

Western Australian Jewish Seniors Oral History Project

Transcription of an interview with
Esther Schenberg

JEWISH HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

DATE OF INTERVIEW:	21 February, 28 February, 16 May 2018
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TRANSCRIBER:	HELENA COHEN-ROBERTSON
DURATION:	154 MIN
REFERENCE:	OHP2018/08
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KNOW

YOUR

Temple David, 34 Clifton Crescent, Mount Lawley, 21 February 2018.

Know Your Nation: So what I normally do is just to start off with you saying your full name and your date of birth for some context.

Esther Schenberg: OK, Esther Schenberg and date of birth is tricky. Officially, it's the 26th of December, 1935. But it actually isn't the official date. So I've discovered and looking back at my parents' papers they came from Poland and I came as a babe. It appears that my birthday is actually a year and a day earlier. So, sorry, later, so unofficially, the 25th of the 12th '36. So I've got an unknown birthday. It's either 1935 or 1936. My passport is one day, my official date is the '35 one.

KYN: And how do you think that happened?

ES: Well, because in Poland, where I was born just before the war and they didn't bother about birth certificates. My parents didn't even know when they were born. And so, somehow, at some point, they made my birthdate 26th the 12th, '35, but it just didn't add up with my father's naturalisation papers and looking back at the age I was, when they were holding me. I was obviously a year younger, but I really, really had a bad time when I started school because I was always that year younger than everyone else. But I didn't know that and that was very difficult for me because I was always so much as I say, younger than everyone. And it wasn't 'til later that it all added up.

KYN: Wow. Wow, that's super intriguing. OK, just for the record, can you say your parents' full names?

ES: Yes, Miriam Kessell and Shai Kessell, or Marie, Miriam Marie Kessell. Some papers were Marie, some papers were Miriam and Shai Kessell because I'm sure you're aware, when, and they came separately. My father came from Poland about a year before my mother. My mother bought my eldest brother and myself. Dad came first a year earlier. But what always happened was that they didn't speak English, so when they were asked their names at Fremantle, names were changed. There's a lot of misunderstanding between the immigration officials because they didn't really understand the new immigrants coming in. So that's why my mother sometimes was Marie, sometimes Miriam and so on.

KYN: Yes, OK. So your mum came over with you and your brother?

ES: My oldest brother. I had two siblings later here in Australia.

KYN: OK.

ES: So there's three brothers and myself. Two born in Poland, two born in Australia, in Perth.

KYN: Yes, and is it you and your brother born in Poland?

ES: Yes, my oldest brother. So I my mum brought my oldest brother and myself out, yes.

KYN: And just for the record again, can you say what your siblings' full names are?

ES: Yes, yes, yes, my oldest brother, Abe and myself came with my mother and then my brother, John and Bernard were born here; John Kessell, Bernard Kessell.

KYN: Interesting that they have Anglicised names.

ES: Yes.

KYN: I love it, beautiful.

ES: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

KYN: OK, so let's talk briefly about anything that we know about Poland or your parents. Did they tell you, did they talk to you much about how they got to leave? Why they got to leave at that time? Talk me through that.

ES: Yes, yes, yes, well it was - the war broke out in '39, anti-semitism in Poland was rife, and the writing was on the wall, and they decided. My father first as I mentioned, he would come to Perth and my mother's brother had arrived here from Poland, and then my father came because of the anti-semitism in Poland. And it was becoming obvious, what was going to happen in the future in Poland to the Jews. The war hadn't broken out. Now, anti-semitism was so bad. I was a baby. I certainly didn't remember anything, but my parents had nothing good to say about the Poles. I mean, they are branded as anti-semites, everyone knows that. And they never spoke Polish at home. It was always Yiddish. And they hated anything to do with - with the Poles. So they would never go back, if the opportunity had ever arisen after the war. They had no desire to go back. They just had terrible memories of hardship and intolerance, yes.

KYN: So it's interesting that, I mean, classically, you'd think about anti-semitism increasing as Nazis moved in, but actually it was welcomed probably by, because the Poles as a nation—

ES: Were the worst. Worse than the Germans and Nazis, the Poles were the worst as I understand it because, well, that's what history tells us anyway, yes.

KYN: Did your parents ever speak openly about some of their experiences?

ES: No, because they got out before the war, so not specifically. They struggled to make a living and they found it very hard in Poland. It was tough for a Jew to make a living in Poland. And they weren't wealthy, it's not like the German Jews. The Polish Jews lived in ghettos and restricted and limited and they struggled, they just struggled, it was hard. So they look forward to a life in Australia that would give them the freedom that they wished for for their children, their family and themselves.

KYN: So where in Poland were they living?

ES: Well, I was born in Lublin, so Lublin was where we came from.

KYN: Is that a town or a city?

ES: A city, Yes.

KYN: And so were you born in a ghetto or?

ES: I'm not sure, no, I can't really say it was a ghetto, but my common sense tells me it probably was. I think the Jews did live in a ghetto to survive, but not a forced ghetto I think. Well, I'm guessing that prior to when we came out in '37, as hard as it was for Jews. I don't think they were herded into ghettos yet, was just support for each other as Jews I think.

KYN: Yes. And why Perth?

ES: OK, that's an interesting question. Everyone came out from Poland or wherever on ships and Perth was the first port of call, OK. Now, a lot of the Jews, the Polish Jews got off the boat. I believe the Hungarian Jews went onto Sydney. The Polish Jews stayed in the main, our community is made up, as I understand it in the main of Polish Jews, but over time some of those Jews decided that they would move on to Melbourne. It's funny, as the Polish Jews - Perth, Melbourne, Hungarian Jews - Sydney. And for instance, my mother's brother, who came out about, just before my dad came out, which instigated my father coming out. He and his family at some point, my aunt, my uncle, my cousins decided after a few years in Perth that they preferred a bigger city and shifted to Melbourne, and quite a few of the Polish Jews did - shifted to Melbourne. Whereas my father and mother were very happy and settled, living in Perth. They didn't see the need to shift to Melbourne. But it's the first port of call, so that after a big sea voyage, this is where most Jews got off.

KYN: Yes, like 'OK, that's enough'.

ES: That's enough, yes. Unless, I had family in the eastern states. But prior to the war, I just wanted to get off from the boat.

KYN: So what - just for the record again, what was your uncle's name?

ES: Shiff, I've got to remember. I have to think for a minute. My cousins, their two children, Freddie has passed away, Eva Shiff, uncle Max. I can't remember my auntie's name. She passed away so long ago, Max Shiff. And yes, Yes. So we used to go and visit them a lot. My mother would take me and my brother and we'd go to Melbourne. She'd visit her brother and I became very close with my Melbourne cousins and still very close with my cousin, Yes.

KYN: You obviously have no memories or limited memories of the ship or?

ES: I was a baby. Absolutely, no recall at all. I truly was a baby—

KYN: Yes, and you probably—

ES: I was a baby. I do have very, very early memories after we arrived here, where we lived, and which was well within the community at the time - it's Northbridge now, but it was around Bulwer Street and Hyde Park. And my earliest memories and I've been two maybe two and a half and

going for a walk with my father to Hyde Park because that's where we all live as a community. I remember the first kosher butcher shop there, the shule in Brisbane Street. I know the house we lived in and kindergarten. Yep. It's all very vivid and I was very young during the war. I remember the blackouts and the air raids and the sirens, the search lights, the trenches that we all had to dig. The war years are very vivid in my mind, yes.

KYN: OK, right, so where do I want to start? OK, so you mentioned that your parents spoke Yiddish at home.

ES: Only Yiddish, Yes. They didn't want to speak Polish.

KYN: When you were growing up, did your parents encourage you to identify one particular way over another in terms of nationality?

ES: Well, Australian, it was just definitely Australian; they got naturalised, as soon as they could. They were definitely Australian Jews.

KYN: Yes. And was it Jewish first and then Australian second or were they equal, or was it Australian first and Jewish second?

ES: They were Jewish. They were very, very Jewish. Not religious. They were Jewish and Jews and yes, traditional Jews, not religious Jews.

KYN: Did you speak back to your parents in Yiddish or in English?

ES: Only English, but they spoke to us in Yiddish mainly because they didn't have the opportunity to learn English. They were very, very hesitant about speaking English. I remember the early years we went to school and we used to have to speak - my elder brother particularly was used as an interpreter when mum went shopping or for any legal purposes. It was my older brother that spoke in English. She'd have to take Abe along to anything official, yes. She only knew Yiddish. She was a housewife.

KYN: And what did your dad do when he—?

ES: He was an upholsterer, which is what he was in Poland, so he opened up his own business.

KYN: And did he work with others or was he on his own?

