

Oral History Interview with Gloria Schusterman

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 24th, 2010 and I am Ray Geselbracht of the Harry S. Truman Library. I am here with Gloria Schusterman in her home in West Palm Beach, Florida. Could you talk a little bit about the family background of your father and your mother and where they were from?

SCHUSTERMAN: My father's family came from Russia. My father's father was one of three brothers, all of whom escaped from the Russian Army. They were so afraid they would be caught and returned, that when they reached Ellis Island they took different names, went different directions and my side of the family has lost contact with the other two brothers and their families.

Our family history is very hard to trace on my father's side. After my grandfather married, the family lived in New York for two years until my dad was two years old. And then, since my grandmother Jacobson was in ill health, her doctor advised that they move out of New York, away from all the car fumes, and get into the Midwest where there was fresher air, supposedly. They moved to Leavenworth, Kansas. They didn't live there very long, not more than a few years, and then they moved down to Kansas City.

GESELBRACHT: Was there a relative in Leavenworth that drew your grandfather and grandmother there?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, I think it was my grandmother's sister. I'm not certain about that.

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

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes.

GESELBRACHT: And was there a sense of a multi-generational family?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes. My dad couldn't afford to buy his own home. After he and Harry lost the store, they each went to live with their in-laws. So, I grew up in my grandparent's house—my mother's parents—until the age of about 15, and that's when my dad was able to buy his own home. This was about 1945. By that time my grandfather was gone, but my grandmother came to live with us in our house. So I was always aware of the past generation of our family. I was very close to my grandmother.

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GESELBRACHT: Was your mother's family more important to you than your father's family?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, because of course I lived with my mother's parents for so long.

GESELBRACHT: Just to establish some chronology, Eddie Jacobson was born in 1891. Harry Truman, who we'll be talking about also, was born in 1884, so he was seven years older than your father. And you were born in 1930, is that correct?

SCHUSTERMAN: Right.

GESELBRACHT: So your first memories will be in the mid- to late-1930s.

SCHUSTERMAN: Right, mid-1930s.

GESELBRACHT: How did your parents meet?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, my mother had two sisters, both older, and a brother. My dad dated one of the elder sisters first, but then started dating my mother, the little sister. And so that's how they met.

GESELBRACHT: Was the story of how they met told very often in your family?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't remember that it was.

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

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, the earliest I guess—I used to sit on his lap a lot and I'd grab the nose off of his face and hold my finger up and say, "Here it is," and that sort of thing. And of course my dad was bald, and we would tease him about that and he'd say, "Oh, I forgot to put my hair on this morning." Things like that. (laughter) And also, of course, he would take me fishing.

GESELBRACHT: Would you talk a little bit about your early memories of your father and fishing?

SCHUSTERMAN: When I was six years old, that was in 1936, we had a heat wave, a terrible heat wave in Kansas City. My grandfather died in July, and we decided to get out of Kansas City for a while. It was terribly hot. We left in three cars—family, mostly family—and one car full of friends, and we made a caravan and drove north to Minnesota. We rented a great big family house. It was like a farm, but it was on a lake. And my dad would take me down early in the morning and we would dig in the garden and catch our bait, catch worms. And then he'd take me down to the dock, and we would fish.

GESELBRACHT: Did you and he fish very often in following years?

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SCHUSTERMAN: Well, whenever we had a chance. We had friends who had a home on Lake Lotawana near Kansas City, and we'd visit them frequently and that was an opportunity to fish.

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

SCHUSTERMAN: The second category. My dad was very easygoing. Even when he was living with his in-laws, I never heard him say a cross word in our home. And I also never heard a cuss word from his mouth. (laughter) He was very relaxed and easygoing.

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

SCHUSTERMAN: Both. I admired him greatly.

GESELBRACHT: Did your mother have the same kind of personality that your father had?

SCHUSTERMAN: She was a little stricter, but easygoing also, I think. But she, yes, she was a little more forceful.

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

SCHUSTERMAN: He was outgoing and sociable. My family had a lot of friends and they were good friends. I called them usually my "aunt" and "uncle."

GESELBRACHT: So you had a lot of aunts and uncles?

SCHUSTERMAN: A lot of them. (laughter)

GESELBRACHT: Usually, although someone can have a lot of friends, only a few of these friends are really close friends. Sometimes a person has only one really close friendship? Who were your father's closest friends? Did he have a best friend?

SCHUSTERMAN: That's real hard for me to say because I was young. But, yes, Harry of course was one of his best friends. And then he played poker with a group of probably eight people. They were my family's closest friends, social friends. My father and Harry had a different kind of relationship, really, between only the two of them. And it was based on mutual admiration. I think they shared the same values—honesty and integrity. They were very close.

GESELBRACHT: Now how could you see that they were close? What were the manifestations of their friendship for you as a young person in the household?

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SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, that's hard for me to remember. (laughter) It just always was that way.

GESELBRACHT: Did you father ever say something like "He is my best friend," or was their friendship more something you could sense without its being talked about?

SCHUSTERMAN: It was something sensed, that's right. I don't ever remember discussing it with my dad and him saying, "He was my best friend." But it was always something that was there. And Harry was always either in our conversation or actually around us.

GESELBRACHT: Did you understand that there was this special friendship, even when you were very young?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, yes. I can tell you my first memory of Harry Truman.

GESELBRACHT: Yes, please do.

