

INTERVIEW WITH ED TABAK

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**Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
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INTERVIEW WITH ED TABAK

INT: This is tape one of an interview with Ed Tabak, spouse of a survivor on April 1, 1996. Ed, do you want to begin by telling me what your name and place and date of birth is?

ED: My name is Edward Tabak. I was born in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, September the 19th, 1927.

INT: What's your marital status?

ED: I am married at the present time.

INT: For how long?

ED: We've been married...this June we'll be married forty-five years.

INT: What's your education level?

ED: Education I have up to an associate degree from Penn State University.

INT: Tell me a little bit about your employment background.

ED: I worked for my father who had a hardware store in Marcus Hook and went into the service, and when I came back from the service I worked for my father again. Went to school and got my associate degree from Penn State University and then I stayed full time at work at Marcus Hook Hardware. I became owner and majority partner at the death of my parents, and that was approximately about thirty years ago. And I retired as of July 19, 1994.

INT: Tell me about your children.

ED: I have three children. My oldest is Rhea. My next is COSTM and my youngest is David. Rhea is a housewife and works part time. My older son works for QVC and my younger son works for the American Bar Association in Chicago.

INT: What socio-economic level would you put yourself in? How would you classify yourself?

ED: I'd say middle income, comfortable.

INT: And how would you describe your religious affiliation?

ED: I'm Jewish and not a very observant Jew but I feel Jewish and respect everything that is Jewish and enjoy everything that is Jewish.

INT: Are you officially affiliated?

ED: Yes. I'm a member of Ohev Shalom Synagogue.

INT: What kind of a synagogue is that?

ED: This is a Conservative synagogue.

INT: What other...other than your synagogue, what other organizations are you a member of?

ED: I'm a member of a Masonic organization. Also a member of the Lion's Club and B'nai Brith Men and Men's Club of the synagogue.

INT: Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your family of origin, that is your parents. Most of these will have to do with your life as a child up until probably the time you went into the service, would be that period of time that we're talking about. Tell me about your parents. Where were they born?

ED: My father was born in Romania, now, which was Russia at that time, and my mother was born also in Russia. My father came to this country when he was approximately in his early twenties and my mother came to this country at the behest of her brother who brought her and who was established in Chester, Pennsylvania and she was approximately also in her twenties.

INT: So your parents met and married in this country?

ED: Yes.

INT: In Chester.

ED: Yes.

INT: And your father, how did he earn a living?

ED: My uncle, who was my mother's brother, Joe Long, had a business in Chester, Pennsylvania, and he established a line of credit of five hundred dollars for my father, at which time he suggested that he open up a business in Marcus Hook, which he felt was a very good town. And with the five hundred dollars my father established a business.

INT: And quite a large business it was.

ED: Well, it started off as a small little Mom and Pop store, in the general variety, selling everything, and they put in long hours. The hours were from eight o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock six days a week and on Sundays, many a times my father would have a knock on the door and a customer would be there and he would go into the store to open it up and service the customer, so they worked very, very hard.

INT: You said they. Did your mother work in the business as well?

ED: Both of them worked in the business, yes.

INT: And what was their religious...attitude toward religious and their religious status?

ED: Both Jewish. My mother was more of the...more on towards the Orthodox. My father really was a Jew and never professed any other religion and just remained as a Jew. I mean he never really was that strong in his beliefs or non-beliefs.

INT: Were they affiliated?

ED: Yes, they belong to Ohev Shalom Synagogue.

INT: And what was the education of your parents?

ED: I doubt if they ever got beyond what we'd call in this country beyond a fourth or fifth grade.

INT: Did they go to school? They both got their education in Europe then, in Russia. So they never had any formal education in this country?

ED: No.

INT: How would you describe yourself as a child or adolescent? What kind of a person were you?

ED: Well, it was a happy home. We had a very good relations. My parents were very much in love with each other. They had a very good relationship. They worked together very well and look, we all worked hard. I worked in the store when I was a young fellow going in in the morning, opening up the store with my father then going to school and then coming back for lunch, and let my father eat first and then I would grab a bite and then go to school, and then after school I worked in the store and did my homework in the store. We kept late hours, as I said before, and we worked...you survived in those days. It wasn't an elaborate living.

INT: I understand that you worked very hard and that most of your time was taken up with going to school and working.

ED: Absolutely.

INT: But how would you describe the kind of person you were? Were you outgoing or more of a loner? Were you very social?

ED: I think you have to describe the times, that all the people, all my friends in school, all had...it was a very poor, poor town. It was a factory town and all my schoolmates worked after school. Some of them worked before school, like I did. And so there was not much socializing. And I had friends in school, but naturally working in the store didn't have much social contacts after the school day so there was a very difficult time in growing up. But everybody else had the same situation so I wasn't different from anybody else.

INT: Since your parents came from Russia, I assume that you didn't have any grandparents in this country.

ED: No. Yes, I did. My mother had her mother living there and my father's grandparents, my father's parents, immigrated to Brazil and I had never seen them so I don't know.

INT: Your father's parents immigrated to Brazil?

ED: Yes.

INT: And your father was here.

ED: Yes.

INT: The only member of his family that came here?

