

Oral History Interview with
Elinor Borenstine

Daughter of Edward Jacobson, Kansas City Businessman; U.S. Army Associate, Business Partner, and Friend of Harry S. Truman.

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Ray Geselbracht, Harry S. Truman Library

GESELBRACHT: It is March 23rd, 2010 and I am Ray Geselbracht of the Harry S. Truman Library. I am here with Elinor Borenstine in her home in Sarasota, Florida. Could you talk a little bit about the family background of your father and your mother and where they were from?

BORENSTINE: My father was the son of Lithuanian refugees—I think you could call them refugees because they were running from the Russian army. They didn't want to belong to that. My father was born in New York City to David and Sarah Jacobson. The family moved shortly after he was born to Leavenworth, Kansas. They went to Leavenworth because my grandmother had a sister there; my grandmother wasn't well and her sister thought she would improve her health if she came to Leavenworth, and so the family went across the country. Now these were immigrants who didn't talk English, it must have been very difficult for them.

Oh, but you want to talk about me first.

GESELBRACHT: No, go ahead.

BORENSTINE: There were four boys and two girls in the Jacobson family. They lived in Leavenworth for a few years. I have always felt the family left Leavenworth because the sheriff could no longer stand the Jacobson boys. They were real devils. Mrs. Johnson's privy would end up on Mr. Smith's front lawn—and, you know, things like that. These were always ascribed to the Jacobson boys.

And I would have loved to hear my grandfather Jacobson talking Yiddish to the sheriff of Leavenworth Kansas. This would have been quite a scene. I can't remember exactly when the family left Leavenworth and came over to Kansas City

GESELBRACHT: Was your father one of these "real devils"?

BORENSTINE: All of them—the whole family.

Daddy didn't finish high school, I think, because he had to go to work. My grandfather was a shoemaker and as my cousin Elliot always said, he was eminently unsuccessful. So they came over to Kansas City. My grandmother and grandfather remained devoutly orthodox Jews.

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One of my fondest memories of them is of my grandmother on Friday night, the Sabbath, lighting her Sabbath lights. It was inspirational. And I remember her walking behind her husband all the way to their place of worship. She was three steps behind him. She knew her place. Not in *this* world that we live in today.

GESELBRACHT: Was there a strong sense of family in your family when you were growing up?

BORENSTINE: I've been talking about my father's family, but I grew up in my mother's family home. My mother's people were German. My mother's mother—my grandmother Rosenbaum—was born in Memphis, Tennessee. Her husband Edward came to this country from Germany when he was four years old. So my grandparents, on both sides were German immigrants mixed with Lithuanian immigrants. When the haberdashery went broke and we had no money—I was about four years old—we moved in with my grandmother and grandfather Rosenbaum. You will laugh if I tell you their address—2012 E. 36th Street, 36th and Garfield. I'm sure it is a slum now. That is where I grew up.

I was a lonely child. I was the only child in the neighborhood. Across the street and hidden out of the way there way there was one little girl that I occasionally played with, but other than that I was surrounded by adults until my sister came along almost 10 years later. So that was how and where I grew up.

GESELBRACHT: Now just to establish some chronology: Eddie Jacobson was born in 1891, and Harry Truman, who we will be talking a lot about, was born in 1884. Harry was seven years older than Eddie. The Jacobson family moved to Leavenworth in 1893, when Eddie was two years old, and the family probably moved to Kansas City in the summer of 1905, although there's some doubt about the exact year.

BORENSTINE: 1905 was coming to my mind but I was afraid to say it because I'm so old I forget dates.

GESELBRACHT: The haberdashery failed in 1922 and Eddie Jacobson worked as a traveling salesman until 1945. He opened his men's store in Westport in that year and died in 1955. You were born in 1920, so your memories are going to start somewhere in the 1920s.

How did your parents meet?

BORENSTINE: My father was dating my mother's older sister and they met during that time. I don't know what happened during that romance. I don't know how mother and daddy got together. But they did before World War I because I have a little picture of him that mother had on her desk or her dresser the whole time he was gone to the war.

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GESELBRACHT: Was the story of how they first met something that was talked about in later years?

BORENSTINE: No.

GESELBRACHT: What are some of the earliest memories that you have of your father?

BORENSTINE: Well, I will tell you that I never heard my father raise his voice, and in his whole life he only struck me once. And he should have hit me a little harder than he did, I'll tell you; it was just a little paddle.

I must tell you that my parents decided to give me music lessons, and finally the music teacher, the piano teacher, said to my mother, "Looks like she'd make a good dancer. She isn't going to make a piano player." So they stopped the piano lessons and now I had elocution lessons. Finding an audience was very difficult when there were no kids around, so after dinner—I must have been around five or six years old—I would go along to the older neighbors and I would elocute for them. One night sometime between—I don't know the exact timing on it, sometime before my sister was born, because there was a still born child, and my mother was terribly ill afterward. And Daddy called me one night to come home before he left to go to the hospital to see my mother. I was in the middle of a big elocution performance, I mean after all I had an audience and I wasn't going to leave, and I didn't. Daddy found me there, and he paddled me just a little. This was the only time in my life he ever raised a finger to me, or I ever heard of him raising a finger to anyone. He should have hit me a little harder, I should have come home.

GESELBRACHT: Do you have any other early memories that are treasured permanent memories of your father?

BORENSTINE: Yes. My father was a fun loving man. If he hadn't had so much trouble supporting his little family he could have laughed his way through life. One time he came home from his week on the road on a Friday night, and as tired as he was he said to me, "Come on, its spring and we have to plant a garden. What would you like to grow in the garden?" And of course I said "nasty-tershums," so he went out and bought nasturtium seeds. We dug up a little plot in the back yard and the next morning he woke me at about 6 a.m. and said "Come here and look at what has happened!" He had gone out during the night and put artificial flowers all through that little garden. My garden was blooming already.

He was the happiest thing in the world!

GESELBRACHT: That's just a wonderful story,

BORENSTINE: I remember something else. You know, there used to be at 47th and Paseo in Kansas City an amusement park called Electric Park. We didn't have enough money to go to

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that park but we would go and stand outside by the fence and watch everything that was going on. One of the little concessions was a goat cart, a little cart drawn by goats that children would ride in. This was great fun for them. As we watched one night, just as the goat cart approached the turn near where we were standing, it turned over and the little girl in it fell to the ground. It looked like other goat carts were coming and might hit her. I watched my father back up about six feet and make a running leap for the fence so he could climb over and grab that little girl out of danger. He didn't make it. The fence was too tall. Daddy fell was badly bruised all over; nothing was broken, but he was badly bruised and he bled for a long time. That's one of my memories.

GESELBRACHT: If I were to divide all fathers into two categories—first, those who are strict, require good responsible behavior from their children and want their children to achieve something important in their life; and second, those who are somewhat relaxed with their children, let them for the most part do what they want, and want them more than anything else to be happy in life. Which category would you put your father in?

BORENSTINE: The second, absolutely the second.

GESELBRACHT: Now if you had to pick one or the other, would you say your father was an admirable man or a loveable man?

BORENSTINE: Both. I'm sorry, they have to go together.