SCHUSTERMAN: I was five years old. I was what they called a "mid-year" student. In those days, you started school when you were five, or close to your fifth birthday. Well, my birthday is in February, so I started the semester in January when I was almost five, in 1935. And I was a mid-year student. After Harry was elected to the Senate, he went to Washington for the first time to find a place to live at almost exactly the time I was starting school. His plane left very early in the morning, I don't remember whether it was six or seven, but I had to get up very early. And my dad wanted to take me to the airport because this was a big event, when Truman went to Washington for the first time. My mother said no, I had to go to school. And there was a little confrontation there about that, there was a discussion about that. My dad said, "I think this is important and she'll remember it." And of course I was standing there listening at the time to all that was going on, and he turned to me and he said, "You'll remember it, won't you?" And I said, "Of course." (laughter) And I do remember it. We got to go to the airport very early in the morning. When my parents had been discussing my going, my mother had said, "But she has school and she can't miss school already." I had only been in school maybe a week. My dad said, "She'll be smart a day later." (laughter) So he won the argument. I was allowed to go. My sister went too, and we saw Truman off to Washington. And that was my first memory of him.

GESELBRACHT: Are there other subsequent permanent memories of Harry Truman that are particularly important to you?

SCHUSTERMAN: To me personally? As I said, I knew about him, all through the years. I don't seem to remember anything else until I was maybe in my early teens. I kept that first memory because it was very important and I had promised to remember Harry's leaving for Washington. When I was in my teens—I think Harry became vice-president then.

GESELBRACHT: In January 1944. You were fourteen.

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SCHUSTERMAN: Fourteen—alright. I was also starting to date. One night, when we had just bought our first house—this was 1945—my father and his friends had a poker game. We had a recreation room in our basement and that's where they played poker. And the gang came to play poker. Harry was coming too. First of all, the Secret Service men came to stake out the house. They came early in the morning, and that was impressive. They found a couple of basement windows that we had grates on that they didn't like. And they fixed everything and got ready for the poker game. Harry was the first one to arrive, and he came in the house. Of course, my dad was proud to show him around the new house.

GESELBRACHT: Was this the house on 72nd Street?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes. We had a little room right off of the living room, almost like a den, and that's where my piano was. And of course, I was taking piano lessons. So, Harry saw the piano, and he said, "Who plays?" And I said, "I do." And he said, "Well, play something for me." I was shy and said something like "Oh, no, I couldn't do that." He said "Sure you can. I'll help you. Let's sit down together." So we sat down together. And I got some music out of the bench and put it up on the piano. And he said "Let's play a duet." He said "I'll play the right hand and you play the left hand." And that's what we did. (laughter) And he said that most people thought his favorite song was "The Missouri Waltz." And he said "Frankly, it's not. It's not that I don't like it, but I'm a little tired of hearing it." And he said "So let's not play that. Let's just play this music." And that's what we did, we played the music I had put up on the piano.

GESELBRACHT: Do you remember other poker games at your parents' house?

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, yes. (laughter) I remember frequent poker games. The men in Battery D would take turns hosting the games, and they'd go from one house to the other, you know. So every few months they'd end up at our house.

GESELBRACHT: Did the games continue after Truman became president?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, I don't think they did after he became president. He did come back as president when my dad bought his store on 39th and Main in Kansas City, and that was very exciting. The police blocked off the intersection from all four directions. And traffic stopped, and the press was there and they took pictures, and it was very exciting for everybody, except my mother. The Secret Service told my dad not to breathe a word about the President coming to my father's store. So, of course, he didn't breathe a word, not even to my mother. And afterwards I remember she kept saying, "But I'm your wife!" (laughter) My dad said, "Well, I promised them I wouldn't say anything, so I didn't."
(laughter)

GESELBRACHT: There's a very famous photograph of the two of them in the store, the Westport store. That must be from that same visit.

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Could you describe a few of your father's faults? This question is intended to put you in a difficult place, but I'm assuming that everybody has a few faults.

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, I'm sure they do. I'm trying to think. Of course, as I say, I was pretty young and he was my hero, my favorite dad. (laughter) I can't think right now of any faults. I guess in my eyes he was pretty faultless. My mother, though, found a few faults, and one, of course, was his weight. He liked to eat, my dad liked to eat. And he had a hypertension problem and he should not have carried the weight that he did. So that was one fault. (laughter)

GESELBRACHT: Did your parents ever quarrel?

SCHUSTERMAN: Certainly not in front of us. No I don't think they did. I think they were very happy.

GESELBRACHT: It sounds like a very happy house.

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, it was.

GESELBRACHT: What hobbies did your father enjoy?

SCHUSTERMAN: Fishing and hunting, I think that's about it. He worked pretty hard for many, many years before he bought his store. He sold shirts and pajamas for the Shirtcraft Company out of New York, and he traveled a few states, Kansas and Missouri, and maybe Arkansas a little bit, I don't remember. He worked a lot and he was gone a lot. From Monday to Friday he was traveling.

GESELBRACHT: Was he typically gone every week on the road?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, probably not every week, but close to it. He traveled a lot.

GESELBRACHT: Did he, was he a kind of person that spoke often about the past, bygone people and places?

SCHUSTERMAN: Not to my knowledge, not in front of me.

GESELBRACHT: Did he talk much about his World War I experience?

SCHUSTERMAN: No.

GESELBRACHT: And about that famous canteen that he and Lieutenant Truman started?

SCHUSTERMAN: Not to my memory, but don't forget I was only 25 when he died and didn't enjoy a great many years with him, listening to his stories.

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

SCHUSTERMAN: Probably his family.

GESELBRACHT: I found a letter in your father's papers, dated July 22, 1950. It's a letter from Truman to your father, a brief letter, not of much consequence. But it has a postscript which says "Take care of yourself." This is underlined. "I sure don't want to send flowers to Mrs. Jacobson for you." What was happening in July of 1950? How was his health at that time?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, by then he had started having attacks and had high blood pressure. I'm sure that's what the postscript refers to. He had attacks off and on. In those days doctors didn't know, of course, what they know now. And although he was on medication at times, there wasn't much help available at that time. And, of course, that's what he eventually died from.