ES: On his own. My mother used to go out and helped him in Vic Park.

KYN: So - and what was the name of his business?

ES: Vic Park Upholstery Company. It was a one man business and I remember going out there with my mum in Albany Highway. It was very exciting. We caught trams and we went all that way. It was a big adventure.

KYN: In hindsight, how do you think that you as a family were received in Perth?

ES: Here? Well we never mixed with Christians, just Jews. We lived in the heart of Mount Lawley or North Perth initially. So my parents had their friends - Jewish friends - and it was always within the Jewish community and their friends were Jews that came from Poland. And it was very interesting that, for instance, the interesting part about it in Perth, the Polish Jews and the Aussie Jews were like separate religions. I married a Jewish man, but an Aussie Jew. And I remember that my parents did not approve because David was second generation Australian. So the Poles and the Aussies just, it was like I was marrying out almost, it was like that. So to answer your question, I've got off track and it wasn't a question of being accepted because they were with their friends, who had all immigrated. They never mixed with Aussie Jews at all.

KYN: What about going into a shop or something?

ES: Well, then, in the early days, as I say, my mother had to take my brother to interpret. Yes.

KYN: What about other Yiddisher Jews who came from other non-Polish countries, did you mix with them or if you had had a boyfriend say, who was from Germany instead of Poland, would that also be bad?

ES: No, no, no, no. I got the very distinct feeling that it was just the Polish Jews. Well, certainly, my mother and father. I'd better not say anything about another family because maybe they were more open minded, but my parents— No, I can't answer that because my situation was simply that it was a second generation - I married a second-generation Aussie Jew. So my parents took an instant dislike to his parents because they were Aussie Jews.

KYN: So was it the fact that they weren't Yiddisher or was—

ES: No, no, they were Yids.

KYN: No, I mean, sorry, speaking Yiddish and like the real—

ES: I don't know. I don't think that was it. It was just something within them I think they were from Europe and Aussie Jew— I don't know. I'm guessing. I really don't know, but they certainly didn't make any effort to get on with my late husband's parents. They were different.

KYN: And how, was there, as kids, was it a lot of mixing between Aussie Jews and first generation or?

ES: Yes, yes, we all mixed. I mean Habonim and school and socially we mixed. it was totally irrelevant to us as kids but we only mixed with Jews, yes, which was fine as kid, yes, in a small community.

KYN: So do you think that there was anti-semitism here?

ES: I never personally experienced it, but going to school and university, I would say that generally there was a lot of ignorance about what is a Jew. There was a lot of ignorance, but I didn't experience anti-semitism myself, no, no, none at all. I just experienced ignorance and I'm trying to think of an example. Going right back, people were surprised that I was blonde and blue eyed and I'm going back to a very young age and their comment might've been "I thought all Jews were dark and had a hooknose." As a kid I thought that was a really stupid thing that they expected a Jew to be like. And they often got surprised when it came up that I was Jewish. I'm talking about my experience at a Christian school. There were no Jewish day schools in my days. And then, university - even at university there was a lot of ignorance about Jews, yes, but no anti-semitism directed to me.

KYN: That's good.

ES: Yes.

KYN: So I might actually just carry on exploring the Jewish stuff a bit more because I know you did already start talking about Bulwer Street and all that stuff and I do want to go to there too—

ES: About where?

KYN: Bulwer Street

ES: Oh, yes.

KYN: But I wonder whether we might do home life and then explore other things after.

ES: Whatever suits you.

KYN: I've got so much stuff I want to explore with you.

ES: I've got a funny little story when the opportunity present itself.

KYN: Tell me now.

ES: OK, when my parents first went into a house that was in Bulwer Street soon after they arrived. So my mother was close to her brother, sister-in-law and my cousins. And everyone lived around there. Then, in the war years they shifted to Beaufort Street, Highgate near the Queens Hotel. Queens Hotel was then there and we lived on the corner of Mary Street and Beaufort Street. I used to go to a convent kindie in Mary Street in those days. And all the Jewish people used to catch the tram in Beaufort Street to the Premier Theatre in Bulwer Street on a Saturday night, 8 o'clock. The whole community, all the mums and dads got on the tram to go up, heading towards the city that is going south towards

the city. And they get out at Bulwer Street and go to the Premier Theatre. And this is the big night, but no one had babysitters. And I told my oldest brother the story and he doesn't remember it. He is a psychiatrist. So he's pretty intelligent, but he does not remember what he did to me. I was tiny, tiny, tiny, very young, maybe three or four, easily scared. It was war years and everything was pitch dark. My parents would think we were asleep and then they'd go off on the tram Saturday night. Abe was never asleep, I usually was. What I remember was, once they'd gone, he'd shake me awake and then he'd open the window onto Beaufort Street and then he would force me to climb out with him and we'd run down Mary Street to Hyde Park in the dark. And he thought this was such a lark. Hyde Park pitch dark, half past eight at night, sailors around, whoever. And he'd run and he'd run and he thought that was the funniest thing. And of course, I was so scared and I was so young and I would run after him and I had no option. And I'd run after my older brother and try and catch up with him and he'd ran and he'd laugh and he'd ran and he'd laugh and when he got tired, then, he headed home down Mary Street across Beaufort Street back through the window into bed and I went as fast as I could and climbed back in the window and fell asleep, exhausted. My parents would get home from the movie theatre every Saturday night and they never knew that. I thought, I must tell you that story. It's horrible.

KYN: How long did you think you were out for?

ES: We were out until he got tired running around the lake at Hyde Park. As an adult, I never ever wanted to go to Hyde Park, never. It scared me still. I go there now.

KYN: Oh, my goodness.

ES: Yes, they never knew. Anyway, I told Abe, who's an upright psychiatrist and he just laughed. He said, "I don't remember that" but boy, it's vivid in my mind, yes, that's a little story.

KYN: Thanks, for sharing though. OK, so being at home, your parents weren't religious but they were strong culturally?

ES: Absolutely, they were traditional. Shabbat, yom tovs. They bought kosher meat, but it was not strictly kosher home.

KYN: Did you keep milk and meat separate?

ES: My mother did, yes, yes, yes. But she wasn't shomer Shabbat, put it that way.

KYN: OK, did you go to shule every week?

ES: Well when I started Hebrew school, yes, I would go, there were classes for the children Saturday morning and Sunday morning. So I'd go to shule every Saturday. And I remember my father going with the

chickens to the Shochet next to the Brisbane Street shule. I'd go with him and they killed the chicken.

KYN: So you know how to purchase your own live chicken and then take it to get slaughtered?

ES: It was a live chicken and it would be religiously slaughtered, much more religious in that respect than we were as we grew up and became adults, much more.

KYN: Did you have mezuzahs up and stuff like that?

ES: Sorry?

KYN: Did you have mezuzahs everywhere?

ES: Of course, we all do. I mean, now we do, yes, of course.

KYN: And so what did a Friday night look like, talk me through?

ES: Well, the Friday nights really were just us, small family. My mother's brother, wife and family now moved to Melbourne and there was just us. So we had traditional Shabbat. My mother made the lockshein handmade and everything was handmade. So we had the tradition and always had the Shabbat and the handmade lockshein and chicken soup and whatever and the gefilte fish and everything else, but a small one. Just immediate family. Yes.

KYN: What happened when it was time for Kiddush and lighting the candles and stuff? What can you remember about it?

ES: Oh, well it was traditional. It was my mother lit the candles and my father said the prayers and we had the challah and the wine and everything was a Shabbat, but not the washing of the hands from what I remember, I don't think so.

KYN: And what about, did your mum cover her head?

ES: Yes, yes, yes, she had a scarf.

KYN: And as the daughter, did you have a role in the candles?

ES: No, no, no.

KYN: Did you want to have a role?

ES: No, no, I was a good girl. I just did as I was told.

KYN: And if you were the good girl, were some of your brothers naughty?

ES: In what respect naughty?

KYN: On Friday night.

ES: On a Friday night, no, no, I don't think so, as far as, Shabbat is concerned. We respected the Shabbat.

KYN: And did your mum bake her own challah?

ES: I cannot remember but my instincts tell me she probably did, yes.

KYN: Poppy seeds, sesame seeds?

ES: I don't remember, look I'm not entirely sure. There was a shop in Brisbane Street and there was a butcher, kosher butcher, Brisbane Street, that they went into, but I think she made her challah, yes.

KYN: So when you thinking about this time, can you remember the smell like, are you smelling the challah or?

ES: No, no, I can see it, I'm more visual. I can see her making the *Lokshen*. I can see that. It's very vivid in my mind and rolling it out in the—

KYN: So she would have done that on Friday or different day?