GESELBRACHT: Was he a shy, private man or an outgoing and sociable one?

BORENSTINE: Outgoing and sociable.

GESELBRACHT: Was there anything shy about him at all?

BORENSTINE: Nothing at all. Well, there was one time when he was shy—the night my husband Joe and I got engaged. That night mother cooked ducks for us before we went to Union Station downtown to put Joe on the train that took him back to the Army. We sat at the dinner table and Joe and I held hands, and daddy felt a little shy in the sight of so much romance, and he said “Ah cut it out.” [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: Did your father have a lot of friends?

BORENSTINE: Oh yes, where ever he went he had lots of friends

GESELBRACHT: How many close personal friends did he have?

BORENSTINE: Oh, I couldn't count them he had so many.

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GESELBRACHT: If we accept the idea—which I think for your father could be wrong—that a man can have many friends, but can have a deep personal attachment to only a few of them, or maybe to only one close friend, who would you say were your father's closest friends?

BORENSTINE: Well, Harry Truman was his closest friend, there is no question of that.

GESELBRACHT: The closest of all of his friends?

BORENSTINE: I mean the one he felt more attached too, not the one that he was able to see more often or be with more often. He certainly felt much more attached to Truman than to anyone else.

GESELBRACHT: Why do you think that was?

BORENSTINE: I don't know—the affinity the two men had for each other.

GESELBRACHT: You're almost persuading me that your father was the kind of man who is so gregarious that everyone is his friend. And I think to myself that a man like this can't have a best friend, but your father did have one.

BORENSTINE: Right. Now there were those that he was with a little more because of proximity.

GESELBRACHT: Was Truman always your father's best friend, as far as you know?

BORENSTINE: As far as I know. Look, there were other friends as Daddy went through life, and for a while someone might be a better friend that he would be closer to, and then that person would pass along. It's that way in my life too.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father have any faults that you could describe?

BORENSTINE: Nope, you're talking to a daddy's girl. [laughter] I was disgusting, I mean he could do no wrong and I still can't think of anything he ever did wrong.

GESELBRACHT: What was his favorite thing to do in his personal time?

BORENSTINE: Oh, he loved to hunt and fish. I think one of his greatest sorrows was that he didn't have a son to hunt and fish with. Both his sons-in-law ultimately came to fish with him, but he had to wait a long time for that.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father talk very often about the past, about bygone people and places?

BORENSTINE: No, almost never.

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GESELBRACHT: Did he talk very much about his service in World War I?

BORENSTINE: No, never. We knew that he had be injured a little bit in the war, and that he had been in the hospital for a while, but other than that I never heard him tell a war story

GESELBRACHT: Did he talk about the famous canteen?

BORENSTINE: No. I knew about it, but he didn't talk about it.

GESELBRACHT: What do you think your father cared about most?

BORENSTINE: Family. No question. He loved my mother dearly, and he loved my sister and me, dearly.

GESELBRACHT: I found a letter in the Truman Library's holdings, dated July 22, 1950. The business of the letter was not particularly important, but Truman's handwritten postscript is interesting. It says, "Take care of yourself," this is underlined. "I sure don't want to send flowers to Mrs. Jacobson for you." What did this refer to? How was your father's health in his last years.

BORENSTINE: Oh, it was very poor. He had heart trouble. That letter was written five years before he died, and he had already been in the hospital several times. Once he said to me—he was in the hospital and I was standing next to his bed, and he said "You know, I don't have anything to leave you. Every time I go to Washington to see Harry about Palestine it costs me a lot of money." And I said to him, "Oh yeah, Dad, you have something to leave me. You have a great heritage to leave me."

GESELBRACHT: If you accept for a moment that everyone who gets older has a few regrets, did your father have regrets?

BORENSTINE: Not to my knowledge. *I* have regrets now that I didn't make him talk to me more than he did. But after all he was gone a lot of the time traveling, and he was pretty tired when he came home on weekends

GESELBRACHT: How long were his trips?

BORENSTINE: Oh, he was gone all week. He left Monday morning early or Sunday night late and you could depend on it, he was home on Friday evening before dinner. I used to come home from school on Friday and sit out on the steps in front of the house and wait for his little Chevrolet to come around the corner. I knew he'd be home soon because on Friday nights we went to temple. Some people have questioned what kind of Jew he was. Well, I'll tell you what kind of Jew he was, he was devout and you don't have to be orthodox to be devout. The greatest honor which my father ever received, I thought, was when he was asked to sit on the board of

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Temple B'nai Jehuda, and when he ushered during the high holy days—these things were a great honor for him because they showed he was well accepted in this reform temple, where he had not grown up; he had grown up in orthodoxy.

GESELBRACHT: Your father wrote a letter to Truman shortly after he became president, I think it was in May 1945 or maybe a little later. He says in this letter, among expressions of good wishes, “Harry you know I’m not a praying man.” Would you comment on this?

BORENSTINE: Well, I’ll tell you, I can remember two occasions when my father prayed. The first was the morning of D-Day, and the second was the morning after Roosevelt died. I was at home with him on both these days because my husband was overseas. Daddy got me out of bed very early on D-Day and said “We’re going to temple. We have to pray for the boys who are fighting.” And then on the day that Truman became president, we had to pray for Harry Truman.

GESELBRACHT: What happened to your father’s business after he died?

BORENSTINE: Oh my. Shortly before Daddy died mother’s nephew, her youngest sister’s son, came home from the Korean War without any visible means of support. Daddy took him in the store to teach him the business, because Daddy knew he wouldn’t last very long and wanted the young man to be capable of taking over the business. He was already having problems with his health and so he took Bob—Robert Kleban—into the store, and then he died. Bob knew a little bit about the business, but now he had to learn the rest the hard way. You know, my father’s store was on 39th and Main, next to the Trocadero, which was a drinking spot for the Kansas City mafia. When I went to my father’s store, I was not allowed to park my car and walk into the store. Daddy had to know when I was coming and send someone out. He was afraid even to let me walk on the sidewalk a short way. If I couldn’t park right in front of the store, he didn’t want me walking around the Trocadero. Shortly after Daddy died, Bob and I decided to take the store out of that location [laughter], and we reopened at The Landing, at 63rd and Troost, and we renamed the store Eddie Jacobson’s Menswear. I went to work there, keeping the books and riding herd on the hired help, and he did the buying. And then we—I don’t remember how many years it was, a few years—and then we went broke. So then we closed it up. I don’t know what’s there now, I think another clothing store.

GESELBRACHT: By the way, the Truman Library was contacted not too long ago and offered the desk from that clothing store.

BORENSTINE: Oh, my gosh, it would have had to be the one from Westport Menswear wouldn’t it?

GESELBRACHT: Yes, but I would assume that the desk went from one store to the other.

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BORENSTINE: Nope, we had a built in desk in the new store as I recall. And I don't know where that desk was, maybe it was out in the back room some place, I don't know

GESELBRACHT: I found something in your father's papers that seemed to indicate that he was a Mason. Is this right?

BORENSTINE: Well he did this with Truman. You know, he didn't talk about that very much. In those days it wasn't something a Jew usually did—become a Mason. We didn't talk about that very much. He wore the ring, always. I don't know where it is now. But he didn't stay interested for long and he didn't go to many of the Masonic functions.