ED: My father's mother died giving birth to him and afterwards my grandfather remarried, subsequently having four children with his new wife, and my father, being the oldest of the family, and his brother was next, there was a difference of approximately six or seven years, and my father was the oldest and there was no opportunities for him so he left and came to United States and worked in New York with his uncle, living with his aunt and uncle there for three years and then married my mother and moved to Marcus Hook. My grandfather subsequently had his next son, which is Leib, and he couldn't get into United States at that time and went to Brazil, which he knew somebody there, and was able, because of conditions, to bring the rest of the family over there.

INT: So I understand. So you only had one grandparent, your mother's mother.

ED: Mother's mother, right.

INT: What kind of a relationship did you have with her?

ED: I don't remember that much of her because she died when I was five, six, so there's not much recollection there. The only thing I remember is that she would come down Friday before Shabbat.

INT: From where?

ED: From Philadelphia. She lived in Philadelphia. And she would check up on the family and she would spend Shabbat with us, Friday night and Saturday, and then she would go back to Philadelphia. And she would do that quite a bit. So my only recollection with her, very limited exposure with her.

INT: Now do you want to tell me about your siblings?

ED: My oldest is Rhea.

INT: No, no. Your brothers and sisters.

ED: Oh, my brothers and sisters? I have a sister, an older sister, and she is three years older than I am. We had a good relationship. It was never really a close relationship. We think differently on a lot of things so I guess that's the reason for a lot of the not being as close as we should.

INT: As children, did she work in the store like you did or were you treated differently?

ED: She was never really a part of the store, really never a part, and when she got old enough she left to work in Wilmington. Living at home but she worked in Wilmington. She was never active in the store.

INT: So she-

ED: She at one time, my father opened up a shoe store around the corner and she worked over there, but for a short period of time. We had a manager. My father had a manager there and she worked there but never in the major store.

INT: She didn't work in the main store. Your mother did.

ED: My mother did, right.

INT: Was this because she was a girl or was there any...why did that happen? You worked in the store before school and after. She didn't work at all. You don't know why?

ED: I don't know why. I've never actually remember that much back the reason why she was never there, you know. We had other women work in the store but she was never really a part of it.

INT: So you don't think it was because that she was a girl, that that was the reason that she wasn't, because your mother worked there.

ED: I don't know. Well, my mother was a good business person there. She worked hard. She was a very good business person there. I don't know. I guess either lack of interest or she wasn't forced to work in the store. One of those unknown mysteries.

INT: Did you have any special relationships with anybody as a child or adolescent? Anybody that you were especially close with, either your own age or older?

ED: No. No.

INT: Were you close with your father?

ED: We had a pretty good relationship. My father-

INT: Now I'm not talking about when you were an adult, I'm talking about in the early years.

ED: Yeah, I understand what you're saying. I thought a lot of my father and I think based on what his knowledge was and education and background, he just did everything he possibly could to keep the family. Like I say, it was very tough times in those days and we all worked. It wasn't

a question...he wasn't a hard taskmaster, it's just that everybody had to do their share. I had a pretty good relationship with him. I wasn't mad at him or angry with him or any of those things, I mean, if that's what you think.

INT: No, no. I wasn't thinking that. And your mother. Were you close to your mother?

ED: Yes.

INT: Closer to your mother than your father?

ED: They were a different type. My mother was, I think, a lot warmer than my father was and it's just, I felt, there was a better relationship with her. She was a very generous woman.

INT: Generous to you as well as to others?

ED: Generous to me as well as to others. Both my parents were. I know that in the business, like I say, it was very difficult times, and it's not...unless you lived those times I don't think you can appreciate what it was. I know that there were big families in Marcus Hook and they were very poor. I mean the average family had at least six children and nobody but nobody there had the money to go out and spend a lot, so everything was on the books and I know over a period of time a lot of the families were not able to pay their debts at the store and my father just canceled them out. He had that feeling for people because he knew what the times were. My mother also was a very generous woman. She took in an orphan. It was from Gerard College. It was...didn't have a father. In fact, he lived in the same room as I did and he worked in the store and my parents gave him room and board plus a salary. My mother also was the type that we had not too far from us we had several, I guess you'd call them vagrants today, but in those days they were not capable, and one of the jobs that I had to do was after dinner I used to take food to them. I did these year after year. She sent enough food to keep them going for a day or two. She was a very generous woman. She helped out her family, I know. Whatever she could she did and never said anything about it, which I think is fantastic because most people like to take credit for something and she never did. And she thought the world of her sister-in-law and her brother and the other family members. It was a pretty close family.

INT: This orphan? Was he Jewish?

ED: Yes.

INT: How did you feel about him when you had to share a room with him? Was there any resentment on your part?

ED: I don't hold anything or remember that I would begrudge him the thing there. In those days your parents said something and you did it. You just don't think about whether it was right or wrong or I was being imposed on. You just did it, and that's the way it was.

INT: How did your parents discipline you? What kind of measures did they use and for what infractions did they discipline you?

ED: If I did something wrong my father would give me a shot and he would...but he-

INT: You mean he hit you.

ED: Oh, yeah. He had a temper but it blew off fast. He didn't hold any grudges there. He didn't hold any grudges. And I don't think I was that bad but look, we all get into things and I was no different.

INT: What kind of things would you have gotten into? What kind of things would have been considered worthy of discipline?