ES: No, I don't know what day it was. I was too young, I can't remember.

KYN: Did you have special Shabbat clothes do you put on or were you just like clean and come in?

ES: No, we didn't have special Shabbat clothes. I can't remember being told to get into the dressy clothes that one does, if you're religious. No, they weren't religious. They just kept it down to the usual lighting of candles. The foods much the same as I guess they did in Poland with what they were brought up with.

KYN: Did you have grace after meals?

ES: No, no, we didn't.

KYN: Was there anything that you guys always did that probably isn't religious per se, but you know, the subject matter, you always spoke about, or a way that food is passed around, or family joke that always happened?

ES: On a Friday night? No, no, I think it was really, I know my father came home from work, it was the end of the week and he was tired. And it was really a question of it was Shabbat. My mother cooked a special Shabbat meal and we had the lighting of the candles, made Kiddush and we had our meal and that was it that was beginning and end. I think

they particularly just wanted to go to bed at the end of the week and not fuss about anything, yes. [Storyteller addition: Just to explain, our Shabbats were low key because my family was struggling for money and with language difficulties. We always had Shabbat but it was not a relaxed family occasion in the way that Friday nights grew to be as the years went by.]

KYN: When you first got married then - without wanting to miss, like decades - were there certain things that your husband did that you hadn't done and traditions that you wanted your kids to do that perhaps you hadn't been doing yourself?

ES: Friday night?

KYN: Yes.

ES: I think you can forget about David wanting to do more than my parents. My parents did more than David's family. David went to Christian Brothers College as a child, and I don't think he even went to Hebrew school. His parents identified as Jews and had Friday nights and yom tovs. Now, I'm thinking possibly, that's why my parents looked down at the Aussie Jews maybe because they were not as traditional even as we were. David didn't know much in the way of making Kiddush. No, I just carried it on as my parents did, but not as much. I didn't make my own challah and I didn't make my own lokshen for the Friday nights.

KYN: Would that have been because these things were much more readily available. It's not necessarily because—

ES: Yes, they were very, very much readily available. Times have changed.

KYN: Exactly.

ES: Yes.

KYN: Do you happen to remember the name of the Shochet or the name of his place?

ES: It was right next door to the shule. I have to think so well known— No, it takes so much time. If I can remember during the week. He was an identity. I mean to go there with my father and watch the chickens being killed. Everyone was turning up on a Sunday morning with live chickens, which they bought in the tram, took in the tram. Yes, it was interesting.

KYN: Was there a smell emanating from this place?

ES: Not that I remember. Probably was, happy to avoid it, but I don't remember it. No, it didn't faze me if there was.

KYN: Fair enough. OK, what about other high holidays, some memories about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur or Pesach or Sukkot or anything like that?

ES: Yes, I do remember the high holidays and we still only had it within our own little family. I always used to think would be lovely to have a big wide family. So there's nothing really much to say until I got married and then we had yom tovs sometimes with my in laws and we combined. But, until then, it was just my three brothers, myself and my mum and dad.

KYN: Were you advised by your parents to not do anything constructive or creative on a high holiday? Was it step out from Shabbat or not really?

ES: No, they never advised this like that because, no, we'd all go to shule, but that was the beginning and end of it.

KYN: So you have a day off school?

ES: Yes, yes, it was a high holiday and we went to shule and that was about it, yes. There was a big shule and a little shule. And as kids growing up and I had a little bit more independence. I left my parents at the big Shule in Brisbane Street and walk over, on Yom Kippur to the little shule and we'd spend a little bit of time over there and we'd go backwards and forwards.

KYN: And why's that?

ES: For fun. We were kids, yes, teenagers. Yes, it was just fun on Yom Kippur.

KYN: Why on Yom Kippur?

ES: Well, we had all day. Otherwise, it was a little.

KYN: So you have friends in both?

ES: No, I'd walk with my girlfriends to the little shule and we'd muck around. Then we'd come back to the big shule, but we only did this on Yom Kippur, because it took all day and there wasn't really the opportunity on Pesach or Rosh Hashanah because shule was only few hours. It was good fun. The same as the kids now, they go to shule on yom tov. You've got all the kids, who play outside the shule. Well, we did the same thing but our fun was walking over to the little shule.

KYN: Would you say there was a different type of person who went to the big shule and little shule?

ES: As a child, I wouldn't even have had any idea. No idea. I didn't formulate that sort of impression in my mind. Couldn't say—

KYN: Did you have two Seders as a family?

ES: Yes, we did, yes we did.

KYN: Were they wieldy and going into the night?

ES: No, not in our family because they weren't religious and it was Pesach. We had the service and had the meal and that was it.

KYN: Did you have songs?

ES: I think we must have. We certainly read the Haggadah. Yes, we must have, yes.

KYN: Very nice. And what about Hanukkah?

ES: And we had Hanukkah presents and the traditional things. My parents didn't deviate at all or get more religious here. I think they probably went the other way as they got older, they just had the basic service of whatever yom tov it was, or Shabbat.

KYN: Were there particular little custom or stuff you had like, would your mum always serve you homemade lokshen or something? Did you have like?

ES: Yes, we had all the traditional foods, oh yes.

KYN: So you had donuts?

ES: I imagine she did. I don't remember, but my guess is she would. Yes, I'm sure she did. She made it all. This was her thing to cook for Shabbat or yom tov. I guess carrying on from her own home life in Poland. This is what the Jews did, yes.

KYN: Was there a Jewish school at this time?

ES: No, the Jewish school started when I had children, yes.

KYN: Right, but people at school—

ES: There was a Hebrew school. We went there as a child, Saturday and Sunday. I didn't learn very much. It was pretty unruly. I was in a class with some really wild kids. I mean, they all ended up professors and doctors and whatever, but as kids they were wild. Next to the shule, the Hebrew school, the grounds, and we'd go to Hebrew school as I said, every Saturday and Sunday. And the poor teacher was trying to teach us and the boys particularly would laugh and fool around and open the window in the middle of the class. The boys climbed out of the window and would laugh and run around the huge yard, and the old teacher climbed out of the window with his stick and ran after them. After Mr. Hertz passed away, his wife said that we were responsible for his death because the boys were so wild. [Storyteller addition: and I'm quite sure we were.] And I'm talking about 10, 11, 12 years of age, they always loved climbing out the window because it was great fun and he was a

serious European, Mr. Hertz and he ran after them with his stick. So we didn't learn much Hebrew at all, but we fronted up every Sunday and Sunday.

KYN: Was it fun?

ES: Yes, if you were young and silly like I was and I thought watching all the boys and their escapades around the yard. Yes, it was as a kid.

KYN: Did you have bat mitzvah by yourself as a result of the—

ES: There were no bat mitzvahs in my days, no.

KYN: All right, OK. Did you get invited to other people's bar mitzvahs?

ES: Oh, yes, of course, Habonim was a big thing and that's how we socialised, yes.

KYN: So you had weekly meetings?

ES: Weekly meetings, but then, my parents shifted to Monmouth Street. They kept upgrading and for the weekly meetings I would walk from Monmouth Street which is near Walcott Street in the dark, down to the hall behind the shule in Brisbane Street in the dark, past Hyde Park and then, we have meetings because my father never took us anyway, and then, I walked back late at night all the time. That's the way we did it.

KYN: And how often did you meet?

ES: Friday night. Sometimes, there was an Oneg Shabbat and I would walk to wherever it was, the Oneg Shabbat. And it was always around Hyde Park. We lived in Monmouth Street a little bit further out than a lot of the Jews who lived near Hyde Park. We moved further north into a house in Monmouth Street as my father got a little bit of money and a little bit more established with his own upholstery business. Yes, so the highlight was always Habonim that was the fun thing.

KYN: Did you manage to meet with Jewish people from other states through Habonim?

ES: Of course, I used to go to Habonim camps in Melbourne and then we'd stay with my uncle and aunt and my cousins who also in Habonim, never missed. We went to Melbourne in the holidays and I'd go off with my cousins in Melbourne to the Habonim camp. I had a lot of Melbourne friends through Habonim, yes.

KYN: That's good. And when you were younger, did you play at other people's houses?