GESELBRACHT: When you look back on those last years of his life and maybe dwell a little bit on the fact that he died at what would be regarded as a young age now, do you blame it on anything—on something in his life that, had it been different, he would have lived longer?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, towards the end, his association with Harry, especially around the time when Israel was being founded, and all his many trips back and forth to Washington were highly exciting to him. And things like that would make his blood pressure go up at times. In fact, when we went to Washington for the inauguration and checked into our hotel, people started calling, "Eddie, can you get me a ticket to this function? Can you get me a ticket to the dinner at the hotel? Can you get me...", you know, "I need a ticket to," this or that or the other. And with all that excitement and pressure, his blood pressure went up to the point that the day of Harry's inauguration in 1949, he had an attack, and we had to call the hotel doctor, and the hotel doctor said, "You're to stay in bed today." And he missed the inauguration.

GESELBRACHT: Oh my, oh my, I had no idea of that.

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes. That was a trauma for all of us.

GESELBRACHT: I imagine. Did you stay with him?

SCHUSTERMAN: We wanted to, we wanted to stay in the hotel with him. And, of course, I could see the blood start to rise in his cheeks and his head when we suggested this to him and my mother and I said "Never mind, we'll go. You stay here and relax, we'll go." My sister didn't come to Washington for the inauguration, but that's what happened, my mother and I went alone. It was a cold, cold, damp day and we sat right across from the reviewing stand. But our thoughts were back at the hotel.

GESELBRACHT: Did Truman know your father wasn't there?

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SCHUSTERMAN: Not at the time. My father was able to watch the inauguration on TV, but he was disappointed that he couldn't go.

GESELBRACHT: Maybe everyone has at least a few regrets when they get to be older. What do you think your father's regrets were?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't know. I remember the day he died, of course. I was living in Tulsa with my two little ones, my husband and two little ones. We drove to Kansas City, and I remember walking in the house and seeing all the people. It was early morning, and all the people were sitting around the living room, but my mother wasn't there, and they told me she was upstairs. So I went up to her bedroom and she was in bed, propped up on pillows. I hugged her and we cried. But then she started to talk and she said, "You know, your dad said to me he had no regrets, and he accomplished most of the things that he wanted to in life," and she said, "that's certainly a blessing." And I remember that vividly. I assume she was right, that he accomplished most of the things that he wanted to do. And that was unique, a lot of people don't feel that way.

GESELBRACHT: Yes, he was a very fortunate man. And one of the things he felt good about is that he had both daughters well married and with lots of grandchildren by that time.

SCHUSTERMAN: (laughter) That's right.

GESELBRACHT: What happened to his business after he died?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, my sister worked in the business, and they carried on at the old location, 39th and Main, for a while, I don't remember for how many years. My sister would know about this better than I. Then they opened a new store in a shopping center called The Landing. They carried the business on there for a number of years, I don't remember how many, and then they finally closed it down.

GESELBRACHT: I found in looking through your father's papers an item that really surprised me. I have to admit that I looked at it several times to see if I was misunderstanding something, but—how did your father happen to become a Mason?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't know. I know he always wore his Masonic ring, he was proud of it.

GESELBRACHT: Do you know what lodge he went to?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't.

GESELBRACHT: Or if he ever went, maybe he never went to meetings?

SCHUSTERMAN: I think he did. It seems like he did, but I really don't know.

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GESELBRACHT: Who do you think your father would select as the three people that he most admired?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, of course, Harry would be one of them. And I'm sure my mother would be another. We had close friends, and I can't really say which one of them would be the third.

GESELBRACHT: But he wasn't the kind of person who would pick Abraham Lincoln or Queen Victoria, or someone of that kind as his heroes.

SCHUSTERMAN: To my knowledge, no, he didn't pick heroes like that. My dad didn't finish high school, and he didn't know too much history. Most of them, most of the children in the family when he was growing up—there were six children—had to quit high school at age 15 and go to work to help the family, because my grandfather was a tailor, didn't speak much English, and wasn't very successful. So I don't think any of the children finished high school.

GESELBRACHT: How often do you think your father and Harry Truman saw one another from the time you were a little girl until you left home to be married in 1949?

SCHUSTERMAN: That's hard for me to say, I don't know. I know when Harry was in Washington and my dad went to New York on business for the Shirtcraft Company, he would always come back through Washington and see Harry. When Harry became president, the guards at the White House all got to know my father and would say, "Hello, Eddie." (laughter) And, I don't know, that probably was a couple of times a year. But beyond this, I don't know how many times my father saw Harry, until things relating to Israel heated up in 1947 and 1948. Then I know he started making many, many trips to the White House. I was with my father on one of his visits to Harry, because I remember going on a tour through the White House. I'm not sure how old I was, but we had evidently been traveling and we went to Washington.

GESELBRACHT: So that would have been 1945 or later. You were 15 in 1945.

SCHUSTERMAN: That's true.

GESELBRACHT: And you married at 19, in 1949, so was it in between those two times?

SCHUSTERMAN: I imagine.

GESELBRACHT: What kind of a tour did you have?

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, all through the White House, even the pool and the private quarters—everything.

GESELBRACHT: Did you visit Bess when you went to the family quarters?

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SCHUSTERMAN: No, I don't know that the Trumans were there at the time.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father ever spend, or perhaps yourself also, a night at the White House?

SCHUSTERMAN: No.

GESELBRACHT: Did he ever speak about that, whether he would want to spend the night at the White House or not?

SCHUSTERMAN: No.

GESELBRACHT: Did you ever go with your father to the Truman home in Independence?

SCHUSTERMAN: No.