ED: Comes to my mind, I remember that I was angry with my sister for some reason or other and I sawed off the legs of her bed. (Laughter) I got a beating for that, and that bed stayed like that for years. When she turned, the bed would fall.

INT: Oh, that's bad. That's bad.

ED: I would imagine that if I objected to something that he asked me to do that he would hit me. He would hit me. But there was no meanness in it, you know. It was just a matter of look, this is what you have to do.

INT: Do you remember any conflicts between your parents? How did they resolve conflicts or how did they handle any differences of agreement?

ED: Not that I was privy to. I'd hear them holler every now and then but it didn't last. They got along very well together. They really had a love affair between the two. It's really a loving couple.

INT: How about their expression of affection for each other or for you and your sister?

ED: Well, my father was not overly affectionate. A little standoffish there. It wasn't his style. My mother was more affectionate and like I say, they...you know, to think back on those times I don't...like I say, it was a fairly happy home. It was not a home filled with dissension or incrimination or shouting and hollering and noise or any of the problems that you hear so much about. There was no reason for me to leave home as a result of something that happened. I always felt very comfortable within my home.

INT: So the biggest problem in your growing up years was earning a living?

ED: To live.

INT: You had to make sure that you could earn a living.

ED: That's right.

INT: Was there any family loss or any specific difficulty that you can remember that was like traumatic for your family? A death, a disease, any major-

ED: Well, I think that naturally the death of my grandmother, my mother was very taken with it. My mother was very much a part of the family and her sister and her brothers and my uncle Bob, all the family members who passed away, at the time they were traumatic but, you know, it wasn't a lasting thing. I mean, when anybody passes that you're very close to, it takes time for you to get over it. But you do. You mean anything traumatic for me?

INT: Anything, yes, that stands out. A fire, for example.

ED: Things like that never...I think the loss of my mother hit me pretty hard.

INT: Well, that was as an adult. I'm still asking about your-

ED: No, nothing really.

INT: What were your goals as a child?

ED: I had hoped to be an electrical engineer and to go into something along those lines, you know, some sort of getting out beyond the store. I thought that store work was not that stimulating or interesting and I would hope to go into something different. But I never did.

INT: What were your parents' goals for you?

ED: Well, my father figured that if I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer I should go to college. But other than that, he saw no need for college, unless you had something definitely in mind that you needed college for. Coming from his background, I could understand that.

INT: Certainly. He made a success.

ED: He did well.

INT: So he felt that-

ED: Yeah. He thought there was no need.

INT: No need for it. So education was not a primary goal or a philosophy in their lives.

ED: No.

INT: In the lives of your parents.

ED: Unusual for Jews, no.

INT: Yes, that's exactly what I was going to say.

ED: I think that...I did very well in school. I was...in the lower grades I was the top student and I used to represent the school at conferences, you know, where they'd have junior high conferences and I was the representative. I had one teacher especially that liked me and she thought I should get out and do more. I remember the time that I went up to Drexel representing

the school and given the opportunity to meet with some of the people at Drexel because they had a program that I was interested in, electrical engineering. And I had a discussion with him and everything went along fine until he asked me what my religion was. And I said Jewish, and it sort of almost...you could see the conversation was coming to an end. He said that Drexel has always placed their students and yes, they would educate me but it would have most difficulty for me to get a job, being with my background at that particular time. So probably that's maybe one of the reasons I didn't pursue it.

INT: How did you feel about that? That's being very honest with you.

ED: Look. I wasn't happy about it and I thought maybe I ought to change what I was thinking about maybe there's something other fields I should be able to go into and at that time I was in the ninth grade at that time and I figured, well, let's go on to high school and see what I could come up with. And then the war was on and it was a choice of either going into the service or signing up for the service so I would cut my army time down, which I did. And I figured well-

INT: You mean by volunteering?

ED: Yeah, at that time you could volunteer for a shorter period of time. If you were drafted you didn't know how long you were going to be. I would have been drafted anyway so it was just a matter...I didn't have much of a choice, but I figured I could cut my army time. If I'd want to stay in the army, which I didn't want to, I could get out sooner. Which it worked out that way and that's part of the reason I got some of the G.I. Bill that I could go to school with.

INT: I see. Okay. What are some of your happiest memories as a child? Doing...what would you say were some of your happiest times?

ED: Well, I think I enjoyed reading very much. I was a very avid reader. I used to take out like three, four books a week and read there at the library. We had a library in Marcus Hook and I was always a great reader and enjoyed reading, and coming from a poor family, if there was some sort of thing, a project, that I wanted...I remember that when I was in school I didn't have a desk and I used to do my homework when I was...well, when the store was open I used to do my homework in the store, and the weekend, I didn't have a desk so I used to use the kitchen table. And I found out that I could, you know, through failure and keep on working, and I have a tremendous persistency, and built my own desk. I was very interested in doing things. Any time we had somebody that was a tradesman I'd always question them how they did certain things and what they were involved in. I became fairly handy with that so I was always able to do the projects around the house and fix up things and do things. My father was not handy. My mother was a lot handier, I remember, so-

INT: So this gave you a sense of accomplishment and of pride. You liked building your own desk?