ES: Did I play at other people's houses? After school, yes. I went to Inglewood School and lived in First Avenue and Inglewood School was a

primary school, Second Avenue. A lot of Jews went to Second Avenue Primary School, but most went to, well, initially, Highgate School, Highgate. And I do remember the trenches and all the kids during the war. The sirens would go off at Highgate School, very young, six year old though, I was probably five. But as a six year old and we'd have to run to the trenches. No, I had a big circle of Jewish girlfriends and we were all— I didn't know gentiles at all. We had no opportunity or even desire to mix with the gentiles. Yes, it wasn't until I'm married, went to university, whatever. I came across, befriended gentiles and then only when my husband and I built a house in Floreat Park. He was a pharmacist. When he bought the pharmacy in Shenton Park it had an existing house behind. So, in fact, we lived out of the ghetto in Shenton Park, which was behind the pharmacy. Then, we were able to build our first house. We chose to build it in Floreat Park opposite the golf course rather than in the ghetto in Mount Lawley. That was a decision that I lived to regret because my children, I only wanted to mix with Jewish people and I had to take them to the kindergarten over in Mount Lawley. By then, Carmel School existed and so we formed a roster. There were other Jewish families in Floreat, so we formed a roster with other Jewish families, but it was a huge rod for our back. Our kids were isolated out of the community by us living in Floreat Park. It was a stupid decision and one I regret it and after about 10, 12 years, we sold Floreat Park, and we built again, in the heart of Mount Lawley in Bradford Street, yes, yes, that was a big mistake.

KYN: Yes, I guess that would be—

ES: Was horrible. Yes, I didn't know why I did that. Was closer to the pharmacy for my husband in Floreat Park. And I thought, "Oh, he won't have that far to go to work." But it was stupid shlepping the kids back and forth from Floreat to Coolbinia and back every day, and then soccer and scouts and whatever Jewish group they belonged to was hard, yes.

KYN: Tricky. OK, let's call it quits and pick up next time.

ES: Yes.

END INTERVIEW ONE

Temple David, 34 Clifton Crescent, Mount Lawley, 28 February 2018.

Know Your Nation: So if you just say for the record your full name and your recorded date of birth?

Esther Schenberg: Yes. Esther Schenberg, 26th of the twelfth, 1935.

KYN: OK. Now, I just got one question as what you said last week which is when you're running around, around, around Hyde Park, you said sometimes there were sailors out. Why were there sailors?

ES: OK, that was during the war years. Everything was blackout and there were no lights, street lights, pitch black and my brother had me running around, around the lake at Hyde Park in the pitch black and being a little kid, yes, just a few years old, I was really scared.

KYN: Yes, you said that there were sailors-

ES: There were sailors, yes, because the navy and the army and the air force used to come and leave here. Yes, the navy, American sailors used to call in to Fremantle during the war for leave, maybe, I don't know. So there were always sailors in the street.

KYN: And why do you think they made their way to Mount Lawley?

ES: I suppose they were all over the suburbs looking at Perth, I'm guessing. I'd see them in the streets. Perth was very small in those years. Going north wouldn't have been very much further than where we lived in those days. Yes. I can only guess.

KYN: Do you - I think the answer to this will be that you were too young, but do you know or in hindsight or do you know of any impact at all that they had on Perth, like any stories people told you or anything you can recognise?

ES: I do know there were number of Jewish weddings to Jewish sailors, young Jewish women from our community did marry American sailors. They did socialise. It must've been in the form of hospitality.

KYN: So it sounded like you moved house several times?

ES: Yep.

KYN: So let's use those house moves as a base for this conversation, which was specifically about houses. So the first house you were in was approximately where?

ES: It was in Bulwer Street and asking me that question I remember that it was a general thing that the community lived around the shule in Brisbane Street. There were lots of Jewish people, not just from Poland, but from other countries in Europe living close by to Hyde Park. And then, gradually, we all moved north as they settled into jobs and earned more money, the community kept moving north.

KYN: Was that because properties were bigger?

ES: I think because the properties, I don't know, I imagine they were bigger and more comfortable. And yes, parents just were able to get a better - because initially they could have been, I can't say for sure. But possibly we all rented, it is likely that we were all in rentals to begin with, as I'm not sure where my parents would have got the money to buy a house. [Storyteller addition: it was not so much that the houses were big as that new suburbs were opening up and new housing estates took over the bush.]

KYN: Do you remember the house, the Bulwer Street house? Was it like weatherboard or like a—?

ES: [Storyteller addition: possibly brick.] It was the traditional, long passage bedrooms and a lounge on either side of the passage and with the kitchen down the end and the laundry off the back veranda. As was usual, the toilet was right down the end of the back yard [which was horrible, when thinking back at it].

KYN: And did you spend time as a family in one particular room?

ES: At night? Yes, we sat in the kitchen area. We never used the formal lounge. We lived in the kitchen area and we listened to the radio. I can remember much more about what we did when we moved to the next house in Beaufort Street, where my brother used to get me every Saturday night out the window. That was the second house, and more than likely a rental too.

KYN: And that was a big house was it?

ES: I don't know that it was bigger. It was just another house that they moved to for some reason, yes.

KYN: So do you have any particular little memories or anecdotes of experiences or times, just general times like walking from either of those rentals or any of your houses to the shule, like with your dad or with your parents, or you know, like the kind of special family times that were Jewish oriented? Or to the community to something community based?

ES: The shule - only to the Shochet with the chickens that I mentioned. And we used to go visit friends, just visit friends on a Sunday by tram, and we didn't have a car in those days and that's about it. No, I really don't recall too much of that in those houses. I don't think we did too much. It would always involve getting on the tram and wasn't like we had a car. [Storyteller addition: I loved to go outside to the backyard to play. I do remember having fresh bread with butter and jam, which my mother made for me, outside in the sun.]

KYN: Was it a kind of open site where there would be kind of low or white fences that you could like play with the neighbouring kids, or how did that? Did you play in the street, or around the back of another—?

ES: No, no, being so young, I used to just play with my brother. And I'd go to kindergarten in Mary Street, where the nuns were just up the road from where we were. My mother used to take me to kindergarten in the convent in Mary Street, which is still there. I don't know what it's used for nowadays but I'd go with her. And later I would go to school, I think I might have mentioned it, to Highgate School, not too far away. And they had trenches and every time the sirens went (as it was still the war years), we'd all have to get in the trenches and crouch down.

KYN: You said you had quite vivid memories of kindergarten?

ES: [Storyteller amendment: My earliest memory is a vivid memory of being perhaps only two and a half years of age, walking in Bulwer Street with my father.]

KYN: Were there any teachers that were particularly inspiring that you can remember?

ES: Not at that stage. After my parents bought a house in First Avenue, Mount Lawley, I went to Inglewood School. There was a Miss Hanson there and we all loved Miss Hanson as kids. [Storyteller addition: She wasn't like a teacher, she was more like a mother figure and she even invited us to come and visit her in her flat in Walcott Street.] She just seemed to be vibrant and alive. And yes, I was in primary school, so it really wasn't too much. Oh, there was Mr. someone or rather, [Storyteller addition: who also stood out as a teacher to me because he was perhaps the first male teacher I had and managed to get me a little bit enthusiastic about my school work] and yes that was all as far as I can remember. [Storyteller addition: I didn't get enthusiastic about education because in those days it was only the boys who were important as far as getting educated and going on to have a profession. I'm sure my parents were only interested in me finding a nice Jewish boy, getting married and starting a family - see below.]

So I really didn't care too much about education until I, myself in my married years, decided I wanted to go to university. My three brothers had gone to university and to do medicine, all three of them. It wasn't until I was married and started having kids and my three sons were at university that I decided I would make up for what I didn't do as a child.

That was inspirational. Going to university were my best years. I loved going to UWA, loved it. Two and a bit of my boys were there then. The third one was coming along and ended up at university too. I studied part time for pleasure, so that meant four of us were going to university. I loved every minute of it. So there was only my husband, who was a pharmacist, who wasn't going to university. That meant that I'd get home and I'd be absolutely stimulated by everything that I had done and was doing. I enjoyed studying and could have been an academic for the rest of my life if circumstances had allowed it. And I only wish I'd started earlier, but my parents decided it was more important to educate three boys, and a girl just had to get married and have kids, which I did. But I really don't think my real life and my real self, started until I commenced university. So at that time, I was studying at university part time for pleasure, as well as having three boys to care for and a husband. And I was working part time two jobs. So I loved that, that I did from choice, not from necessity. So they really were the best years of my life.

KYN: And what decade was that?

ES: I started university in the late 70s – going to UWA. And I really enjoyed the challenge of my two jobs and bringing up the boys, who were going to uni, plus my own study. I remember coming out of the library at 10pm when they closed. And it would only be me and all the Asian students, who are very fastidious about their study. We all came out at the very last minute, studying until late.

KYN: What did you study?

ES: I just did B.A. for pleasure, majoring in English lit part time. And then, I started doing honours. My eldest son was doing his specialty, oral, facial, maxillo surgery at Melbourne University. He became engaged to a Melbourne girl, whilst studying there. So because he got engaged, I was flying over there all the time, and it didn't allow me to go to university and meet my assignments and timelines and everything. So I reluctantly stopped my masters because I was going backwards and forwards. [Storyteller addition: I thought I might get back to it eventually but it never happened. But I had had a good seven years at university studying part time until then.]

