Chinese laundry.

KW: And your father's shirts and things?

FF: They did beautiful work. But my mother always opened the sheets when they came back and opened everything to see that there were no bugs. She thought there might be bugs. But I never remember...and we'd help to hold them out and turn them backward. I never remember of anything showing, and I used wonder why she did it. It didn't occur to me.

KW: You'd think that after doing that a few times she'd finally decide—

FF: No.

KW: She did that year after year?

FF: I tell you the hygiene in our house was something, and I think it was in everybody's house as far as I know, because there was so many germs about.

[Break in audio]

KW: How about going to school?

FF: I know that so many people came from Europe that went to school—their parents—and I don't ever remember except one or two fights of children and they were all nice children. It seems to me, my impression is that they were always glad to go to school. I know this about Jewish people, but it may be so about others too. That they always told their children what a wonderful thing it was to go to school. That in their countries they could not go to the public schools, because Jews weren't allowed to go.

KW: If there was a public school even.

FF: Yes. Very few of the well-to-do Jews came to America, because they were getting along all right. It was those who couldn't get along and amongst the non-Jews too.

KW: Did you always do well in school?

FF: Yes. We weren't the first in school. I don't ever remember being the head of the class. But I remember one terrible thing a teacher said about me...I didn't feel bad about it. I just felt shocked. But Belle was. You see, you'd have two grades in one room, an A and B, and Belle was in the B because she was a year younger than me. Once, the teacher was reading us a story, something about the Milky Way, and I raised my hand, "What is the Milky Way?"

She asked the children: "How many of you know what the Milky Way is?" and quite a few raised their hands. It was about, maybe the fifth or sixth grade, but I'm sure they didn't all raise them. She said, "If Frieda doesn't know what the Milky Way is I told you children never to laugh at another person who makes a mistake, but now you can laugh at Frieda, because she doesn't know not to know what the Milky Way was." Well, we knew about the stars and we used to look at stars and have this beautiful star pointed out and this, but we didn't know the names of the stars. My sister said she felt so bad for me that tears came to her eyes.

I said: "But we never talked about the Milky Way in class."

She said, "Of course we didn't, you're supposed to know about that." Wasn't that awful?

KW: Must have been a bad day for the teacher.

FF: I wonder if that teacher ever felt sorry about that. Someone came to my door a couple of years ago and brought me...She said she was sorting out the papers of a brother who had died, and she finds this high school graduation thing and my name was on it. She thought I might like to have it. And I was surprised. I had no memory of giving the talks that I'm listed there as giving. And I'm playing the piano. I'm playing a waltz or...no, I'm playing a waltz from Rigoletto or something.

KW: Do you remember that?

FF: I don't remember the waltz. I just faintly remember going up to the piano. But I remember playing it at home.

KW: Did your mother teach you piano at home?

FF: Oh, no. We had a wonderful teacher in Helena. Imagine, he charged three dollars for three-quarters of an hour, and then he went to Butte and charged four dollars for a half of an hour. Imagine! Belle and I both took lessons, and there are about a dozen people still living who took lessons from that same professor. Say, I'll tell you who will know a lot, whose father...Margaret, Mrs. Hibert (?), who was Margaret Stevens. Have you been to see her? You've heard about her? There's a town of Stevens here. I don't know whether it's anymore...really people living there or whether it's just part of their ranch that's called Stevens.

KW: It's part of the ranch. Norman told me too that I should speak with her.

FF: Oh, he did. Oh, she's a marvelous person...I don't want to bring this up—

KW: Well, I can stop the tape.

[End of Interview]