ED: Yeah, well I built my own desk. If when I was a kid we couldn't afford like little things that I'd wanted, like a little airplane model, so I'd go to the library and draw a picture of the airplane and go home and get some scraps and make my own airplane. It was the times.

INT: What were some of your saddest memories you have as a child?

ED: I don't remember anything really that way. I guess just...nothing that really comes to my mind at this time that I would think of that were sad for me. We did, like I said, we did a lot of things as a family.

INT: When you say family you mean more than just-

ED: Extended family.

INT: You mean extended family, don't you?

ED: Yeah, right.

INT: What kinds of things did you do as an extended family?

ED: We would picnic together. My uncle, Joe, who was the only one that had a car at that time, we'd go around and he was a very generous man and pick up the family and take everybody to the park and we would, all the women would have food prepared and we'd have a little family outing there. That was done quite a bit. And the family was fairly close. I mean, they weren't that far away. They were only a few miles away.

INT: So how large an extended family is this?

ED: It's all my mother's-

INT: So it would have been your Uncle Joe and his wife and his children.

ED: Right.

INT: And-

ED: My Uncle Bob and his children, and my Uncle Zalman and his family. So you're talking like-

INT: These were all your mother's brothers?

ED: All my mother's brothers and-

INT: Sister-in-laws and family.

ED: Right.

INT: So that was a very-

ED: They were a lot of fun together. We had a lot of fun together. The family was a good family together.

INT: Did you have any experiences with anti-Semitism? (End of tape 1, side 1)

INT: Side 2 of tape 1 of an interview with Ed Tabak, and Ed is talking about his experiences with anti-Semitism as a child.

ED: I grew up in a town which is a very Catholic town. A very strong Catholic town. And a very rigid Catholic. At that time there was only four Jewish families in the town, of which all of them were in business and they weren't very close. So there was always-

INT: Were the four Jewish families close to each other?

ED: No, no.

INT: That's interesting.

ED: No, they were not. Because, again, the hours that each of the families put in were in such a way they couldn't socialize that much. I remember one incident when I was, oh, I guess I must have been either in first or second grade that a gang of boys beat me up because I killed Jesus and I had no idea who Jesus was. I was probably seven or eight at the time, and I had no idea who he was. And I went home and complained to my mother. I didn't know what was going on.

INT: What did your mother tell you?

ED: She said that whatever it was, that I understood that he wasn't part of the kind of people we believe in. Simplistic answer. But I did have my scrapes in the town there, and I guess everybody else in the town also had the same thing. It was that strong a Catholic town and it was the religion that was passed on to...that Jews were Christ killers.

INT: But-

ED: And the kids were simplistic enough to believe that any member of the Jewish faith was involved in the killing of Christ.

INT: But the four Jewish families that were in business were all successful, so people bought from them or did business with them.

ED: Yes. Did business with them, right.

INT: Now tell me about your religious upbringing, religious training.

ED: When I was probably at the age where you go to Hebrew school I used to come home from school and then go to Hebrew school. Those days in entailed going up on a trolley and we had...whatever religious training I had was at Ohev Shalom, which is a very poor, poor religious training. We used to have a lot of teachers who, for whatever reason, the synagogue couldn't afford to have better teachers, and a lot of them were people from Europe who didn't have much English and some were from Palestine at that time and didn't have much English also. And it

was very difficult to understand them and it was very, very poor Jewish background I had. Not much in the way of education.

INT: How did you feel about it? Did you resent going or-

ED: I think I did. I think I did. You know, it's whatever free time I would have had I could have enjoyed sports or doing something else. Instead I had to go up to Hebrew school.

INT: Did you make any friends with the other boys that were in your Hebrew school class?

ED: We got along together, but again, you have to realize that they were in the city of Chester and they were going to public school at the same time, so they were friends in public school, where I came up, I was a loner, by myself. I didn't...you know, when I was there we were friends but I went home in my own world there, and they were up in theirs.

INT: Did you get any religious training at home at all?

ED: My mother was kosher and we observed all the holidays and participated in all the holidays. My father was a little more educated than my mother. My father could speak about six languages and he also could read, and my mother, after a while, could read English. I don't think she could, yes, I guess she could read Hebrew. I guess she could. She was not that well educated as my father was, but she could probably make out.

INT: Did they speak Yiddish?

ED: Yes.

INT: Did you learn any Yiddish?

ED: I can understand if somebody speaks slow enough, I could understand, except that they throw in a word or two, but I can...I have difficulty speaking Yiddish because I don't think in Yiddish, and I think a language you have to speak and understand a language to be able to form letters and words and I couldn't do that in Yiddish.

INT: Did they speak Yiddish to each other?

ED: Yes.

INT: I take it, because they worked so hard they did not go to synagogue. They were not synagogue-

ED: During the holidays they did. Only during the holidays.

INT: And they didn't observe the Sabbath at all.

ED: No.

INT: Except when your grandmother came down, but she died when you were young.

ED: Yeah. What she would do is she knew that they had to work and make a living. She understood that, but as far as the other things like smoking, she made sure that they didn't smoke on Shabbas, and observe whatever they possibly could in the confines of their work. It's one of those things, you know. They weren't easy times.

INT: If you had to describe your early life in one or two or three adjectives, what would one of them be? What would some of the adjectives be that you would use to describe your early life?