GESELBRACHT: Did you see Bess very often?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, this was a friendship between Harry and Eddie, and it was a special friendship. But it wasn't a family affair. Harry and my father understood each other's problems and I don't think any questions were asked.

GESELBRACHT: So the Trumans never came over to your house for dinner, kind of thing?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, only Harry came, to play poker. (laughter)

GESELBRACHT: And was there ever any talk in the family at all about "Why don't we ever go over to the Truman home?"

SCHUSTERMAN: Not to my knowledge. My dad was a private man and these things didn't come up around the house. My dad was in the Truman home once in Independence, but I don't think Bess ever knew about it.

GESELBRACHT: What was that occasion?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, it was a special occasion alright. (laughter) It was probably around 1952. My husband was doing business with an Israeli at that time, and this man was in Tulsa, and we invited him to our home for dinner. And after dinner I said to him—I don't even remember his name now—I said "I have something in my office I think you might be interested in seeing." So I took him into our little office and I showed him one of the pens that Truman used to sign the *de jure* Recognition of Israel. It was hanging on my wall. And he really got excited. He said, "Oh, my goodness," he said, "I can't wait to get home and tell Chaim." At that time, the president of Israel was Chaim Herzog, and he and this man were friends. And he said,

“I have lunch with Chaim every Thursday, and I can’t wait to tell him what I saw.” So that was the end.

Then, a few weeks later, we got a letter from a Mr. Lior, who was Secretary to the President of Israel. It said that the President was aware that I had this pen, and he would really like to have it, or borrow it, so that people who came to Beit Hanassi, which is the president’s house in Israel, could see it and enjoy it. And so we discussed it, through letters. I think my husband answered the letter and told him that we were coming to Israel shortly, and that we would discuss it. He said that they would have it picked up by private courier and they would take good care of it, and so forth. Well, when we got to Israel, I went to Beit Hanassi. I made an appointment with Mr. Lior. My husband was sick that day and he had to stay in the hotel, so I went by myself. I talked with him for a long time, and by the end of our conversation we made arrangements for him to borrow the pen. So at the end of the conversation, he said “Mrs. Schusterman, the President is in his office today and he is aware that you’re here, and he’d really like to meet you.” So there I sat in my blue jeans, and I thought, “Oh my goodness, the President of Israel!” But Mr. Lior said, “No, that’s perfectly fine, he’ll be happy to meet you.” So I was ushered into his office, and we talked for probably 20 minutes or so. He was a charming man, and a remarkable man. He was not young, but he had a fantastic memory. And he said, at the end of our conversation actually, he said, “The last time I remember seeing your father must have been about 1952, because at that time I was in the States and I had a troop of young Israelis with me at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.” They were studying the Lance missile that the United States was getting ready to send to Israel. Since Leavenworth was very near to Kansas City, he said that he and some of the boys would come into Kansas City every weekend and have breakfast at Bretton’s downtown, which was the only kosher restaurant in the city at that time. And he said the Jewish community was very welcoming and always enjoyed having them at Bretton’s for breakfast. So he was there with some of the boys the last Sunday before they were to leave and go back to Israel, and while they were having breakfast, he thought, “You know, I’d really like to see President Truman one more time before I leave.” He had met Truman in Washington many times. So he went to the phone and he called my dad. He said, “Eddie, could you get me an appointment to see the President this morning?” It was a Sunday morning. My dad said, “Well, I’ll call him, I’ll try.” So, a few minutes later, my dad called back and he was paged to the phone and my dad said, “You know, President Truman is sick this morning. He has a very bad cold, and he promised Bess that he wouldn’t have company this weekend, he would just relax and try to get well and get rid of this cold. So, he’s really sorry he can’t see you.” Herzog thought, “Well, I’m sorry, too,” you know. He went back to breakfast and about 30 minutes later, he was paged to the phone again, and it was my dad with something new. “Do you still want to see the President?” my dad asked. And Herzog said, “Of course, why?” My dad said, “Well, Harry just called me back and said, ‘Bess went to church. If you’ll get in the car right now and come right now, if you’ll drive around the driveway and come to the back of the house and come in the kitchen so that the neighbors won’t see I’m having company and tell Bess, I’ll be happy to see him.’” So they did, they drove out to the Truman home.

Herzog took a few of the soldiers with him, just three or four, and they picked up my dad and they went to Independence. They went around to the back of the house and they went into the

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kitchen. And Herzog said he didn't want to bombard Truman with all of these boys—there were about four of them, I think, in the car—because Truman was sick. So he just took—let me think a minute—he only took one in, and I think it was Moshe Dayan. And he left Yitzhak Rabin in the car, and a couple of the other boys, whose names I have forgotten. One was “Raffi” something. Anyway, they went in the back door and they sat down in the kitchen at the kitchen table, and they had a nice chat. Herzog was British, and he said they had “a very nice chat” with the President. And they had coffee, and just when they were getting ready to leave, he said, “Mr. President, if you had one piece of advice to give me, what would it be?” Harry banged on the table and said without any hesitation “Don't believe one God damned word those State Department men tell you.” (laughter) And that's my story.

GESELBRACHT: And that story was all told to you by Chaim Herzog in what year?

SCHUSTERMAN: It was in the '60s, I don't remember what year.

GESELBRACHT: So that was the only time that your father was in the Truman home.

SCHUSTERMAN: That's right. (laughter) I'm being honest with Bess now, and with the neighbors.

GESELBRACHT: Did you ever go with your father to visit Truman and his mother, Martha Ellen Truman, at her home in Grandview?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, on the occasion of her 90th birthday, in November 1942. I was twelve years old. We went to an open house which she had. We went through a receiving line, and I remember when we got to her, she was seated in a chair. I think Vivian was next to her and Mary Jane also. And when we got there, one of them—I think it was Vivian—said “Mama, this is Eddie and this is his daughter.” And she said, “Oh yes, I know.” (laughter) That's about all I remember about it.