KYN: How did you feel to make a decision to give up?

ES: Well, I just felt that I had to go to Melbourne often to help organise the engagement and wedding and I continued with my work commitments and social life and everything at home.

KYN: What job were you working?

ES: I was working for an international commercial interior designer, architect. I had a fantastic job. I was so fortunate. I found working with her was very stimulating. I was arranging her appointments, her PR, organizing her entertaining of movers and shakers in Perth. Her main

job was redesigning, refurbishing hotels and shopping centres in Perth as well as internationally.

KYN: What was her name?

ES: Marsh, Janine Marsh. I'd do a lot of her research for shopping centres and hotels because research was one of my skills; I was very, very well equipped to do that through my years at university. For instance, I'd go down to the architecture library at UWA and do a lot of her research even though I wasn't a trained designer. But I could research whatever she needed to design, put it together [to present to her clients]. So I was her PR lady, and I arranged appointments and the catering. And I entertained all the movers and shakers around Perth and I had meetings and I was her right-hand woman for many years.

KYN: Who was the most special person that you met through that work?

ES: Oh, Janine, without a doubt. Janine because she was so highly creative and intelligent. And we used to sit, she'd have a design that she needed to finish. For instance, at 10:00 the next morning, she was always running late. The client was coming in at say 10. We would work until, if necessary 2am to get the whole thing together. She did the design, but I would have played a big hand in everything else in the written stuff because of my English literature background. I did a lot of that sort of thing for her to put that all together.

KYN: Were you doing typing as well, like typing it up, or just provide the research?

ES: No, no, she had a secretary.

KYN: Fantastic.

ES: I did that for many years as well as going to uni and very active social life, as well as sailing every Thursday night through the summer. So every Thursday I would get changed into sailing gear, leave the office, join my husband and we would go sailing.

KYN: Where did you go sailing?

ES: Royal Perth Yacht Club. Go sailing on a friend's yacht because my husband was a yachty. I have to tell you I had and still have such an amazing life. So every Thursday, we would go social sailing at the Royal Perth, then there would be dancing and the barbecue. On a hot night we'd sit there and I'd say "Thank you, thank you for my life".

KYN: So, I have a million questions. Firstly, just for the record, can you say your sons' names in full because you're talking them a few times?

ES: Yes, yes. Michael Eric is my oldest and Graham Bradley and Brett Andrew.

KYN: Nice. And do any of those names come from other historical sources or they just named you like?

ES: Names I like.

KYN: Good.

ES: The Hebrew ones are from family that have passed on, yes, the Hebrew, yes.

KYN: Good. Now, do you think that Janine had an impact on you in a way that carried through to the rest of your life? In other words, did you take things that inherently you picked up from her or learned from her or learned from the environment in which you worked with fast pace and did you find that you're applying them in your other—? Can you give me some examples?

ES: Yes, I can say that. Definitely. It gave me tremendous confidence in myself that led me on to being a community leader such as becoming president at WIZO, first of our group and then state president. I was president and I did a lot of - president first of our group, WIZO group and then state president. It didn't faze me to stand up and talk to a crowd of people. And again, I also built that confidence through university tutorials, where I had to present papers that I prepared and from working with Janine, which meant, when it came time to either accept or reject the offer of becoming state president of WIZO, didn't worry me. I represented WA in Israel and the eastern states a number of times.

KYN: What decade was that?

ES: Sorry?

KYN: What decade was that?

ES: Decades? Over many years because I did a lot of work for WIZO over many years 1980s, 90s guessing, Yes.

KYN: Cool.

ES: Then I gave all of that up when my husband started a new phase of our lives. My husband retired and that's when I gave up WIZO work. He sold the pharmacy and we found that he was much in demand as a pharmacist in rural countries around Australia. For instance there were offers of work in Alice Springs, Cairns and Darwin. They would pay for us both to fly to our chosen regional centre and provide accommodation and a car - quite often - for him to work for a month in these places. [Storyteller addition: The minimum period of work was a month. If we particularly liked a place, for instance we loved Cairns - that was our favourite destination - David would offer his services for three months, and he was snapped up for that period.] What all this meant was that we'd get home, I'd put the washing on, and then we'd go off again. We'd

fly off to Darwin for instance, there for a month or two, come home, put the washing on, and then go off to Alice Springs. We did that for years and it opened up a whole new life for us.

KYN: OK, good. Did working for such a strong woman changed your views on feminism?

ES: No, it didn't. I wasn't brought up in that era, no. Only to a point, yes, but not as a strong feminist. My views on that went about as far as saying to my friends, who said they couldn't go to uni, they couldn't study now, they couldn't be president, they couldn't be state president, I'd look at them and say, "Of course you can." Or they would say, "My husband wouldn't allow me to." And then, I'd think, "Oh, poor thing being ruled by a husband." That's was it as far as feminism is concerned.

KYN: OK, yes, fair enough. So can you describe - I'm trying to avoid the answer of 'everyday was really different' and leaving it at that - can you tell and describe a typical or a series of typical days when you're working for Janine? What kind of time would you have started? What would you have done first?

ES: I was working part time. And I think it was two and a half days a week. And yes, she would have staff meeting and I'd go into her staff meeting, where she would discuss with her professional staff, interior designers and architects, the projects in hand but I would sit in with her and just listen so I was aware of the current project commitments. I was her Business Development Manager so we would also discuss making contacts with companies either overseas, over east or locally to encourage more projects for her company, for example, managing agents of shopping centres and offices. I would make phone calls and speak to heads of their departments as well as commercial retail and property agents. My job was to set up meetings either within Australia or overseas. As part of my PR position I would also join Janine in going to women's organisations for breakfasts where we would meet the presidents of the large companies of Perth. It was varied. I'd also chase up any accounts that were unpaid as part of my job. I had no problem with that.

KYN: Where was the office?

ES: Do you know Beaufort Street and Walcott Street? There was a medical suite on the corner of Walcott Street and Beaufort Street, and the house next door to that was for sale. She was delighted with this property and moved from her rented West Perth office to this property, which she was able to buy. It was especially good for me because I lived in Mount Lawley. She trusted me for everything.

KYN: So how many years did you work for her?

ES: It would have been part time, maybe seven years.

KYN: That was all in the 70s?

ES: Yep. [Storyteller amendment: the 80s.]

KYN: OK, so—

ES: All together and WIZO and everything else.

KYN: So what was UWA like in the 70s?

ES: Oh, I loved it. It was like 70s, 80s, I went to uni until sometime in the 80s. I started late 70s. I'd be there with all my friends' teenage children, as well as my own children. And university students in those days were going braless, rolling their own cigarettes, they'd sit at UWA rolling their own cigarettes. And there was I, an older woman.

KYN: And were there any interesting political, or other social movements at the university at the time?

ES: There were but I kept away from them. Yes, the usual. There was anti-Israel demonstrations, and there were a few Palestinians on the campus, and I had a feeling that there was a lot of anti-semitism at times, much like there probably is today.

KYN: And did you being at UWA at the same time as your boys?

ES: When I say the same time as my boys, to clarify, one was at Curtin university, one was at Murdoch university and one was at UWA. I'm sorry, I said it "my boys at UWA" but you picked me up quite rightly. I meant that they were all at university.

KYN: That's OK.

ES: One did veterinary science at Murdoch. One was doing marketing at Curtin. Sorry, you picked me up on that.

KYN: That probably negates my next question, which is going to be, did it impact your relationship with them?

ES: No, it was wonderful with Mike no, no, not at all. He kept away from his mother. I gave him his lunch fresh every day. I made two lunches and delivered one to the middle son at Carmel School, who was almost ready to go to university. And after I dropped his lunch off I'd meet Michael at university. My joke was I went to university so I could give my Jewish boys fresh lunch every day. Graham at Carmel School said "All the boys were envious of him having fresh lunch delivered every day."

KYN: And what would lunch have been?

ES: Oh, just the sandwich made with fresh bread rolls, that's all. It was fresh as opposed to stale.

KYN: From the kosher or deli or—?

ES: I'd just go up the road to buy the rolls fresh, easy.

KYN: OK, so can we go back a bit?

ES: Yes.

KYN: Is that OK?

ES: Sure, sure, sure.

KYN: So Inglewood School?

ES: Yes, primary school.

KYN: Did you have any memories of Highgate?

ES: No, I was really little.

KYN: And then had you moved again when you went to Inglewood or was that also -?