ED: I think that the best thing that I would say about that is I came from a very warm home. A very warm, comfortable home, and that my parents set examples, work ethics, and they were very honest people.

INT: What were the examples? What were the ethics that they, the values that they gave you?

ED: Well, I think that some of the things there, you have to do to help other people when you're capable of doing that. Whatever you take out of an area you have to put something back. It's not something that's all yours and you don't ignore the plight of other people or other things that have to be done in an area in which you live. They were both very honest people. They weren't gossipy. They didn't tell tales on other people. They weren't vindictive. I think pretty good values for anybody to grow up with.

INT: I assume that one of their values was that it's good to work hard.

ED: Absolutely.

INT: They believed in hard work. The value of hard work.

ED: They had no choice whether they-

INT: Well, some people have to work hard but they resent it or wish they didn't or whatever, but-

ED: No, they both enjoyed what they were doing. My father was a very outgoing person and my mother was maybe not as outgoing as him, but they both liked people and they both enjoyed working in the store. My mother probably was not a great housewife to speak of, as far as a cleaner of a house or as far as a great cook, but we were clean and we, you know, the house wasn't outstandingly dirty, you know. It's just that was the way she was. She had help after a while to help with the house. We always had somebody later on that helped her in the house while she worked in the store. In fact, I had a woman that helped raise me. A Black woman that helped raise me. A very fine woman.

INT: So she really liked being in business?

ED: Oh, no question about it. No question about it. Very much so.

INT: Tell me what your family was like during the war. What were the circumstances of your life during the war?

ED: Really the war didn't touch us. I mean, Marcus Hook has a blackout and there was no shortage of anything. In fact, we had ration cards and a lot of the items that we had that were rationed my mother gave them away that we couldn't need or use. We didn't need all the things that we had, so it wasn't-

INT: Such as?

ED: Like butter was rationed and sugar was rationed.

INT: And she had more than she needed and she-

ED: She gave it away. It wasn't necessary. We didn't need it. We didn't need it. You were allowed so much and she bought what she was allowed and she gave a lot of it away if we didn't need it. We didn't suffer for anything during the war.

INT: A couple of times you said that times were hard. Did you feel poor?

ED: No.

INT: You didn't feel poor.

ED: No.

INT: So you didn't feel deprived at all growing up?

ED: No. Well, you have to realize that from the town that I lived in everybody was in almost the same situation, or maybe not even as good a situation, so how can you feel deprived when you don't see what somebody else has?

INT: That's true. That's true. You haven't mentioned any friends, any childhood friends, so I am assuming that you were kind of a loner as a child.

ED: When I got to high school, the synagogue had a Jewish fraternity that I joined and I had some friends there. After work, at eleven o'clock, we used to go out together.

INT: At eleven o'clock at night?

ED: Well, the store closed at eleven. At that time my father had a car and I'd borrow his car and we would go out. Go to a place like Schuster's and have a hamburger and a soda and meet girls there like every young fellow in those days would. But they worked too. So their hours were long and that was the socializing. Every now and then we would go on a convention with them. It was a nice group.

INT: Did you ever feel lonely growing up?

ED: I guess occasionally I did. Occasionally I did. I think there are times when everybody has a time of loneliness and I think what happens then, it's like coming back out of the service and most of my friends had married or were going to school or had moved away, and I had to start with new friends. And there was a period of loneliness at that time.

INT: Were your friends mostly Jewish or mostly non-Jewish?

ED: Mostly Jewish. I had a few-

INT: Even though there were very few Jews in Marcus Hook, so you made friends in Chester and wherever there were.

ED: Yes, right. I had no Jewish friends in Marcus Hook whatsoever, and I had a few non-Jewish friends in Marcus Hook and we would...mostly athletics. I was always fond of athletics so we would do a lot of sports together. But as far as going to their house, no, or them coming to my house, no.

INT: So you played in the fields and on the streets and places like that with the boys.

ED: Right.

INT: Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your present family. First of all, I'd like to ask you about your wife. How did you meet her?

ED: We had, at that time, things were a lot better in the store.

INT: This is after you came out of the army.

ED: After I came out of the army, things were...and it was a period of time where everybody was coming out of the service and they were getting married and starting families. When we came out, when I came out, I started to do more managerial work in the store and we got rid of the dry goods and patent medicines and the general store part of it and we took in the hardware and we sold to the contractors' industry and people, the homeowners there. And things were pretty good. It was a good time for us there. And at that time we had a couple of girls that worked in the office. We were able to afford office help. And one of the girls that worked for us, she had just graduated and she knew that I was Jewish. Naturally I never disguised my Jewishness. And she showed me her yearbook and showed me a picture of Frieda and she said, "There's a very nice girl that you should meet."

INT: Did this girl that worked in the store know Frieda?

ED: Yes. She knew Frieda, and she said that this is a girl you should meet. And I saw her, I sort of looked for her during the High Holidays and I liked what I saw and at the time I was going with somebody else.

INT: Was this another girl Jewish?