GESELBRACHT: So the door to the house was open and the neighbors were coming through and things like that?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes. My only memory is that I saw her sitting in her home and she seemed to know who we were.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father talk about Truman very often? What kind of thing would he say about him, if you remember any talk of that sort?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't really remember any talk until around probably 1945, 1946, and 1947. At that time my dad was beginning to go to some Zionist meetings in Kansas City. He was invited to come. My dad didn't know much about Zionism and he was not a Zionist, but they invited him to come to their meetings and learn, and he learned quite a bit. At that time things were heating up in Palestine and the Zionists wanted to create a state there. And, of

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course, the Arabs didn't. And you know the history of that time better than I, but I'd hear things like that around the house when my dad had to go to so and so's house for a Zionist meeting. And I remember things that were said around the house at that time about the situation. I certainly wasn't interested in politics at that time.

GESELBRACHT: How would you describe what happened to your father with respect to Zionism during this period of time? Presumably he began without any understanding of Zionism as you say, and maybe he didn't even think about Palestine before he started attending these meetings.

SCHUSTERMAN: That's right.

GESELBRACHT: And then, by 1948, he could write very passionately about "my people" when referring to the Jews in Palestine. I'm thinking of his account of his famous meeting with Truman in 1948 where he persuaded Truman to meet with Chaim Weizmann. Could you see steps along the way of your father's transformation?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, he learned a lot from these meetings that he went to. I can't say my dad was not a religious man, because he was, really. If he was in town on a Friday night, which he usually was by the time we're talking about, he and my mother would go to temple, to Temple B'nai Jehudah, which they belonged to. It was a reformed congregation. It was not Orthodox by any means. My dad and the rabbi were very friendly, and my mother and father went and enjoyed the service. So he was not irreligious, but not overly religious either. And he didn't really know about Zionism and things like that. So, yes, as he found out more and learned more, I guess he became passionate about Zionism.

GESELBRACHT: Did the transformation take very long?

SCHUSTERMAN: Probably just those couple of years, 1946 to 1948.

GESELBRACHT: It wasn't the kind of change that happened suddenly, in a single meeting maybe, where he came home and said "Oh, what I just learned has opened my eyes?"

SCHUSTERMAN: No, no. But I remember that he and my mother did discuss the meetings. I didn't listen to those discussions, I wasn't interested, but I know they discussed the meetings. And my dad never joined the Zionist organization.

GESELBRACHT: Were these meetings with Frank Goldman and Maurice Bisgyer from B'nai B'rith. I understand they would come to Kansas City to meet with your father?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, yes, that happened too. But the meetings I'm talking about were with Kansas City Zionists. The only name I remember was Peiser, because their daughter Nancy and I went to high school together, and I think her mother's name was Nell. The meetings my dad attended were at the Peiser home, usually.

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GESELBRACHT: I didn't know about these meetings. I knew of those with the two men from B'nai B'rith.

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, my dad did belong to B'nai B'rith, and so he probably went to B'nai B'rith meetings, also. And when the regional or national members came to town, he probably met with them.

GESELBRACHT: Was your father invited to these meetings because of his friendship with Harry Truman?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, no. He belonged to the B'nai B'rith group, and he went to their meetings.

GESELBRACHT: What about the meetings at the Peiser home?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, I think he was invited to those because they were courting him, as Truman's friend.

GESELBRACHT: I've gotten off my script a little bit, so I'm going to back up a little. Apart from what one can read in Frank Adler's book about the B'nai Jehudah congregation in Kansas City, *Roosts in a Moving Stream*, and also in your father's autobiographical account, do you know anything more about how your father and Harry Truman first got to know each other?

SCHUSTERMAN: That I don't remember. Both my father and Harry were both working in Kansas City when they met. My dad had quit high school, and, of course, Harry was seven years older and he was working in a bank, making money to help his family. They worked down the street from each other. Harry worked for the Union Bank, I think it was, and my dad worked for an Army Navy store. That's where my dad learned merchandising and men's clothing and things like that. And they met, I guess, just from working in the same area of town. And they'd go to lunch together, and things like that. And they'd spend time on weekends together. So they became friendly.

GESELBRACHT: We hear about them being together in Kansas City in about 1905 or 1906, the exact time is a little uncertain, but when Harry was working at Union Bank, which he did only for about a year. We hear about them then, they were working very near one another. Maybe your father had come to the bank for some reason, and met Harry there.

SCHUSTERMAN: Probably.

GESELBRACHT: And then we next hear about them in 1917.

SCHUSTERMAN: In the Reserves.

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GESELBRACHT: Yes, when they went to Camp Doniphan. I think your father was simply assigned to Lieutenant Truman as a supply sergeant, I don't know any better than that. But do you know of any contact between Truman and your father between 1906 and 1917?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't. Of course, I wasn't around then. I do know that Truman went back to the farm from the bank. And I don't know how long my dad worked at the Army Navy store. Maybe until he entered the Reserves, I don't know. My sister probably has told you better than I, because she's older than I am and has a better memory than I have.

GESELBRACHT: From what I can determine so far, all that is known about this early period is what your father wrote in the autobiographical account and told Frank Adler, the author of *Roots in a Moving Stream*. Did your father talk very often about the haberdashery?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, but he only said that he and Harry were partners in the business.

GESELBRACHT: Was it a sad memory for him?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't know. When they lost the store, it was certainly sad, and a lot of worry and concern for both of them.

GESELBRACHT: I'm sure.

SCHUSTERMAN: But that was before my time.

GESELBRACHT: But it doesn't sound like it's something he dwelled on at all, saying, "If only I hadn't got into that, I'd have a big house today," or something like that.