GESELBRACHT: But he always wore the ring?

BORENSTINE: Yes.

GESELBRACHT: Did he become a Mason because of Harry Truman?

BORENSTINE: Yes, I'm sure that was true. He wouldn't have had the foggiest notion of doing that on his own.

GESELBRACHT: It surprised me too. I didn't think your father could have been a Mason.

BORENSTINE: Of course not.

GESELBRACHT: Do you know what lodge he went to?

BORENSTINE: No. Well, I remember where it was, on Linwood and The Paseo. That was where they went to their meetings. But I don't remember what the lodge was.

GESELBRACHT: Who do you think were the three people in history your father would have most admired?

BORENSTINE: All of history?

GESELBRACHT: Yes.

BORENSTINE: Listen, I already told you my father didn't even graduate from high school. He didn't know a lot of history. Of course one was Chaim Weizmann. I can't remember that he ever talked about anyone else in history.

GESELBRACHT: Now would you say Truman was someone, as president, that your father admired? Or was there too much of a friendship for him to admire Truman as an historical figure?

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BORENSTINE: Oh no, there was too much admiration on a personal level, love if you want to use that word, too much of an attachment, and they knew each other too well for Harry Truman to have been just someone in history to my father.

GESELBRACHT: I'm going to turn now to the relationship between your father and Harry Truman, and also the way the two families engaged with each other.

BORENSTINE: Alright, but first let me tell you one of my early memories that just occurred to me. You know I mentioned that my mother wasn't well at the time—I wish I could remember how old I was, maybe around four years old. There was at this time a small lake between Independence and Kansas City. I don't imagine that there is one now, it has probably been filled in and built on. But during the summer when my mother wasn't well, Daddy rented a cabin on that lake. And he and mother and I enjoyed our little summer. I remember Truman stopping to see us one day on his way home from Kansas City to Independence. He would occasionally drop in like this. Now this is a very hazy memory. I cannot remember the name of the place and I can't remember anything that happened except that Harry Truman used to drop in on us.

GESELBRACHT: I remember that Truman used to go to a place called Cave Spring, a recreation place, which might have been like the place you remember.

BORENSTINE: I remember another place where Truman went, on the Missouri River. Do you know Buckner, Missouri? Is there still such a place left as Buckner, Missouri? Yes. Well, there was a man there who was some kind of local official, by the name of Frankie O'Donnell. He had a shack down on the river and that is where he and some friends used to go to hunt, and Truman would go along as the camp cook. He didn't hunt, he always went with an arm load of books. And while Daddy and Frankie and maybe one or two other men would go out and hunt Harry would cook for them and read. It was on the Missouri River. I remember it well because very, very close to that shack was an abandoned railroad car owned by a man by the name of Frankie Mayer. He was a butcher at the City Market. Daddy used to take me to the place where Frankie lived and I thought that was the best fun I ever had—was going to the railroad car that a man was living in. And Daddy and I got meat from him and of course we liked that a lot.

GESELBRACHT: Where was the railroad car?

BORENSTINE: On the Missouri River.

GESELBRACHT: So it was on the Missouri River in Buckner, in the same place where Frankie O'Donnell's hunting shack was.

BORENSTINE: But the lake I was talking about was miles from Buckner, many miles from Buckner. I just happened to remember that Frankie O'Donnell and Uncle Frankie Mayer, the two Frankies, lived in Buckner. This hunting went on every fall for a while until one day

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Frankie O'Donnell's wife picked up one of the guns and shot her husband. [laughter] Only in the leg, but the hunting stopped after that.

GESELBRACHT: That is a wonderful story. I've seen a photograph of Truman in hunting clothes and with his gun ready for firing whenever the animal appeared. And now I know from what you've said that he probably put the gun down and started reading.

BORENSTINE: Of course. And there is a picture floating around of him holding a duck, but I am going to tell you he didn't kill that duck, he was getting ready to take it in and cook it. But he probably didn't know how to cook a wild duck. My mother knew how, and Daddy's great joy was to get wild ducks and have mother cook them.

GESELBRACHT: But the other place you were speaking of with the cabin and the lake might be a place Truman used to go called Cave Spring, just east of Swope Park on Gregory Boulevard.

BORENSTINE: Well, that could be the right place. Maybe my memory wasn't too far wrong after all.

GESELBRACHT: Your memory works very well, much better than mine does. What are your first memories of Harry Truman?

BORENSTINE: I think what I just talked about, when he came to this vacation place that we had. I can't remember him before that.

GESELBRACHT: What was your impression of him?

BORENSTINE: I don't think I had one.

GESELBRACHT: And as time went by?

BORENSTINE: Well, as time went by he became a god in our house. [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: Before that—your first memories, he would have been just a county judge.

BORENSTINE: Well yes, he would have been *just* a country judge, but in our house Truman was always spoken of with great reverence, always. So that has to be my only memory.

GESELBRACHT: You were a little girl, and this man, Harry Truman, came into the house. Did he keep his distance, or did he make an effort to be friendly with you?

BORENSTINE: Oh, sure he was friendly, but he didn't come to our house very often. The men, the two men, kept in close contact but the two families did not, and actually after he became

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president he came to our house to play poker. And of course we were never in the Trumans' house. So our contacts were rare.

GESELBRACHT: Did you never go to the house on Delaware Street, the Truman home?

BORENTINE: Once after Bess died, and also at the time the Truman Library was dedicated—July 6, 1957. I took tea from Eleanor Roosevelt in the parlor of the Truman Home and wore my arm in a sling a week after so nobody would touch it and remove the traces of Eleanor Roosevelt, my heroine. [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: So you were never in the Truman Home at any other time?

BORENTINE: Never. My sister will tell you a story of once when Daddy got into the kitchen, but that's all. [laughter] But that's her story and I'll let her tell it.

GESELBRACHT: Did you ever visit the Truman farm home in Grandview?

BORENTINE: Once. Daddy took me there on the occasion of Grandma Truman's 90th birthday. I think that's right, that would have been 1942. I remember that I was working and living at home at the time. At any rate, there she was rocking on the front porch and Miss Mary Jane was standing next to her, and we visited for a little while. That was the only time I was on the farm in Grandview.

GESELBRACHT: Do you have any other memories of this, aside from just being there?

BORENTINE: No.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father visit the Truman farm at other times, by himself?

BORENTINE: I'm sure he did, but then you know, I was married and not living at home and I didn't know what he did all the time.

GESELBRACHT: So you think that after the haberdashery failed, your father and Truman saw one another.

BORENTINE: Oh yes.

GESELBRACHT: Was it playing poker?

BORENTINE: No, they would meet and have lunch. They saw one another, they were together.

GESELBRACHT: Wasn't your father, for twenty years, wasn't your father on the road all week?

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BORENSTINE: Yes, but when he was home they saw each other.

GESELBRACHT: Did they go out to eat for lunch, do you know?

BORENSTINE: Oh, yeah.

GESELBRACHT: Did Harry come over to your father's home?