ED: Yes. I found out very early on that my mother especially would not have wanted me to go out with non-Jewish girls, and being conditioned not to go out with non-Jewish girls, I didn't. And that was a matter of...I remember being in some of the school plays at Marcus Hook and happened to take home a non-Jewish girl for a soda after one of the shows and it got back to my mother and after listening to a barrage of hollering for a long period of time, I figured, look, it's not worth it. (Laughter) As I say, I was conditioned. So I saw Frieda and I called her up and I started to take her out. It was...I found out that she was from Europe and the Holocaust was not involved at that particular time. We started to...she was going out with somebody else at the time and I was going out with somebody else at the time. And we started to have more and more dates and after a while I realized that she was a lot more interesting and more for me than the other person was. We got very serious and I guess we were going together roughly, I would say, almost a year, and then we got engaged when she was in her sophomore year and we were married before she started her junior year, and that was part of the agreement I made with her, that she could finish her college. She wanted to finish up and I agreed with that. I wasn't ready for a family. I was pretty much involved in my business and I financed her last two years of college.

INT: As you described it, then your very first attraction to Frieda was physical. You liked what you saw, you liked the picture and then you-

ED: No question about it.

INT: You liked the girl when you took a look at her.

ED: I think most times when people see somebody it's a physical attraction there, and then after a while when you get to know them and the parts of them that you don't see, it becomes more important.

INT: Although you just said that the Holocaust had nothing, you really weren't aware of it, you were aware of the fact that she came from Europe.

ED: Yes.

INT: That she had been in Europe during the war.

ED: Yes.

INT: That she came here after the war. She hadn't been here too many years when you met her.

ED: She was here approximately about, let's see, she came here she was fifteen and I met her when she was going to-

INT: When she was nineteen?

ED: Eighteen.

INT: So she had only been here a few years.

ED: Right.

INT: Did you ever talk about her life in Europe or anything about the fact that she was from Europe? Before you were married.

ED: No. She did not-

INT: Never.

ED: She never brought the subject up or never was involved in talking about this.

INT: And you never brought it up?

ED: No.

INT: So-

ED: I knew a little bit about her background, about her being in Europe at the time, but I never knew the depth of what she went through in Europe.

INT: So it really wasn't a factor at all in your relationship?

ED: No.

INT: Now, how would you describe your marriage? Your relationship with each other?

ED: I think we have a very good relationship with each other. I think we're considerate of each other. She's a very strong woman, as you know, and very set in her beliefs. I think I'm a lot more flexible, and I think that as I have gotten older I'm not...I think when I was younger that I had certain things that I would very strongly believe in and we had, as in any couple, had a certain amount of accommodations to get through and probably the only arguments we really had were over the children. I mean, she was set on a lot of things that they did, and I was a lot more flexible.

INT: Can you give me an example?

ED: Rhea, my older daughter, was a very difficult person to raise, and I think Frieda, being very young and with her background that she had and her very strong Jewish belief, was very unhappy with Rhea dating non-Jews and Rhea's...Rhea had a lot of problems when she was young and she was very difficult to raise, and I was a lot more, I don't know what would you say, condescending.

INT: Understanding would you say? You were more understanding of Rhea than-

ED: I think that any family that when you have two women in a family it...I think one of them has to be a queen bee and the other one can't be, and I think that really puts it up. There's always

a conflict between women, more so than men that I've always found. I think I've seen relationships, and I think women have a lot more difficulty in relationships than men do. And I don't know if it's a nature or whatever it is or what causes these things, but that's my belief.

INT: You said that Rhea was difficult too raise.

ED: Yes.

INT: Can you give me an example of something young, long before she was dating, when she was younger, that made her difficult to raise?

ED: Well, very high strung and Rhea would always work for a mark and not for the knowledge and she was able to get very good grades but she retained very little of what she learned, and didn't use what she learned, and she always felt that her Judaism was being pushed down her throat because we sent her to Hebrew schools and to Jewish camps and to Israel and she didn't like the idea what she perceives as religion being pushed down her throat so there was a lot of conflict among that.

INT: How did you feel about that? Did you want to lessen her Jewish involvement?

ED: Well, I am not a ritual Jew, never was and I'm not going to profess I ever will be. I enjoy being Jewish. I enjoy the things that are Jewish, but as far as being a devout Jew, no. An Orthodox Jew. No. I don't enjoy ritual. I don't enjoy having...going to services where they're long, involved and repetitious. To me, I don't enjoy it and I can understand and feel that my children would feel the same way, so I'm understanding this.

INT: So you were understanding of Rhea's resentment of things Jewish being foisted on her?

ED: Yes. Or other things, you know. We wanted all our children to be educated. We wanted them all to go to college, which we did and I'm very proud that they have done what they have done in college. All three of my children have master's, so they really have achieved things there. It was one of the things that I had made up my mind that not having a great college education, that I wanted two things. I wanted a home for them and the second thing that I wanted for them was to make sure that they had an education. Whether I had one or not, it was important for me to make sure that they had the opportunity to have an education.

INT: Education was much more important to you than it was to your parents.

ED: Absolutely. Absolutely.

INT: Do you think that was because you didn't have an education, that it was so-

ED: Well, it was the times. I don't think my parents could afford to educate me college. But there again, it was up to me to also...you know, I don't blame them, I blame myself more that I could pursue my education. I don't blame them for...they put me on this earth and I'm here and I have to take responsibilities for myself.