ES: We'd moved again to the house in First Avenue. The school was in Second Avenue. There was a lot of Jewish kids there, but it wasn't a Jewish school. There was no Jewish school at that time.

KYN: And was it a multicultural school?

ES: I don't think so. I just mixed with Jewish kids, so I really don't know about anyone else too much.

KYN: Did anyone get up to mischief?

ES: Oh, did they? I don't know. I was a timid, little girl so that's all I can really say. Yes.

KYN: Fair enough. Was there any getting—

ES: I didn't really grow up until I was married and went to university. [Storyteller addition: I was brought up in the age when the belief was that children should be seen but not heard.]

KYN: OK.

ES: There was a time I was a timid, little girl.

KYN: Yes. What would you have done in the playground?

ES: At Inglewood? My memories are of running around, of skipping and eating my lunch with my friends. My mother used to give me the same lunch every day.

KYN: What was it?

ES: It was corned beef. It was boring. Yes, sitting with my girlfriends, eating lunch, not too much happened for us, wasn't exciting, it was very dull when I look back, yes.

KYN: So how old were you when you left Inglewood?

ES: When I left Inglewood that was the end of primary. So I would have been whatever primary was 12, I suppose.

KYN: So you didn't leave because...?

ES: We stayed in our First Avenue house for quite a number of years. Yes, and so from that school I went to high school.

KYN: And what high school did you?

ES: It was Girdlestone in those days, it doesn't exist anymore. The building was in James Street, Perth [which is now Northbridge], Girdlestone.

KYN: Where in James Street was it?

ES: You know the old buildings between Beaufort Street and William Street, opposite what is now a car park.

KYN: Is the house in First Avenue still standing?

ES: I don't know, I doubt it, I doubt it. Yes, I haven't been there.

KYN: Can you recall it?

ES: Yes, very well.

KYN: Can you describe it?

ES: Now, looking back it was a traditional old house and we lived there during the war years. And it was in that time that my father was able to buy a car. We used to go out on Sundays for Sunday drives and that opened up a whole new world for us. They would invite their friends, who didn't have a car, and we would go in the car up to the hills every Sunday for years. They could also then afford a beach house in Scarborough. We spent wonderful years there. A lot of the Jewish community would go there, to the cubicles at Scarborough beach. But what was in affect just a large room. That one room was our bedroom, kitchen and sitting room. There was a toilet at the end of the row of

cubicles, as well as a shower. We could afford to go to the cubicles all summer and it was great fun. As kids we would all play together and have fun together. Listening to the radio every night was also a big part of our holiday get together, and it was fabulous living on the beach, simple and primitive as it was.

KYN: So you rented a cubicle?

ES: Yes, there was maybe two dozens in a line.

KYN: And you had them for the weekend or?

ES: We had them for two to three weeks. We went down there for the summer, maybe even longer. [Storyteller amendment: We had them for the whole of the summer, the whole of the school holidays.]

KYN: In Scarborough?

ES: On Scarborough Beach. Yes, they were fantastic days. And then, after a few years my father could afford to buy his own house, one block back from the beach. After we bought the holiday house we would drive to Scarborough for the whole of summer. I remember the dunny at the back and the iceman coming every week. The men would come and empty the dunny and replace the lining, or whatever was in there. We eventually got a fridge, which was considered a luxury at the time.

KYN: So you only used it once a year?

ES: Yes, I think so, I think so. I can't remember any other time down there, but that was what the community did in the main. Gorgeous days, playing on the beach, and being a beach bum with all the other kids of the community.

KYN: Did you guys eat together then?

ES: No, we didn't. But after family meals and my parents had cleaned up, their friends would get together or sit out on the front balcony because it was very hot during the summer. There was no such thing as an air con or fans even.

KYN: And what would you have done for meat?

ES: Oh, what do we do for meat? I think my parents caught a bus to the kosher butcher every now and again to get the kosher meat. Yes, they'd go in by bus, whatever, yes.

KYN: Was it like Rottneest Island now where you have to book out straight away to get those cubicles again for next year?

ES: I didn't know what my parents did. I was too young to know. This was all primary school stuff.

KYN: What car did your dad have?

ES: What car did my father buy? Little one. I don't know, whatever was around. It was during the war. We had a car and we got a phone when we were living in First Avenue. A phone was a luxury, a car was a luxury, so his upholstery business was obviously doing well.

KYN: And what did your parents say when they answered the phone?

ES: Oh, just "hello".

KYN: Oh, instead of number. You know, some people would answer with their phone number.

ES: Not that sophisticated in those days, no, very simple. I think we probably all died of shock when the phone rang.

KYN: Tell me about your trips to the hills. Where would you have gone?

ES: Oh, for afternoon tea. There were certain places up in the hills in those days that served afternoon tea. So we'd head off with my parents' friends every Sunday.

KYN: And everyone would be rammed into one car?

ES: Yes, well, we would be, yes, we would. There were no seatbelts. Yes, yes, my mother would have my young brother on her lap. And another brother would be squeezed in, as well as myself as well as the friends that were with us.

KYN: So did everyone have their Sunday best on or was it just normal—?

ES: I really can't remember as a child. Yes, I didn't have that many clothes. I mean, I had a sailor suit for occasions as my brothers also did, that was the in thing for children then and I've still got a photo of my brother and myself with our sailor suits on because having a photo was very, very important. So good clothes, I'm not sure.

KYN: Did you guys have a camera or did you have to go to a photographer to get the photo of you in the sailor suit?

ES: We went to a photographer for the official photos. But, yes, I remember having a Brownie as a child when we were in First Avenue.

Incidentally, I just remembered that there was one more house that we moved to and that's where I got married from and that was Monmouth Street. So we were mirroring the gradual movement of the community further north. [Storyteller amendment: I got married from another house on Walcott Street, which we lived in after Monmouth Street, which my parents had designed and built.]

KYN: Did you only bring out the Brownie for special occasions or?

ES: No, no, but I had to be aware that it cost my parents' money to have it developed into black and white photographs. Of course, at the early stages, yes. It was so exciting to have a camera and getting the roll developed, and seeing what had come out.

KYN: So tell me more about your memories of the war. I know trenches at school, I know sailors, I know blackout—?

ES: Yep. And the sirens and the search lights.

KYN: Where were the search lights?

ES: Well, up in the sky. Search lights where you could see streams of light coming from all directions like that, searching, I suppose for enemy planes, with the sirens going. Any more memories?

KYN: Why would the sirens have gone?

ES: When they suspected that there might be a German plane around. There never was. It wasn't like England or London, but for some reason the sirens went off and when they did we knew that we had to run to the trenches. There were never ever bombs. It wasn't like London, but that's what happened, quite often.

KYN: Do you remember feeling fear or were you too young?

ES: Do I remember?

KYN: Feeling fearful or—?

ES: Yes, very fearful and my father had a shelter built underground, with food down there. The school had trenches, but we had a full underground bunker. We'd all run down there when the sirens went off. Yes, as a child I was fearful.

KYN: Was there anything in particular you used to do when you're in the bunker with your family?

ES: We didn't seem to stay down too long before the all clear siren went off.

KYN: Yes. So in the Monmouth Street and the First Avenue houses, were all of your neighbours Jewish people or were they just like Jewish people in the streets, you know, that you knew?

ES: Most of the Jewish community lived in the area around our Beaufort Street house. We had the Queens Hotel on one side and a wood yard on the other. The Monmouth house was one we moved to after First Avenue, when I was a teenager, walking to Habonim from Monmouth

Street in the dark down to the Prince's Hall next to the shule and back at night. I mentioned that last week.

KYN: How long did that take?

ES: How was—?

KYN: How long did that take to walk?

ES: Oh, from Monmouth Street? Would take a good half hour going from home to Brisbane Street. As a child I'd be walking at night, passed Hyde Park in the dark. No one worried about what might happen because Perth was quite safe in those days. We left our doors open, the keys in the front lock, or the back door, keys in the car, and the doors open because it was hot at night and we'd sleep on the veranda. No one locks their doors or their cars in those days.

KYN: When did all that change?

ES: It changed when Cooke started murdering young women. Perth grew up. It may have been in the 80s, maybe in the 80s Perth changed. [Storyteller amendment: 60s or 70s actually] There were women being raped and murdered and they discovered that it was a man, Cooke, and his partner. It was then that we started locking our doors and we stopped sleeping on our front verandas in the summer heat. Previously we had all slept on our front verandas or at the beach to get away from the heat because there was no air conditioning.

KYN: Do you remember where you were when Cooke was hanged, or like when you heard about it?

ES: No, not many was hanged— No, I don't.

KYN: Was everyone talking about it all the time, did it change everything like?