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, I never heard him say anything like that, no.

GESELBRACHT: When Truman's father lay on the bed dying, I can't remember where I read this, but allegedly he lay there expressing deep regret that he had lost all of his money more than ten years earlier. He died in 1914, and he lost all of his money in about 1902. And I think Truman's father felt that he had somehow failed in his duties as a man, you know, as a head of family. Your father doesn't seem to have been troubled by that same kind of feeling.

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't think he was. I grew up in a happy household, and my dad had certain sayings that showed he was very content. Such sayings as, "An apple a day is a good thing, it keeps the doctor away," and "good food is better than medicine," and that sort of thing. And of course as I've said he was overweight and he loved to eat, and that was one of his things.

GESELBRACHT: When I think about the failure of the haberdashery, I feel that maybe it's a remarkable thing that the friendship survived that shock.

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SCHUSTERMAN: Well, I think it is a remarkable thing. But as I say, they shared the same values, and they knew it wasn't anything they could control at the time. It was just the way things were, and they didn't blame each other.

GESELBRACHT: Do you think your father was ever envious of the success that Harry Truman enjoyed fairly quickly after the haberdashery?

SCHUSTERMAN: No.

GESELBRACHT: Can you say more?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, but I know how thrilled my father was to take me down to the airport to see him off to Washington. I don't think that was envy. My dad was not a political animal, not really. Until, you know, Harry ran for election, and then things were different. Another thing—I remember that my dad rode on the train with Harry once, coming back to Kansas City from Washington.

GESELBRACHT: Oh.

SCHUSTERMAN: You didn't know that?

GESELBRACHT: No.

SCHUSTERMAN: What was the train called?

GESELBRACHT: The Ferdinand Magellan.

SCHUSTERMAN: Ferdinand Magellan, right. Yes, he said that was very exciting, to see the crowds turn out.

GESELBRACHT: Was that an occasion where he had just gone on business to New York or something like that?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't know. I have something in my scrapbook about it, though. I think I have a picture of the Ferdinand Magellan, probably an article about my dad being on the train. Actually, the train stopped in Kansas City, and Harry made a speech in Kansas City. And then they ran out of money, and so my dad called a bunch of his friends together and raised money to send Harry on to Provo, Utah. They felt that Provo was a very important stop for him to make for some reason at that time. And in Provo he made a speech and they presented him with a gold watch that was inscribed "To Harry Truman From Provo, Utah." And Harry took the watch and had "To Harry Truman" scratched out and put "To Eddie Jacobson From Harry Truman, Provo, Utah," or something like that. And my son has that watch now.

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GESELBRACHT: That's wonderful. We should try to photograph it, to have a photograph in the Library's files.

SCHUSTERMAN: Okay, well, I think my son would be happy to let you do that.

GESELBRACHT: We could include the photograph in your father's papers.

SCHUSTERMAN: It's a pocket watch, I think. No, wait a minute, that one was a wristwatch, I think. One of my son's hobbies is photography, and he'd be happy to take a picture for you.

GESELBRACHT: That would be very, very good. Did your mother ever talk very much about Harry and Bess Truman?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't think so. I'm sure she did with my dad, but nothing that I can remember.

GESELBRACHT: The story about what was happening to the Jews in Europe started coming out of Europe in the 1930's. Was your father aware of these stories at that early time?

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, yes he was.

GESELBRACHT: In the '30s?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes.

GESELBRACHT: And did he have strong feelings regarding them?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, yes, I think most Jews did when they began to find out what was occurring. I remember on Saturday going to a movie, when I was very young—it had to be in the 1930s, with my grandmother and my aunt and mother. And I remember they showed a newsreel about what was going on in Europe. And I remember—this I'll never forget—my grandmother stood up in the middle of that news reel and started shouting, "Those are my people! Those are my people!" And I remember my mother and my aunt kept saying, "Shhh. Mama, sit down, sit down. Shhh. Sit down." "No," she said, "that not just a picture, that's real!" And I remember that. So, you know, people were becoming aware at that time.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father ever, to the best of your memory, think about Palestine as a home for the Jews before he started going to the educational meetings we talked about earlier?

SCHUSTERMAN: Not to my knowledge.

GESELBRACHT: How important do you think Israel became to your father?

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SCHUSTERMAN: Very important. Yes, I think the excitement and the state of his health were all wrapped up together and I think that was one cause probably of his death at an early age with hypertension. It was very exciting to him to go to Washington and see the President of the United States, even though it was just Harry. (laughter) And I think it took a toll on him.

GESELBRACHT: When your father came home from his meetings with Truman—you were still living at home during the time he was meeting with Truman about Israel—one would think that when he came home he'd immediately sit down and say, "Listen to what happened to me this time," and tell the whole story to you. Did that kind of thing happen?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, no. My dad had quite a sense of humor, and I remember one time, I think this was the time that Harry visited him at the store [on June 28, 1945], his new store in Westport, and the Secret Service blocked the streets off and everything, and it was so exciting. I remember him coming in and saying, "Well, all you peasants, wait 'til I tell you this," (laughter) you know, things like that. He'd call us "commoners." (laughter) And of course that was his sense of humor, he would tell us about what had happened in that way, but not in any real detail.

GESELBRACHT: Did he talk about Chaim Weizmann very often?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, he didn't know Chaim Weizmann until he came to the United States in 1948. When my dad left his famous meeting with Truman of March 12, 1948, the one when he asked Truman to meet with Weizmann, he went to New York to tell Weizmann the result in person. That's when he met him.

GESELBRACHT: Did he say anything about meeting Weizmann after he came home?

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, yes. He thought Weizmann was a wonderful, wonderful man.