INT: Let's go back to talking a little bit about your relationship with Frieda. How do you two resolve conflicts? You saw...you were different in your child-rearing methods. You had different ideas. How did you resolve those conflicts?

ED: Again, you have to realize that I worked pretty long hours too and Frieda gave up her time to raise the family. She was more of an influence on the family. She did more to raise the children than I did, because I was pretty much working.

INT: Questions of philosophy. How did you resolve those differences?

ED: Well, pretty much she set the pattern there and I would pretty much back her up most of the time, except when I thought she went a little bit overboard on certain things.

INT: Did Frieda go overboard on certain things?

ED: Well, she probably didn't think so. I did.

INT: Can you give me an example?

ED: Not offhand. Not offhand. I don't know of anything. You're going back for quite a while and I don't dwell on the past that much. Every now and then something will trigger something in my mind, but I never really, you know, a lot of people carry the burden of the past. I don't carry it.

INT: How did you express affection in your family with your wife and your children?

ED: I've always been very supportive of my kids. I was never...never said to them, "Look, you got a B and you should have had an A." As long as I knew that they were trying then maybe it wasn't possible for them to get an A. I think I always felt that when you mature sometimes you learn a lot easier from a mature mind than from a non mature mind. There has to be more of a desire and I see that in my older son. He was not a great student but he did very well for himself and I'm very proud of him. And the younger guy there, he came a lot later, we were very much more relaxed with him and I don't think we pushed him as much. What he will do and what will become of him time will tell. As far as affection, Frieda and I always...we were always pretty affectionate. We hold hands together and we like each other. I like her presence. I like her mind. She's interesting. She's enthusiastic. She's upbeat. She doesn't...her glass is never half empty, as they say. She's always, you know, has a smile for me. She's comfortable with me and I'm comfortable with her. We were crazy about each other.

INT: That's wonderful. How about showing affection towards your children? When they were little did you-

ED: Where I'm more affectionate than Frieda was, I think, with the kids. I always hugged them. I always gave them a lot of praise. I always feel that...more so than Frieda. I think I...I would never, ever say to them that, "You did something that is stupid, that you can do better, that you're wrong." I felt that sometimes I expressed it in words and sometimes I expressed it, you

know, “Things will look up for you. Just hang in there and you’ll be all right.” I never downgraded them. I never would.

INT: You describe Frieda as being very optimistic.

ED: Yes.

INT: Would you describe yourself that way?

ED: Well, I’m not a pessimistic person. I’d say halfway between...a little better than not overly optimistic and never positive pessimistic. I’m a realist. I see things to me what they are, not what they could be. Maybe not what they could be, just what they are. (End of tape 1, side 2)

INT: This is tape two of an interview with Ed Tabak, April 1, 1996, and Ed is talking about disciplining his children.

ED: Well, I was very not much of a disciplinarian there. I mean I always told Frieda, “The kids did something during the day and they need to be disciplined, don’t wait for me to come home and do it. You know, you do it.” And she said many times I was the guy in the white hat and she was the one wearing the dark hat. I was never really much of a disciplinarian there.

INT: So the discipline was no issue. It was her issue, not your issue.

ED: Positively.

INT: How about your religious training of your children? Was that a joint decision or was that Frieda’s decision?

ED: Well, being away so much of the time, Frieda had the brunt of the education of the children both in school as well as Jewishness. All my children attended Hebrew school. All of them went to camps and two of them went to Israel, so the education as far as it goes is whatever the synagogue gave them and whatever they picked up in the camps.

INT: And how much did you and Frieda do at home?

ED: We observed the holidays and we always liked to get together for the holidays. Always tried to almost semi insist on them coming for the holidays. We always liked to be a family for the holidays. And I think the boys can read Hebrew. Rhea probably could. I don’t know how much of it...I don’t think she would want to, but she could, probably.

INT: How do you feel about her rejection of things Jewish?

ED: I don’t like it. I don’t like the idea of my children not marrying Jewish mates, but I accept it. I accept it. They’re married to very, very wonderful people and I accept them for what they are. I’d be not happy to have them raise their children non-Jewish, but I would accept it. I think that as you get older you learn, as I say, what it’s going to be and not what you would like. And that’s the distinction I would make. I can’t feel other than that. If I said to them, “I insist on you having

raise your children as Jewish,” and they didn’t, I wouldn’t like it, but I could understand it. Would not understand it but just this is the way it is.

INT: Accept it.

ED: Accept it, right. That’s the word.

INT: You mentioned that one of the goals for your children was that they get an education.

ED: Absolutely.

INT: Did you have any other goals for your children?

ED: I didn’t want them to be involved with drugs or anything harmful. I would hope that they would have good mates to have the kind of home that we had and that my parents had and to be good, decent people. I never, outside of my older son, I never really pushed them into any kind of field that they should be educated in. I mean, I gave them the opportunity to go to any school that they wanted to go to and I was willing to do whatever necessary to make sure that they could go to any school and to do what they wanted to do. I don’t think that, going through my background, that I had all the opportunities, but the times weren’t there for me.

INT: You mentioned that you really didn’t push them in any direction, except for your older son.

ED: Yes.

INT: What direction did you push him in and why?