ES: Yes, I think Perth was going through a transition in many ways and it had to happen. We were growing up. The Perth community generally was getting bigger and along with all of that came all sorts of problems with big city living. We were moving from Perth as a little country town to a large city with all its problems.

KYN: OK, so I want to touch on your high school years briefly, early, as far as, was it a coed school?

ES: Not it was a girl's school.

KYN: OK, and did any of your friends go to a coed school or was everyone going to girls only schools?

ES: Oh, of my friends, I was the only one going to Girdlestone. My parents had pulled me out of school and I didn't continue on to my third year. So

in my third year I went to commercial college, and then worked as a secretary, because all they envisioned for me was that I would get married and have children, from their perspective. Whereas my three brothers were being educated in preparation for medicine. As it happened I did find a new Jewish boy. I settled down and got married.

KYN: Did you enjoy the high school years that you had?

ES: Not really. I wasn't really a very studious child until I went to university. And to get to university, I didn't have the prerequisites. What I did was a mature age 12 month course with an entrance exam for uni. And then I was able to get in, meeting the requirements for acceptance into university, having achieved high marks in my exam.

KYN: Wow. OK, so high school, no sports team of interest or no?

ES: No sports and not even academic—

KYN: No inspiring teachers?

ES: No, no. It was just because I didn't have the parental encouragement that my brothers had. I was simply biding time, as far as they were concerned, because I was only a girl.

KYN: OK. And you took that as read, or did you seek to challenge it?

ES: I was just a little girl.

KYN: Yes, OK. And the other thing I want to come to today, just in one question is, can you describe the Princes Hall?

ES: Oh, I loved the Princes Hall that's where all the dances were. And yes, the hall behind the shule and we had Habonim meetings there. We had Pesach there for all the families to come. We had all the Yom Tovs there. I'd go there most Sunday nights when I was old enough for dances. We also had plays there. We had Yiddish plays and I also acted in a couple of the plays that were put on in the Princes Hall. We also put on plays for our parents. All community events took place in the Princes Hall. I loved it, at the time it was most exciting to go there and meet friends and join in all of the community events.

KYN: And what was it like as a building?

ES: It was just a big, big hall. I mean, my perspective now is different to my perspective then. My perspective then was, oh, loved it. It was all exciting going there. I remember vividly one seder that was put on for parents and the community, it was lovely. But looking back it was just a big hall, yes.

KYN: And how did you access it or was it through the shule or was there a side entrance?

ES: No, side entrance, yes.

KYN: Did you have security for the people?

ES: There was no need for security. No, everything was secure. There was just one crazy member of our community that used to make the hall his home. He was a litigant and Gefinkle was his name. He was a character of our community in those days. He was harmless, but he made the place dirty. He'd leave in the building and mess it all up.

KYN: Cool.

ES: That's it.

KYN: Let's stop there.

ES: That's it. Thanks.

END INTERVIEW TWO

Temple David, 34 Clifton Crescent, Mount Lawley. 16 May 2018.

Know Your Nation: So, if we start by saying your full name and your date of birth, well your recorded date of birth?

Esther Schenberg: Yes. Esther Schenberg, 26th of December 1935.

KYN: OK.

ES: Which should be 1936.

KYN: Yeah. So, there's a few things that I want to cover and then there's some general things that we might get onto.

ES: OK.

KYN: So, the first thing is, I want you to tell me all about your time with WIZO?

ES: Oh, that goes back so far. When we all had little kids, we formed our WIZO group for mothers with little ones. It began when we were all invited along to a meeting to form a new young group. We called ourselves WIZO Ilana and that was the beginning of many wonderful years working together with a new group of friends. Our babies and young children came along and played together as we made plans for the needs of disadvantaged women and children in Israel.

KYN: So, when you said you were, you formed the group and then you were invited, can you talk me through exactly what happened?

ES: Then, I was invited, oh well, you mean?

KYN: So, you actually formed—

ES: A new younger group was formed for our age. Yes, WIZO was expanding in those days, and I'm talking about 50 odd years ago. So it was wonderful because being mothers with little children, it gave us a group to relate to, all with common interests.

KYN: So how did you set up the branch?

ES: Oh, there was very active member of our community called Betty Harris, who's long gone. She formed our young group and became our president. We worked hard for years and the group is still going, except nowadays we are a devoted WIZO group of elderly ladies.

KYN: So did you have weekly meetings or how did it work?

ES: Once a month there was what we call State Council meetings, where the state president chaired the meeting and the presidents of each of the groups like Betty Harris as president of WIZO Ilana would go and they'd give reports to the state president. And functions would be organised by State Council. At the State Council meetings group Presidents would give a report on what was being organised through their individual groups. There was also a queen competition as a form of fundraising. We nominated a member of each of our three WIZO groups to be queen to see which group raised the most funds. The nominated WIZO member, whose group raised the most money that year, became WIZO queen and she would have deserved it because every group worked very, very hard in competition with each other.

KYN: So the queen was per group?

ES: Per group, three groups and we competed against each other.

KYN: So there were three groups in WA?

ES: Yes. At that time. It grew. I'm talking about a specific timeline.

KYN: Yeah. Every year, each group at WA—

ES: Yes, we—

KYN: Nominated a queen.

ES: Nominated a queen, yes, which was to begin with, a member of our group, so it was wonderful. Of course, whoever, that member was, their family were very, very keen that their family member won. So all the queens' family members rallied around and raised money and it was a wonderful project to have. So with competition like that in Perth, it worked very well and we raised big money and that went on for many, many years. After a while no one offered because of the amount of work involved. After some years and I can't tell you how many - it was decided that through lack of offers by members to be queens anymore, we hit on the idea of nominating our children as a replacement figurehead.

KYN: So then what did the children have to do?

ES: Some were our babies. They were just a figurehead really because none of us wanted to stand. But in actual fact, we still worked as a team together for that particular child who was representing our group.

KYN: Ah so what would happen at the start of the year when it was still someone in the group, you would nominate the person to be queen at the start, and then they would act—?

ES: Well, yeah, at the start of the WIZO working year, we'd nominate. It worked so well for many, many years because it was our major fundraiser for WIZO. You haven't heard about it yet?

KYN: Let's take a step back, so the main purpose of WIZO in WA was?

ES: Is to raise funds for disadvantaged women and children in Israel. And we have a [side comments] we have a project, Australia's got a project called *Ahuzat Yeladim* in Haifa, Israel. And that is where our Australian funds go. That is a home for the most disadvantaged children in Israel, that's the end of the line. These children had been through the worst possible home environment, had been traumatised and been treated by doctors and psychiatrists to no avail. The medical profession and police, being aware of *Ahuzat Yeladim*, could now only recommend that they apply to be taken in at this children's home. It was horrible. I visited the home and it's too horrible to even think about what these young children have been through. Some of them are so traumatised when they get there that they can't talk, even the small ones. But by the time they finish at the age of 17, most of them are recovered enough to go into the army and then join the outside community. So that's what WIZO in Australia raises funds for.

KYN: That's amazing.

ES: It's huge.

KYN: And who chose that charity?

ES: I don't know. That was never in my time, I can't tell you, yes.

KYN: Just one second, so there were three state groups in WA even when?

ES: Yes, at that time, at that time.

KYN: So where were the other two groups?

ES: So the members of the other groups were older and we at that time were the young ones.

KYN: So what kind of functions did you have in order to raise money?

ES: Oh, we had dinners and dances.

KYN: And this is at the Princes Hall?

ES: Princes Hall? No. We had dinners, which we all cooked for, anything that involved cooking and selling tickets. It was a good fundraiser because we'd all cook. You didn't have to be kosher in those days.

KYN: That's OK. Tell me about the conferences that you went on?

ES: As state president for a number of years I would regularly go to the conferences in the Eastern States. I also represented Western Australia in Israel for a national conference, which consisted of members from 52 countries from around the world.

KYN: That's awesome. Was taking the state president role a big deal or like a family decision?

ES: No, it was left up to me as to whether I would accept the role. My husband didn't mind at all. He knew it was a very important role, so he left it to me.

KYN: Did he give you the support you needed through WIZO?

ES: Yes, he did. There's such a thing as WIZO husbands, who need to schlep and do and they were wonderful and we needed them. They're still working. Those who can still lift and schlep. Yes, yes, yes, not a problem. David was interested in visiting *Ahuzat Yeladim* and he was very impressed with the high level of care for the children. I'd been to Israel a few times prior and was more emotionally prepared to see these children. David was very upset but didn't show it when we were there. They are only there, as I said, because this is the end of the line. There is only the best medical treatment available. He was heartbroken to see that children could be treated the way they were and so badly that they'd end up in such a facility.