BORENSTINE: No, they would go out to eat in a restaurant. I'm sure they went to Dixon's and I'm sure they went to get ribs.

GESELBRACHT: I take it you never saw Bess, is that right?

BORENSTINE: Never. Once I ran into her on the street and we had a "how do you do." She and Margaret were walking along for a little while and I had come home from college and I was kind of out of it, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself. I worked in a little book store on Linwood Boulevard, and one day I ran into Bess and Margaret coming out of the book store as I was going into work and it was "how do you do," and that was all.

GESELBRACHT: So you never saw Margaret either?

BORENSTINE: No.

GESELBRACHT: What did you think of the two of them?

BORENSTINE: Not much if you really want to know.

GESELBRACHT: Can you say more about this?

BORENSTINE: Sure, I could.

GESELBRACHT: It's all right. [laughter] It's for the historical record now, they are all gone.

BORENSTINE: We felt they didn't care for Jews or want any part of them so, you know, we didn't care. We knew Harry was alright with us, but we also knew Bess was not. After all, she was raised at her mother's knee. They were the first family of Independence, Missouri for God's sake, this big place! So, that was alright, we didn't care. We didn't miss 'em.

GESELBRACHT: Did you ever worry that Harry might feel the same way?

BORENSTINE: No, never did.

GESELBRACHT: Did you ever meet Madge Wallace, Bess' mother?

BORENSTINE: No, no of course not. I forgot her name was Madge.

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BORENSTINE: Did your father speak much about Harry Truman?

BORENSTINE: Not really. I don't know, maybe—maybe I've lost some of my early memories. But certainly not in later years.

GESELBRACHT: Do you know how your father and Harry Truman first became acquainted?

BORENSTINE: Yeah, Daddy worked in a shirt store in downtown Kansas City and Truman worked in a bank nearby. Daddy used to make the deposits, and they would always chat and sometimes would go out to lunch together. That is how they first met and got to be friends.

GESELBRACHT: That would have been in 1905-1906, since Truman left the bank in 1906.

BORENSTINE: Well, didn't the Jacobson's come to Kansas City in 1905? So they had just about a year before Harry quit the bank and went to the farm in Grandview.

GESELBRACHT: In fact your father used to say that the Jacobson's came to Kansas City in 1906. But he also—this is in the autobiographical document he wrote—he also said that he would go see Harry at Commerce Bank, which Truman left in 1905.

BORENSTINE: No it wasn't the Commerce Bank.

GESELBRACHT: Well, he went from Commerce Bank to Union Bank.

BORENSTINE: Union Bank is the one.

GESELBRACHT: He worked there just a year, in 1906 or 1905-1906. And at that time, your father was at Burger, Hannah, Monger Dry Goods Company at 8th and Broadway.

BORENSTINE: Right.

GESELBRACHT: And Truman's bank was only a block or two away.

BORENSTINE: Yeah, about a block I think.

GESELBRACHT: At that time Harry would have been 22 and your father would have been about 15.

BORENSTINE: Right. Well, I told you, he didn't finish high school, he had to go to work. All the Jacobson boys did. My Uncle A.D., Uncle Doc you hear me talk about. Uncle Doc learned how to be a plumber and he used to come home and cry to the old man, to his father. He didn't want to dig those ditches, he didn't want to be a plumber. And the old man would say, "You are going to be a plumber. Go out and dig." Well, it was pretty good. During the war A.B

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Jacobson's and Sons was the biggest plumbing and heating company in Kansas City, paying the biggest income tax in Kansas City. It was pretty good to be a plumber then.

GESELBRACHT: We can place your father and Truman in 1905-1906, but Truman leaves for the Grandview farm in 1906.

BORENTINE: And they were totally separated.

GESELBRACHT: Did they see each other at all between 1906 and 1917, or maybe 1918, when they were together at Camp Doniphan?

BORENTINE: Not to my knowledge.

GESELBRACHT: So your father and Truman renew their relationship after eleven or twelve years at Camp Doniphan. Do you know how they got together there?

BORENTINE: No, I've never heard.

GESELBRACHT: I don't know if Truman knew your father was in the camp and asked for him. Maybe the camp was not so big that Truman and your father did not know the other was there.

BORENTINE: They possibly ran into each other in the camp, and they said "Oh yeah, I remember you!" [laughter] And that was possibly right about the time they told Truman to start a canteen.

GESELBRACHT: Truman wrote to Bess Wallace in December 1918 that he intended to go back to farming when he got out of the Army. And when Bess wrote him a letter in March 1919, she talks about the possibility that he might get a job in Kansas City instead of farming. She mentions talking with Truman's partner in his oil well business from before the war, and suggests this man might give him a job in Kansas City. So as of March 1919, there was apparently no thought of the Truman and Jacobson haberdashery. Do you know how the haberdashery idea got started?

BORENTINE: I always thought, though I don't know for sure that this was so, that Truman and my father made this decision on their way home from France, on that terrible ship where they were so sick. That's where I always thought they made the decision to open the shop.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father talk about the haberdashery very often?

BORENTINE: No.

GESELBRACHT: One would think that it would have been a sad and difficult memory for your father.

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BORENSTINE: Oh, yes and I'm sure that's why he didn't talk about it.

GESELBRACHT: A business failure like that must have been a difficult thing for the two partners.

BORENSTINE: Oh, my yes, for both of them.

GESELBRACHT: And I'm a little surprised when I think about it, that they remained friends.

BORENSTINE: I am too. There was a different bond between them.

GESELBRACHT: And your father had to go through bankruptcy and Truman didn't.

BORENSTINE: Well, because Truman went into politics, and because he became a county judge.

GESELBRACHT: But one could imagine that your father might have said, "Well I had to go through bankruptcy. It doesn't seem fair."

BORENSTINE: Right.

GESELBRACHT: Was there ever anything like that?

BORENSTINE: No, never a word.

GESELBRACHT: Was he the kind of man that just didn't indulge in that kind of emotion?

BORENSTINE: My father was essentially a happy man and I would think he—I don't remember him ever talking about how tough it was for him to travel all the time, except you could tell it was when he came home on Friday nights. He was a tired man.