GESELBRACHT: He wrote a long account of his March 12, 1948 meeting with Truman. Did he tell you all about the meeting after he came home?

SCHUSTERMAN: You mean when he went to the White House?

GESELBRACHT: Yes.

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, yes. He told us about that.

GESELBRACHT: Do you remember what he told you about the meeting? I'm wondering whether he told you something which he didn't include in his written account.

SCHUSTERMAN: That was 1948, and I was in college, and I really wasn't at home a lot. I also wasn't really concerned a lot about international problems. My main concern was whether or not Dan Schusterman was going to ask me out next weekend. (laughter) I'm sorry to say I was such a giddy kid, but I was.

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GESELBRACHT: Could you describe your father's relationship with A. J. Granoff?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, they were very close. A. J. was his lawyer, and so knew a great deal about my dad. Yes, they were close friends.

GESELBRACHT: And do you know, did your father rely on him for assistance?

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes.

GESELBRACHT: Was there ever in the family any feeling of some problems in the relationship between your father and A. J. Granoff?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't think so. A. J.'s son, Loeb, was one of my very first dates in Kansas City by the way.

GESELBRACHT: I've gotten to know him somewhat.

SCHUSTERMAN: Have you?

GESELBRACHT: Yes. He gave the Truman Library his father's papers a number of years ago. I went to his home and looked through the papers there before they came to the Library. It was very interesting for me. Do you know if your father had any views about what the outcome would be of the relationship between the Jews and the Arabs? Was he hopeful that there would be peace?

SCHUSTERMAN: Of course. It was very upsetting, you know, that they went to war immediately. And I remember coming home from the University of Oklahoma, it must have been in 1948, right after Israel became a state. And I remember—I was home for the summer—and I remember my dad saying to me one night "There's going to be a special meeting of the Jewish community tonight at the hotel downtown." I think it was at the Muehlebach Hotel or somewhere. And he said "I'd like you to go with me." I didn't want to go to a UJA [United Jewish Appeal] meeting. Why would I want to go to something like that? And he said "I think you'll enjoy the speaker. I want you to hear the speaker. I think you'll be very impressed." Well, anyway, he insisted that I go, so I remember putting on my best dress and spending a long time putting on my makeup, my lipstick, just to look perfect as, of course, I had to do in those days as a teenager. That was very important. (laughter) I remember going to this dinner and the whole community was there. And out walks this little lady, the speaker—a little dumpy lady in a straight black dress, no makeup, hair back in a bun, a big orchid on her shoulder. And I thought "This is what I got dressed up to come down here for?" And then Golda Meyerson—later she became Golda Meir—started to speak. By the time she finished speaking, I was so moved. She told about the war that was going on, and about how that morning there were seven young Jewish soldiers who were killed in Jerusalem. And I thought "My God, they're the same age as my boyfriend, Dan." I mean, how could that be? I thought World War II was over and there would be no more killing of Jews. That was when I guess I woke up and I realized what was

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going on in the world. At that time, my dad was pretty involved and pretty passionate about the Jews and Israel. All Jews were beginning to wake up and find out what was going on in Europe, and they wanted the State of Israel to be a place for the Jews who had survived.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father and mother mention Ambassador James G. McDonald and his wife, Ruth, to you?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, they were at my wedding. Harry was president at the time and couldn't come to the wedding, so he sent Ambassador McDonald as his deputy, and I met him. And then in 1949 the Israeli government invited my mother and dad for an all-expense paid trip to Israel. I think they stayed with the McDonalds in Israel, so they met Ruth McDonald in Israel.

GESELBRACHT: There are several exchanges of correspondence in your father's papers with Ambassador McDonald, and Ruth McDonald would always write a little note to your mother.

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes.

GESELBRACHT: It seems they were quite good friends.

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, well they were long distance friends, but yes they kept in contact.

GESELBRACHT: The correspondence seems much beyond the polite and formal, as if there was some genuine friendship between your father and mother and Ambassador and Mrs. McDonald.

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, well he was quite a man.

GESELBRACHT: When your father came home from his trip to Israel in 1949, did he tell you about all the things he had seen?

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh yes. They had a professional photographer accompany them on the trip so we had pictures. I still have the pictures. I've had them changed from the big film reels to video cassettes. Yes, my dad talked a lot about that trip. In fact, I think he spoke at some churches and different places around Kansas City, telling about their trip. It must've been a wonderful trip. There were no straight flights at that time. There was no El Al airline, and they had to go through Europe. It was not an easy trip but they had a wonderful time over there, they got to see everything. And one of my dad's favorite stories when he came back was to tell us about a parade. "You know, we rode in the parade," that they had in Tel Aviv, I think, when they presented McDonald his papers as an ambassador and everybody turned out for this big parade and my mother and dad were in one of the cars. And he said one of his vivid memories and one of the most exciting things that happened occurred when they were driving down the street in this parade and some little boy on the side yelled "Look, there's Eddie!" (laughter)

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GESELBRACHT: Did you ever hear your father say anything critical about what the Truman administration was doing for Israel after Israel was recognized, any criticism that the United States was not doing enough?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, no. My dad was pretty much on the inside after that. I think he made something like 31 trips to Washington within 18 months. He went for a lot of meetings. He sat in on meetings with Truman and with different committees in which Golda Meir, she was Golda Meyerson at that time, participated. It was all very exciting to my dad. And he realized that Truman was doing all he could to facilitate the growth of the new state. There were talks about arms and ammunition and things like that, that Israel needed.

GESELBRACHT: And a loan as I remember. And of course there wasn't full recognition until January 1949.

SCHUSTERMAN: Right.

GESELBRACHT: Your sister Elinor mentioned that he was for a time the effective Israeli Ambassador to the United States.