KYN: And when you were there did you follow the progress of particular children? Like you went to see them and then a couple of years go back and see them again or—?

ES: I didn't go in that sequence at all. One visit was on the international WIZO conference and we were taken up there as a group and shown around. And then, when I went with David, it was entirely different. WIZO provided a driver to take David and myself to the home in Haifa and the principal showed us around on our personal visit. We had lunch and met some of the children, who showed us much of what they considered to be their home. The interesting part was how proud they were of their bedroom section. It was their space with their own personal belongings - it was so important to them.

KYN: Did you find when you first went there that you're quite emotional?

ES: Yes. But there is a wonderful, positive effect that comes out of it. Yossi, the principal, was a very special person. The children adored him. For instance, when they saw Yossi showing us around, sick as they were,

abused as they had been, came running up to him with great excitement in their voices. He was the children's solid foundation, helping to nurture them and bring them back to a normal healthy life. So that's the two sides that gives one heart break but also you go away feeling positive about it.

KYN: So is there anything else you want to say about WIZO or should we move on?

ES: No, let's move on. It's still going and raising lots of money through its hard-working members.

KYN: Tell me about sailing?

ES: Oh, sailing was our fun, every Thursday night, during the summer we'd go to Royal Perth Yacht Club and we'd sail with a yachty friend on his boat. It would be a social race. My late husband loved sailing. And we'd sail with Bev and Barry Silbert. We sailed for maybe 20 to 25 years. What we did was, after the race we'd sit on the lawn together and have a barbecue with the boat crew. We'd sit on the lawn, over the water at the Royal Perth Yacht Club and I'd look at the skyline of Perth and I'd pinch myself thinking how lucky I was. It was so beautiful there on a hot night with the sailing and the barbecue and dancing quite often as well. At the time I was so busy, running from my part time work, studying for university and helping David in the pharmacy, as well as the sailing every Thursday night, it was magic.

KYN: Did you help with the actual sailing a bit?

ES: No. What do I know about sailing? I made salmon patties, Bev Silbert brought cheeses and crackers. That was standard. And we'd sit and eat the whole way around the course and it was happy and it was lovely and we'd dance and we'd eat and we drink.

KYN: And your husband, David did additional sailing too, did he, or work on the boat—?

ES: Oh, absolutely. He was definitely a keen yachty up to the time he got ill. We also went out most Sundays with Ian Rosenberg for the day for social sailing for many years. Ian appreciated David's skill as a yachty for our Sunday pleasure cruising from Fremantle.

KYN: [Side comments] OK. So it was social racing on a Thursday?

ES: Social racing on every Thursday night. Saturday afternoon was serious racing with Barry Silbert, who was a state champion sailor, and David was his crewman.

KYN: And did you ever win the social racing?

ES: Thursday night with Barry, the social races, we did, often, but it didn't really matter, being a social race.

KYN: And did your, so your kids were early 20s by then?

ES: Two out of three of my boys were at university.

KYN: And did they ever want to have any involvement?

ES: No.

KYN: OK.

ES: We did buy them their own boat when they were teens, hoping that they liked to sail. They were taught how to sail, but no, they were not interested in sailing.

KYN: Was there any involvement by you and your husband in the kind of presidency side of things or the committee side of things in the boat club?

ES: David...No, no, no. We would just yachties enjoying the club facilities and the boat without wanting to get officially involved.

KYN: Yes. So then let's jump a little bit more. The other thing, I wanted to cover with you is, you're doing your amazing PR job for Janine is it?

ES: Janine Marsh, yes.

KYN: And then, at some point, you left, why did you leave?

ES: Yes, because David sold his pharmacy and a beautiful new chapter started in our life and that's when he started to work in the regional centres of Australia. They needed pharmacists in regional centres like Alice Springs, Darwin and all sorts of other centres around Australia. The need was so great that they would pay for both of us as well as provide accommodation. The only thing the pharmacist required for this was for David to work a month at a time in their pharmacy. Some centres, like Cairns, we loved so much that David would work for three months at a time and go as often as he was needed. We did that for seven years, and the routine was I could be home for, say, two days, which was just enough to unpack and wash, and then I'd pack again, and we'd be off to the next centre.

KYN: So what year, if you can remember, or if you can't then what approximate decade, did this new journey start?

ES: The new journey, I didn't prepare myself for these dates.

KYN: Don't worry if it's too hard— don't worry. Decade?

ES: Yes, yes, this decade. Yes, yes, the end of last and part of this, yes.

KYN: So that's in 2000s.

ES: Yes, in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s.

KYN: Lovely. So any trepidation when you left your work?

ES: No, no. I'd had that chapter and it was lovely and it was all part time and I'd had a magic job and going to university part time. No, it was all good. I've been very fortunate, yeah.

KYN: And how did David feel when he sold the pharmacy?

ES: He was happy, he was happy that was exactly what he wanted to do. He only sold it because he thought it was over time and it was affecting his health.

KYN: So then you would fly to each place?

ES: Yes. Because it was places mostly out of the state, though occasionally we'd go to centres in WA like Kalgoorlie and Albany. David would be flown to Kalgoorlie, I would train from choice, because I enjoyed that. But in the main it was over east.

KYN: How did you fill your time when David was working?

Speaker 2: Oh, that was easy. I just took my oil paints with me and I messed around painting and I took pen and paper and I wrote, 'cos my degree was in English literature. So it gave me the opportunity to sit down and write. We did occasionally have friends, who were caravanning around Australia. For instance, in Broome we met friends who were caravaning. It was a very peaceful and unpressured time for us both. For instance, in the weekends, when David wasn't working, from Alice Springs we took off to see the rock and camped under the stars. At every opportunity we would go sightseeing and made the most of seeing Australia. We mostly had a car and drove to a lot of the sites, so it was never boring ever, never. We always took a picnic with us!

KYN: How easy was it for you to check in with your boys during this period?

ES: Oh, they were already adult now and the oldest two were not at home anymore. It was seven years, so time moved on and it was easy.

KYN: Did they come and visit you in different places?

ES: No, they never did, no.

KYN: Were they supportive of you?

ES: Yes. They were supportive, yes.

KYN: And how did it feel when you came back to Perth each time?

ES: Just a feeling of excitement because there was always another trip to go off to as long as we wanted to take it up, which we did, very much.

KYN: And what about checking in with community and friends and other family when you got back here, did you make time for that?

ES: Yes. If I was here long enough, but when I was away I used to ring my good friends or family and talk to them. And, and really the main thing was that we were often away over the seven years, and which time also included the high holidays. But that was no problem because in almost all of these major centres they'd have Chabad rabbis coming in. There was usually a core of Jewish people in places like Cairns, Alice Springs, Darwin, who would organise rabbis from Sydney or Melbourne to come up for the high holidays. What I would do would be to make my enquiries through the tourist centre to find out what was prepared for the coming Yom Tov.

There was one time we drove from Coffs Harbour up north to Byron Bay. The closest service for Yom Kippur for us was then in Byron Bay. We found the mix of people that turned up at Byron Bay was very interesting. When we arrived, we found that our Yom Kippur service was in the local church hall. We didn't know anyone but that was fine. It was just fun being there and being with your own people and all of that.

KYN: What an adventure.

ES: So far away from home, oh, it was, it was magic.

KYN: So what caused the end of that period, that seven years?

ES: David got ill. Yes, he got ill, so that was the end of that, yeah.

KYN: Was he ill while you were away?

ES: Yes. Luckily, we were in Albany and he started to feel ill. So when we came back, we saw the specialist and things developed from then on. And also he was getting on. It was after he retired so I think it would have come to an end sooner or later even if he'd been healthy, but maybe later rather than sooner.

KYN: So what happened next?

ES: After that, he had to fully retire and take things easy.

KYN: So you were his primary carer?

ES: Oh yes.

KYN: What does life look like now?

ES: Well, it hasn't changed very much. I still have a structured life. I still work looking after my investments. And I play bridge, and now mahjong. And I'm the lady who lunches, every Tuesday with a large group of friends, as well as with Renee Rosenberg, my girlfriend, who I meet every Friday. And I go to gym three, four times a week. I still Zumba and I'm doing more aqua aerobics because it's easier on my legs now. In effect I'm still out from 9 o'clock to half past 5, 6 exhausted when I get home and I'm still very social. I go to symphony concerts and WAAPA and WASO and the usual.

KYN: Well, if there's one parting message that you want to give your family.

ES: Oh, just enjoy life, kids. Don't waste a moment, just enjoy it all.

KYN: Is there anything else you want to say before we turn it off?

ES: No.

KYN: Fantastic.

END OF INTERVIEW