There's a story I want to tell you. I don't know if it is still in existence today, but at the Lake of the Ozarks there was a lodge called Kirkwood Lodge. This was *big* in square dancing. Now I was already married and had three children. And Kirkwood Lodge was not a place you could call and make a reservation. You had to get an application and fill out an extensive application about who you were and what you did and if you would be a good guest at the Kirkwood Lodge. Well one year we went there. Elliot and Anne Jacobson went with their oldest son Mark, and Joe and I went with our two oldest daughters, Paula and Hazel. So we arrived at the lodge, and all of a sudden we noticed we had the choice table in the dining room, and we had two waiters standing by our table at all times so we couldn't even lift a napkin on our own. We looked around and saw that nobody else was getting this treatment, and we thought it was kind of strange. Toward the end of the first meal we had in this dining room, the lodge's owner came and sat down with us at our table. We thought that was pretty strange too. We didn't see him sitting around with anyone else in this way. His name was Bill Hagedorn. Finally he said to me,

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“Listen, I know your father is Eddie Jacobson and I want to tell you a story about him. During the Depression I was broke, I didn’t have a plugged nickel. All I had a line of ties I was trying to sell in Kansas. Always, when I was traveling around trying to sell these ties, people wouldn’t even let me open my sample case. I would walk in a store and the owner would say ‘Out! I’m not thinking of buying anything. Get out!’ One time I went through Kansas, and in every store I went to the owner said ‘Come in. Eddie Jacobson was in here last week and he said we didn’t have to buy but we had to let you open your sample case.’” And he said “That is how I made the money to start Kirkwood Lodge. You are going to be given royal treatment, but let me tell you the best thing that could happen in my life is if Eddie Jacobson would come with you.” And I said, “Next summer.” Daddy was already very old by then, and we went down and believe me he had the choice cabin. And Bill Hagedorn had a big comfortable chair put out on the bluff so that Daddy could sit there and watch his grandchildren learn to water ski, and we had quite a good vacation, let me tell you. Now that was the kind of guy Eddie Jacobson was. You don’t have to buy but you have to look. He made really good friends of merchants all through Kansas and Missouri. They were glad to see him come.

GESELBRACHT: Do you think he was ever envious of Truman’s success?

BORENSTINE: No, of course not. Truman used to say to him all the time, teasing my father, “Come in Eddie, the water’s good,” meaning my father should get into politics. And Daddy would say, “No, no, no, no, I’m going to make an honest living.” [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: Did Truman seem to you to be always his normal self?

BORENSTINE: Oh, always. He was never President of the United States to us.

GESELBRACHT: Did you ever go to the White House when he was President?

BORENSTINE: Yes, but we went during the time the White House was being renovated and the Truman’s were living over in Blair House, and Truman was in Key West. Someone—I don’t know who it was—took us through the parts of the White House that weren’t torn up. I didn’t get to go to the inauguration. My father told me that I had to stay home and take care of his grandchildren. And I said to him, “I have full time help. Grandpa”—my husband’s father—“Grandpa is staying in the house and there will be plenty of supervision for your three granddaughters.” He said “No, you are staying home.” And I didn’t go to the inauguration. My sister went. I’ve always held that against her. [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: She was 18.

BORENSTINE: Yeah, she was in college. She had a wonderful time. [laughter] That was a bitter pill for me.

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GESELBRACHT: I imagine so. Did he care a lot about his grandkids?

BORENSTINE: Oh, did he love those girls! He used to come to our house—after the two oldest were born we bought a house at 7307 Holmes which wasn't far from Mother and Daddy's house at 235 East 72nd street. He would come over quite often, come in the front door—this was a two story house—and he would stand at the bottom of the steps and he would go “eeeeeeeeeeee.” And the girls for some reason called him “Gee.” He was never their grandfather, he was always their “Gee.” He would come over and one day—my husband and I knew how we wanted to raise our children, and we would not have a television in the house—one day a man knocked on the front door with a television and said “Where do you want this?” I said “I want it taken back. I didn't order it and I don't want it in my house.” He said “Mr. Jacobson bought it.” So I called Daddy and he said “Listen, when I come over to see my granddaughters, I don't want to have to run all over the neighborhood trying to find out which neighbor has a television where they are watching it.” [laughter] So that is how I got my first television set.

One time—I felt it was womanly, it made me feel womanly, to do my laundry and hang it out on a clothes line in the back, and that aggravated Daddy to death. He didn't want to see me out there hanging all those clothes up. One time I opened the door and there stood a man with a clothes dryer. He said “I'll take this to the basement.” And I said “No, you'll take it back. I didn't order it.” He said “Mr. Jacobson ordered it.” That's how I got my first clothes dryer. [laughter]

And one year—but this was purely selfish motive—one year a truck drove in my drive way and around to the back where my garage was, and he said “This freezer is supposed to go in the garage.” And I tell you, this was one of those old-time enormous chest freezers. I said “No that is my garage, and I didn't order that freezer.” He said “Mr. Jacobson wants it there.” So I called Daddy and he said “Well, I have to have something to do with my fish when I catch them, and there is no room at my house, so we're going to have the freezer in your garage.” I no longer had a place to park my car, but that was alright, I parked his fish. [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: Truman loved to play poker with your father and others, both at your father's house and at the Oakwood Country Club, on Grandview Road. Those are two places I know of.

BORENSTINE: Oh, they played at Uncle Doc's house too, at my Uncle Abram D. Jacobson's house.

GESELBRACHT: Where was his house?

BORENSTINE: His house was someplace around 67th Street, or maybe 68th Street, between Ward Parkway and Wornall. By the time Truman was coming to his house to play poker, my uncle was very well off and had a very beautiful home over there, and a recreation room that

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they played poker in more than once, I know. We kids never even knew what his real name was, we all called him Uncle Doc. Very recently, I asked Herbert Jacobson “Where did your father get that nickname?” And he said “Well, your father gave it to him.” And I said “What do you mean? Where did he get the name?” And he said “Well, he always called him the Doctor of Crapology. He was a plumber, so that’s how he got the name Uncle Doc—from my father.

My father loved to tell a joke and he loved to hear a joke. Do you know what a Seder is, a Passover Seder? It’s a meal, and this is a wonderful tradition in Jewish homes. In fact when my oldest daughter left home that was the only thing she missed. She didn’t miss me or her father or Kansas City or her sisters or anything. She only missed our annual Seder. I remember the Seders at my grandmother and grandfather Jacobson’s house. They were wonderful. Something funny was always going on, like the time that my father gave his father—the old man as we always called him—my father gave the old man the book where we read the story of the Seder upside down, and the old man read it anyway. He could read it upside down. We were all sitting there giggling our heads off. My father just loved a good joke.

GESELBRACHT: Do you know of other places where Truman played poker?

BORENSTINE: No, I just know they played at Uncle Doc’s and at our house.

GESELBRACHT: Who was usually there?

BORENSTINE: Well, A. J. Granoff, as you know, Uncle Doc of course, Lou Gershon, my father’s office mate, Hyman Brand, Earl Tranin, were among the poker players. I don’t know who they were. Herman Rosenberg. Do you know about Herman Rosenberg? No? He was in 29th Field Artillery. I don’t think he was in Battery D; he may have been in Battery F too, I don’t know. When Chaim Weizmann went to the White House to see Truman, Matt Connelly decided that Daddy should not accompany him because the reporters and the Secret Service would know immediately something was going on if Daddy entered the White House with this old man. So Truman said “Let Herman Rosenberg bring him.” So Herman took Weizmann to the White House, Daddy did not.

GESELBRACHT: That’s interesting.

BORENSTINE: I thought you would be interested in that because I hear it told otherwise.

GESELBRACHT: I have been reading the new book about Truman and Israel, *A Safe Haven*, by Allis and Ronald Radosh. I think—I may be misremembering—that they say that your father brought Weizmann though the back entrance of the White House.

BORENSTINE: Yes they did say that, and it’s wrong. Herman Rosenberg went with Weizmann, Daddy did not. That I remember very well.

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GESELBRACHT: Who was Herman Rosenberg?

BORENSTINE: He was—I don't know what his business was—he was a rich Jew living over near my Uncle Doc. That's all I knew.