SCHUSTERMAN: (laughter) Sort of, there was no other ambassador. He played that part, and there was some talk for a time that he should become the ambassador. But my dad had no political ambitions.

GESELBRACHT: There was talk for a while, too, of making him the President of Israel.

SCHUSTERMAN: Who? My dad? (laughs)

GESELBRACHT: Did he ever mention that?

SCHUSTERMAN: I don't remember that.

GESELBRACHT: You were married by that time.

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, he would have declined that invitation immediately.

GESELBRACHT: Yes, I guess there was serious talk about some kind of a candidacy, that his name would be put forward, and I think you're right, he just declined to run. And there's a letter in the file where Truman says something like "I hope you don't want that job."

SCHUSTERMAN: No, I'm sure he didn't want that job.

GESELBRACHT: Do you think he felt any personal responsibility regarding Israel? How do you describe the responsibility he felt toward Israel in those years after recognition?

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SCHUSTERMAN: Well, I felt he wanted to do all he could to help them.

GESELBRACHT: Gloria, thank you very, very much. Are there other memories that you think should be on the record?

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, Ray, I can't think of anything else right now. I have, you know, a lot of stories I can tell and have told to different people at different times, like the story I told you about Herzog. I could talk for hours, telling stories, but no, I can't think of anything else that should be included here. I think you covered a lot of important points.

GESELBRACHT: Thank you very much for having me here today and for allowing me to interview you.

SCHUSTERMAN: Well, thank you. It's one of my favorite subjects, of course, and I enjoyed it.

[Recording Stops, Resumes]

GESELBRACHT: Could you relate the Jacobson family story which you remember hearing in your home? It's about Truman, your father, and the KKK.

SCHUSTERMAN: Yes, that's right. This story is about something that took place when Truman was a county judge in Missouri and the KKK invited him to speak at one of their meetings. And they had this meeting in a cornfield, and they were there in their sheets, and hoods, and torches, and everything. And there was a platform built up. When Harry told my dad that he was going to this meeting, my dad said "Well, you're not going alone. If you're going to do this, I'm going with you." And Truman said "Oh no, you're not coming with me." And my dad insisted, "Yes I am, you're not going there by yourself." When he told my mother he was going to this meeting with Harry, my mother told him he couldn't go. "No, you can't do that, you're not going." But he was determined to go. So he and Truman went, and Truman delivered the speech. I don't know what it was about, but he spoke his mind, and it wasn't exactly what the KKK expected to hear, I guess. And at the end of the speech he said, "Now you fellows standing out there in those pajamas," he said, "I don't know where you bought those pajamas that are under your sheets, but, if you didn't buy them at Truman and Jacobson's Menswear, you paid too much." And with that, Truman walked right down the stairs from the platform and my dad got up out of the front row and joined him and the two of them walked out of this cornfield through the lines of pajamas, and hoods, and sheets, and torches. They got in their car and they drove away. It was very uneventful, fortunately.

GESELBRACHT: This was a story you heard in your home.

SCHUSTERMAN: Right, I don't remember who told it. When I told my sister this story not too long ago, she said she hadn't heard it. But I heard that somewhere.

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GESELBRACHT: Thank you very much.

SCHUSTERMAN: You're welcome.

GESELBRACHT: Did your father like to play cards, and was he good at playing cards?

SCHUSTERMAN: He liked to play cards. He loved it, and he was very good. But he wouldn't play bridge, which was my mother's favorite game, because people argued at the bridge table, and he just wanted no part of that. He was very soft spoken, and cards didn't mean enough to him to argue over.

GESELBRACHT: And what were some of the card games he liked?

SCHUSTERMAN: There was a game called pitch, and then there was—I can't remember the name of the other one.

GESELBRACHT: Did he have a favorite?

SCHUSTERMAN: Probably poker. (laughter)

GESELBRACHT: What was the poker playing venue in your home on 72nd street? Where did they play?

SCHUSTERMAN: We had a recreation room built down in our basement, and it was wood paneled and was a nice room and had a big poker table. That's where my dad played with the men in Battery D for a long time. They'd rotate homes, so they didn't play at our house each month or whatever the time interval was, but every so often we'd have a poker game at our house.

GESELBRACHT: Do you remember some of the people who would come?

SCHUSTERMAN: No, I don't. I was pretty young then.

GESELBRACHT: And were you ever present at any of these games?

SCHUSTERMAN: Not at the games themselves, but I remember one game when, I think, Harry was Senator. Did I tell you about this one already?

GESELBRACHT: I don't know.

SCHUSTERMAN: Or maybe he was Vice-President by then, and the Secret Service men came in the morning to stake out the house and they were there all day. And then in the evening when it was time for the poker game, Harry was the first one to arrive, and my dad showed him through the house because we hadn't lived there very long. And when we got to a little room

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like a study off of our living area, where my piano was, Harry asked who played the piano. And I said I did. And he said, “Well, play something for me.” I was too shy to do that. I said, “No I don’t play for people, just for my own entertainment.” And he just insisted, “No,” he says, “come on, I’ll play with you.” We sat down at the piano and I took out some music and he played the treble and I played the bass and it was like a duet. We played, I don’t remember what it was, whether it was Chopin or what the piece was at the time, but we had a little musical party before the poker game.

GESELBRACHT: Were any women allowed in the basement when the poker game was played?

SCHUSTERMAN: Oh, I don’t think so. (laughter) No, my mother took all the refreshments down there early, and I think that was the end of it.

GESELBRACHT: Was there a sign, anything like that, “No Women Allowed?”

SCHUSTERMAN: No, not that I remember. (laughs)

GESELBRACHT: So, it was just understood that no women were allowed?

SCHUSTERMAN: Right, this was men’s night out.

GESELBRACHT: Thank you.