GESELBRACHT: What was the poker-playing area like in your father's home?

BORENSTINE: It was in the basement, which was wood paneled, and there was a poker table down there, at one end of the basement room, and on the other end was a couch and chairs. When they had poker games going, no woman was allowed there, and in fact when it was time for refreshments I took a tray to the door and opened the door and said "Come and get it." I couldn't even walk down the steps with that tray.

GESELBRACHT: Would you tell the story you told me of Truman giving you signed copies of his memoirs?

BORENSTINE: He came to the house after Daddy died. His memoirs had just been published and I told him that I had six copies, two for each of my three daughters and that I would like them autographed. He said bring those to my office next week and I'll do it. And so I went to his office, and I carried those six books all the way. My arms were black and blue for weeks. I carried those six books up the hill to the Federal Reserve Building and went in Truman's office and sat down next to him. He took the books and put them in front of him, and he turned to me and he said "Elinor, I couldn't feel this bad if I'd lost my brother. I can't even talk about it today." And he put his head in his hands and he started to sob and sob and sob, and I thought I was going to join him, and this wasn't going to be a good thing. So I left and called Rose Conway and said "I'll send for the books." Elliot Jacobson went for the books the following week.

I never saw Truman after that. Joe did, my husband did, he went to the Eddie Jacobson memorial luncheons and so forth, but I didn't.

GESELBRACHT: Why didn't you want to see Truman again?

BORENSTINE: Well, I was afraid I was going to do it again, to start crying. I keep kind of tight control of myself, except my language isn't always so good. Sorry, Ray.

GESELBRACHT: It's quite alright; I think your language is exactly appropriate to every occasion.

BORENSTINE: You've possibly heard it all before anyways.

GESELBRACHT: Have your views of Truman, either as a person or as president, changed over the years?

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BORENSTINE: Yes. Always he was for me just a really good friend, but when I think now about the things he did when he was president, he certainly has grown in stature.

GESELBRACHT: Is there anything else you would like to say about the relationship between your father and Harry Truman?

BORENSTINE: I can't think of anything.

GESELBRACHT: I want to change pace a little bit and go into the last main theme of this interview. This theme concerns your father's role in the founding of Israel. Could you describe what your father's identity as a Jew meant to him?

BORENSTINE: Everything. I'll tell you a story about that in a minute. Daddy was not a Zionist. He didn't know about Palestine. We lived in the Midwest; we were not on the east coast where a lot of Zionist activity occurred. Two men from B'nai B'rith, Frank Goldman and Maurice Bisgyer, decided that Daddy needed to be educated, and they would come out to Kansas City and in the parlors of the few Kansas City Zionists of that time they educated Eddie Jacobson. They taught him about Palestine, and they also taught him about what was going on in the camps and about the plight of the Jews who were left in Europe. Daddy wasn't ever an active Zionist.

GESELBRACHT: Did he know in the 1930s what was happening to the Jews?

BORENSTINE: No, we did not, we did not know. Out in the Midwest we had no idea what was going on until shortly before the end of the war.

GESELBRACHT: I think he would occasionally send a letter to Truman when he was a U.S. Senator, asking him to get a Jew out of Europe.

BORENSTINE: Just once. I'll tell you about that. My mother had a cousin who was stuck in Germany—I told you all of her people came from Germany—and she had a cousin who was still in Germany and he was appealing to her to get him out. He was not in a camp, had never been in a camp, and I don't know how he was able to miss all that good stuff. In those days someone who wanted to immigrate to the United States had to have a patron who would to guarantee the prospective immigrant a livelihood, a patron who would back the immigrant financially. I can remember sitting at the dinner table one night and hearing my mother say to Daddy "We don't have that kind of money, how could we back my cousin financially." And Daddy said to her "Don't worry about that. There are enough rich Jews I know that will give me money to back him." And Daddy asked Truman to help bring this man into the country. This was the only time—except one other thing, which I will tell you about in a minute—we ever asked Harry Truman to do a personal favor for us. Incidentally, the man came here and I didn't like him at all. He brought my sister jewelry and me a vase, and I didn't like that man at all. [laughter]

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Anyway, the only other time we asked Harry Truman for a personal favor was to get my husband Joe out of the Army after the war. He came home from overseas and the Army would not write any orders to release him. They wanted him in the Army; they were after him in every way and he couldn't get out. That was all he could think about—he wanted out of the Army. “Let me out, let me out, I want to finish my internship as a medical doctor and go to work.” And we asked Harry Truman, and it only took a day or two before my husband had his orders. [laughter] I've still got them out in the garage.

GESELBRACHT: Did Truman call General Marshall?

BORENSTINE: He called General Somebody. Joe Borenstine was out of the Army finally. Incidentally, we prided ourselves on never asking Truman for favors, personal favors.

GESELBRACHT: When your father asked Truman to see Chaim Weizmann in the weeks leading up to the creation of Israel, he reminded Truman that he had never asked his old friend for very much.

BORENSTINE: Only for those two personal favors, that's all.

GESELBRACHT: So your father wasn't really aware of the holocaust, didn't think about Palestine being a homeland for the Jews until the two men from B'nai B'rith began to visit with him?

BORENSTINE: Right—Frank Goldman and Maurice Bisgyer.

GESELBRACHT: And that would have been after Truman became President.

BORENSTINE: Oh yes.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father immediately accept these new ideas that were being presented to him?

BORENSTINE: No, he listened to what Goldman and Bisgyer told him, thought about what they said, and then they would come to Kansas City again and talk with him. I can't remember the homes where they were having parlor meetings—for the express purpose of educating Eddie Jacobson.

GESELBRACHT: He could have resisted these new ideas.

BORENSTINE: Oh, absolutely.

GESELBRACHT: But he didn't.

BORENSTINE: No.

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GESELBRACHT: And it seems from reading his letters to Truman that he really embraced these ideas, very strongly.

BORENSTINE: Oh yes, after he found out all about the Jews in Europe and about Palestine. Incidentally A. J. Granoff was a Zionist, and I am certain he influenced Daddy a lot in this area.

GESELBRACHT: What was their relationship like?

BORENSTINE: Daddy and AJ were buddies. AJ was Daddy's lawyer so to speak. We, the rest of us—not Daddy, he never said anything like this—but the rest of us always felt that AJ was riding Daddy's coat tails. Wherever Daddy went AJ showed up. He wanted to take credit for everything. This is the way we felt about it. My sister Gloria and Loeb Granoff, AJ's son, were very good friends. They used to date, and I used to drive them to religious school. I used to teach religious school and on Sunday mornings I would drive Loeb and Gloria to religious school. Daddy and AJ were very close, but the rest of us were always suspicious of this. I will tell you that after Daddy died, AJ did not close his estate. Now there wasn't much estate to close. AJ just kept the estate paperwork in the jumble on his desk. When you walked in his office, his desk was miles high with papers and files and all kinds of stuff. He loved being able to say to everybody, "Oh yes, I am handling the Jacobson estate." So it never got closed, and this made my mother nervous. She was after us constantly, "Why can't we close this thing?" So finally I walked in on AJ—I'm just the gal who could do this—I walked into AJ's office and I said "You're fired. You can't close the estate. I have a lawyer who can. Hand me the estate file." And he did. I took the file to Joseph Cohen and it was quickly closed. But there's no question that my father's relationship with AJ was very close. AJ liked to believe that he taught Daddy everything, and that he was really the brains in the relationship, and it always aggravated the *hell* out of me that he thought that Eddie Jacobson didn't have enough brains to do take care of his business on his own. I'm sorry but that is my feeling about AJ Granoff.

GESELBRACHT: Do you know how your father felt about A. J. Granoff? He was a lawyer and had more formal education than your father. Did your father feel that he needed his help, or perhaps shared some of your misgivings about Granoff?

BORENSTINE: He never said that. I told you Daddy was such a mild mannered man, and a happy man. He had friends and AJ was a friend.

GESELBRACHT: They ended up being very effective together.

BORENSTINE: Yes, oh yes.

GESELBRACHT: We have the Truman Library's holdings very good letter from A. J. Granoff to his son, Loeb describing the meeting that he and your father had with President Truman shortly after the United Nations vote on the partition of Palestine on November 29, 1947.

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BORENSTINE: Yes, AJ was with my father for that meeting. He wasn't with my father for the crucial one about Truman's receiving Weizmann, on March 12, 1948.

The earlier meeting was the one when Truman said, after some talk about honesty, or something like that, "I would have never let you through the gate if I hadn't known you two birds were alright."

GESELBRACHT: So your father becomes very involved in the plight of the Jews—both those left in Europe and those who lived in Palestine. Did his involvement have its origins in his strong personal feeling for the Jews, or was he responding to what people such as the two men from B'nai B'rith said to him?

BORENSTINE: All of the above, I don't think you could separate it.

Daddy had a very good friend by the name of Ruth Gruber. Does that name ring a bell for you? She was a writer with the *New York Herald Tribune* and she was on the *Exodus*, and I have every book she ever wrote. She wrote wonderful books about Israel and the *Exodus*, and she also was a speaker for the United Jewish Appeal. And when she would come to the Midwest, she would call Daddy and say "Eddie I'm tired. I've traveled and I need to rest for a couple of days." And Daddy would say "Ok, what plane should I meet?" He would go get her and bring her out to the house. I remember she loved to go out in the backyard, sit in the comfortable chair that they had there, and watch my two older girls play while she worked on Daddy's scrap books. And certainly Ruthie taught Daddy lots. Like I said, she was on the *Exodus*, and she had seen what was going on in Europe.

GESELBRACHT: In the long letter that your father wrote about his March 12, 1948 meeting with Truman in the Oval Office he refers to the Jews as "my people."

BORENSTINE: That letter was written after he had been well educated.

GESELBRACHT: But it really seems heartfelt.

BORENSTINE: Oh it was, there was no question it was.

GESELBRACHT: Do you know what your father thought of the Arabs? Did he think there would eventually be peace in Palestine?

BORENSTINE: He knew what was going on in Israel after it became a state. He knew about the gun running that was going on, that Teddy Kollek was engaged in for instance. Teddy Kollek was a gun runner, did you know that? And Daddy knew him. We've always felt that Daddy was more important after the State of Israel was created than he was before because there was no U.S. ambassador to Israel for three or four months after the country was created—four, I think it was. During those months, the Israeli government ran everything from Israel through

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Daddy to the White House. I remember some of the men who came out to Kansas City to see Daddy. One of them landed in our living room after dinner one night. He brought some kind of document that needed to be signed and he told a story. The national pastime in Israel, in those days, was listening to the shortwave radio. And this fellow, his name was Meyer Weisgold, I'll think of his last name in a minute, was Chaim Weizmann's strong right arm. Weizmann was then President of Israel. So there was all of Israel listening to the shortwave while Meyer was in our living room, and he told us that Weizmann had called him on the shortwave that morning and said "Meyer, it's time to come back to Israel, and don't you forget to bring me two pounds of bacon." [laughter] Well this created a big problem. All of the Kosher Jews in Israel heard that their president, the president of their country, was eating bacon. Oh my God! [laughter]

GESELBRACHT: Did your father receive any hate mail from anti-Semites?

BORENSTINE: Oh, yes and not just mail. He had a threat over the telephone that scared us all to death. Someone with an Arabic accent called the store and threatened him. Mother was out of town, and Daddy's store manager called me at home and said "Elinor, I don't know what to do. I don't want Eddie to go home alone." And I said, "You won't be able to talk him out of driving home. But I'll tell you what. Joe and I will follow him home. Let me know when he leaves the store." We were then living on Armor and Gillam, which was only about a mile from Daddy's store. And I said "We'll then get in the car we would drive to the store right away and follow him home and be sure he gets in the house alright." Which is what we did.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father or your mother ever mention the U. S. ambassador to Israel James G. McDonald and his wife?

BORENSTINE: Oh, are you going to hear about him! McDonald came to Gloria's wedding, at Temple B'nai Jehudah on Linwood and Wayne. Oh I remember it well. You know, Mother and Daddy had already been to Israel and stayed with McDonald and they were friends. So Ambassador and Mrs. McDonald got an invitation to the wedding, and they came.

GESELBRACHT: The correspondence with the McDonalds in your father's papers seems very friendly. It could have just been only polite and proper, but it wasn't like that.

BORENSTINE: No, no, no, no, they were friends. I don't even know if Gloria even knows this story, but it is one of my favorite ones. When Mother and Daddy went to Israel they were guests of the State of Israel really. They stayed with McDonald, but of course they saw Weizmann. We had a movie of Weizmann taking Daddy to the top of the YWCA building and looking over to the West Bank.

GESELBRACHT: That is the big building right across from the King David Hotel.

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BORENSTINE: Right, right, absolutely. And during that trip Mother and Daddy went to call on the chief rabbi of Israel. My mother didn't begin her visit very well. She went in and shook the rabbi's hand. Well, he had to excuse himself to go out and wash his hands. [laughter] A woman shouldn't touch his hands! So then they sat down and the chief rabbi said to my father "Eddie, how could you do it? How could you do it, Eddie? You left orthodoxy and went to reform. Eddie, why did you do this thing?" Daddy said "I want to tell you something rabbi. My brothers stayed with orthodoxy and you know they are good Jews. They go to the high holy days, they go to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and they are good Jews. And I went to reform, but I'll tell you what I do. I go to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but I go every Friday night to Sabbath services too." And the old man didn't have any answer. I have always been so proud of my father for the way he answered the rabbi. You know, Daddy didn't have any education, but he sure had a lot of brains and a lot of heart.

GESELBRACHT: Did he say much about Israel when he came home in 1949?

BORENSTINE: Oh, this trip was the glory of my parents' lives. Yeah, they talked about it a lot.

GESELBRACHT: How did your father's sudden notoriety affect him? It must have done something to him. He was a man who had been for many years a traveling salesman, and was in the clothing trade. Suddenly he's getting acclaim from Jews all over the world. How did this affect him?

BORENSTINE: He never changed. He was the same guy he always was and never changed a bit.

GESELBRACHT: Did he ever say anything about Truman's policies toward Israel following recognition?

BORENSTINE: Well if he did, I didn't hear what he said. I wasn't living with him any longer at that time. And you know, we didn't see as much of each other as he would have liked. I think he always resented this, but I was raising three children all by myself, and my husband was a pediatrician who was out raising everybody else's children. I was busy with those three girls and with other things too. I just didn't see that much of Daddy and I didn't hear much about any views he might have had about Israel.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father ever mention Truman's favorite idea of diverting water from the Mediterranean Sea into the Dead Sea basin?

BORENSTINE: Yeah, I vaguely remember all that kind of stuff, but I couldn't tell you about it.

GESELBRACHT: Truman would get very excited about this idea. He envisioned the whole Mediterranean Sea rushing through a tunnel with a big pipe going down to the Dead Sea.

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BORENSTINE: Oh wouldn't that be wonderful, because you know they still have troubles over water—terrible troubles over water.

GESELBRACHT: There is a wonderful letter in your father's papers, from Truman to your father, written just shortly before your father died. When was that?

BORENSTINE: October 25, 1955.

GESELBRACHT: The letter was written in June. Truman writes about a trip they are going to take to Europe and Israel. Did your father mention this?

BORENSTINE: Oh, they were so excited about it, both of them, really excited. And then Daddy died. Joe and I had been fishing. We came home, really tired, and mother called us in the middle of the night and said "Daddy is really sick. You better come over." Well, my husband would not step out of his house without shaving and fixing himself up. He wasn't a vain man but he had his ideas, and it was taking a while to get on our way. Mother called back and said "You better get here pretty quick. Daddy's sick." I think he was gone by then.

Oh, I forgot to tell you a story. I was going to tell you about how I got engaged. It was the night Truman was elected Vice President, the night of the election in 1944. I was then living at home and I was having a party down in that recreation room we talked about earlier. After everybody left Joe stayed behind, and he asked me to marry him and I said ok. It was very late. Joe left and went home and I went to bed. In the morning I got up and Daddy wasn't there, he had gone to downtown Kansas City to see Vice President-elect Truman. Joe called and said "Well, have you talked to your parents?" And I said "No, I wanted to know this was so—that you were still going to marry me—in daylight." And he said "I'll be out there in a minute," and I said "Daddy isn't here. We don't know where he is." So Joe came out and picked me up. I must tell you that my mother and my father adored Joe. Mother sewed a button on his coat that morning before we left, and this thrilled him to death. He had no mother. We drove down to Daddy's office downtown and his office mate said he was someplace in the Ridge Building at 9th and Walnut. Do you know if the Ridge Building still exists? The back end of it went into the Commerce Bank.

GESELBRACHT: I don't think so, though I'm not sure.

BORENSTINE: There was an arcade in the building, and in that arcade was Frank Spina's barber shop. He was Truman's barber. When we went to look for my father at his office, they told us he was over at Frank's getting all spiffed up to go see the vice president-elect. So sure enough, he was getting his hair trimmed and a shave at Frank Spina's place. Joe and I went in and explained that we wanted to get married. Daddy was very excited, but he said "You can't do it." And I said "What's the matter? Joe wants to take me out and buy me a ring right now." And

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he said “Well, not until we go see the vice president.” So we walked to the Muehlebach Hotel at 12th and Baltimore, and there were Secret Service men all around, and they all knew Daddy, and we went right up to “the penthouse”—the presidential suite on the eleventh floor. Truman was sitting at the baby grand piano, strumming on it. We walked right over to him and Daddy said “My daughter wants to marry this fella.” And Truman looked Joe up and down for a minute and said “Major, that’s a good idea.” Joe and I left and Daddy stayed there and they visited some more. That’s how I always tell everybody how I got engaged. I couldn’t have a ring until after Truman approved of Joe.

GESELBRACHT: Truman called him “major?”

BORENSTINE: That’s right. Joe was a major in the Army. That’s why he couldn’t get out of the Army. They wanted to make him a lieutenant colonel. But he didn’t want to be a lieutenant colonel, he wanted to be out of the Army. It was very difficult to get out.

GESELBRACHT: So the marriage was approved by Truman.

BORENSTINE: The marriage was approved by Truman. Otherwise it wouldn’t have taken place, I can tell you.

I had promised Joe something. He was getting ready to go overseas again. He had been two years in the South Pacific, and now his evacuation hospital was heading to Europe. I said to him “If you are going to be in the United States someplace so I can know where you every day of the week, then I will come out and marry you, wherever you are.” So sure enough he called me and told me to come to him and we would get married. Well, at that time, when Joe called me, my father was in a duck blind someplace in the State of Missouri. We had the sheriff of every county between Kansas City and St. Louis looking for Eddie Jacobson. I was leaving that same day that Joe called to go out to the dropping off place of the world, Ft. Bragg, North Carolina—oh my god, what a horrible place!—to get married. And we couldn’t find my father. My whole family was sitting in the living room of my parent’s house. At about 8:00 p.m.—my train was leaving for union station at 9:00 p.m.—the front door opened and an arm came through with ducks hanging from it. Daddy went “Wha, wha, wha, wha,” which he always did when he had ducks, and I said “I’m going away to marry Joe.” “Oh bad idea,” he said, and I said “It doesn’t matter. I’m going. [laughter] Lou Gershon gave me \$100 and bought my ticket this morning. I’m going to get married.” So he said, “Wait, I’ve got to go get dressed.” So he quickly got out of his hunting clothes and into something suitable to take me to Union Station to go marry Joe.

That’s the story of my marriage.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father ever talk to you about his decision not to allow himself to be put forward for President of Israel?

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BORENSTINE: Oh yeah. Truman's assistants teased him unmercifully, and he just laughed at them. He told us every time he went to the White House, "Matt Connelly was after me." Matt was always calling him Drew Pearson. They teased each other. I've told you about how Daddy loved to laugh and loved to tease, and Truman's assistants were always getting back at him.

Daddy didn't want to be president of Israel. He wanted to have his little store.

GESELBRACHT: Elinor, thank you very much. Are there any other things you want to record?

BORENSTINE: No, that's everything.

GESELBRACHT: I'm going to interview your sister tomorrow.

BORENSTINE: You will find my sister very different. She is reserved, quiet. She doesn't have a big mouth like I do!

GESELBRACHT: Well that might be unfortunate for an oral historian, though.

BORENSTINE: She'll remember a lot of things, and do get her to tell you the story of Chaim Herzog. I think it's the best story of all, about his visit to Truman at his home in Independence.

Gloria and I had a different kind of relationship. I think she was more like a daughter to me than a sister. When she was 13 years old, she had scarlet fever, which left her with a permanently damaged heart. She was very ill, and I quit my job and stayed home with her. My grandmother Rosenbaum, my mother's mother, was dying at the time and mother was busy taking care of her. I took care of Gloria and so we developed a different kind of relationship. We're almost ten years apart in age, and I've always looked on her as one of my daughters. She was not a daddy's girl like I was. She was a mama's girl, though she won't admit it. I was insufferable, I was such a nut about my father.

GESELBRACHT: Thank you, Elinor, for giving the Truman Library this fine interview.