ED: Well, COSTM is the closest to me and I felt that when we were going to Penn State up there and we were talking, and I said to him, you know, “I want you to take an accountancy course and to look over accountants. I think that’s a marvelous field. I think you can...” At that time I thought you could make a very good living out of it. And it’s a springboard for a lot of other things. He listened to me and that’s what he did. And he became pretty successful with what he was doing there.

INT: How come you pushed him in a particular direction and you didn’t really do that with your other two children?

ED: Well, Rhea, like I say, was always different in a sense there. She was...I think Rhea’s biggest ambition, I don’t know, for whatever reason, that she wanted to have a family. Get married and have a family. To me that was her biggest ambition. And I don’t think college was that important to her. And David...David was-I don’t know how you would describe him. He was different, and I figured with him, “What could you make of yourself? What would you like to do?” And we never really got involved in a big major conversation of what field would you like to go into. What you would like to do. More or less said, “Look, you go to college and look around and see what you would be interested in.” And I left it at that. And I figured that of my three children, David is very much like his grandmother. He’s very vocal.

INT: Your mother?

ED: No, Frieda's mother. And he liked the academic life and I wasn't too happy with what he wanted to be, as a Russian professor, but I didn't discourage him and I never said a word that I didn't like it. I said, you know, "If this is what you want, do it. I'll support you in any way I possibly can. This is what you want to be, fine. It's okay by me."

INT: You said that you were closest to COSTM of your three children.

ED: COSTM is the closest to me. What I mean by that in the mannerisms and thinking and thoughts and so many ways. He's sort of like a little mirror of me. I don't know if you saw that when you talked to him but-

INT: Well, his voice is almost indistinguishable from yours.

ED: Well, David's is too.

INT: Yes, yes.

ED: All two of my boys are like that. But I just always felt that he was very much like me. Very much like me in so many ways.

INT: And so you encouraged him to become an accountant? To take an accounting course?

ED: Yes. At times he sort of didn't know what he wanted to do. He was really drifting and I figured, look, he needed the precision of an accountant, you know, to be more structured. And that was, to my way of thinking, that would be the best thing for him.

INT: Did you ever encourage him in your business or not?

ED: All my children worked in my business and COSTM always thought I was too easy. He thought I should be a lot stricter than I was. But that was not me, you know. And none of them really were that interested in anything there and they didn't enjoy it. They didn't like it. They weren't interested. I mean it was always-

INT: So you never really seriously considered them going into-

ED: No, it was always an option and I figured, possible, I felt maybe I pushed them away from it. Maybe if I had sort of pushed them more towards it and showed them the different good parts about it they might have gone into it, but I figured, look, I never had that many avenues when I was growing up and I wanted to give you a lot more than I had. And I think as parents we probably didn't do them all a service by doing that. Maybe we made it too easy for them, but coming from my background, this was my thoughts on that and this is what I did. I don't apologize for it.

INT: Did you have any fears for your children?

ED: Being Jewish I did. I felt that the anti-Semitism that...I was hoping that the war would change a lot of people's thoughts and minds and it would be a lot easier for them, and the only one that I knew that had a little bit of problem was COSTM when he was in school. Other than that, the other two-

INT: What kind of problems did COSTM have?

ED: COSTM was on the track team and he followed me. I was also on the track team when I was in high school. He sort of followed along with the track after me.

INT: Do you think that's why he went out for track, because he knew you did?

ED: Probably. And for whatever reason, one day the boys on...he did both cross-country and inter-mural track. And some of the boys threw some coins at him and said, "Here Jew, there's some money for you there." And COSTM came home and he said he quit the team. And I knew he enjoyed it and I didn't know why. And I got a call from his coach and he told me what had happened.

INT: The coach knew what had happened?

ED: The coach knew. He found out what happened. And I said, well, I said, in a way, my children have to learn how to handle that, because I learned and they will have to learn. I can't teach them that. The world teaches them that. And regardless of how much I want to shield them I can't, because I can't be with them all the time. I can't take their pain. They have to suffer their pain themselves. And I said, "You as a teacher have to explain to them and it's up to you as a teacher to remedy the situation. I know he enjoys it," and I said, "I'm not going to tell him what to do. I'm not going to tell him what to do." And I said, "It's up to you." And one by one the boys came to the house and they apologized to COSTM.

INT: Really.

ED: And he went back on the team. And he did very well. He got his letter and his sweater and all the things that go with it. And it's something that every Jew that's in a non-Jewish place has to go through. We all go through anti-Semitism and it's never going to change.

INT: How would you describe your life philosophy? Your view of life. Do you see the world as a kind of chaotic place where things happen randomly or do you see the world in kind of an ordered, structured fashion, or some other way?

ED: I think the world is never, ever going to change. Always be wars. Always be greed. There are always going to be a lot of good things that happen, a lot of poor things that happen, and I'm at the stage now, in the twilight of my time, that I would like to be able to enjoy a few more years with my wife and be able to do a few more things, but if not, I'm very well satisfied that I've seen my children grow and educate and have their mates and to be respectable people. And that satisfies me. I'm satisfied with that. And I don't see any changes, big changes in the world. I think that there are always going to be the same problems that manifest itself maybe in new

wrinkles but it's still the same things over and over again. I'm not pessimistic or optimistic. I'm a realist.

INT: Do you think the fact the Frieda is a Holocaust survivor has had a big impact on either your relationship with her or on your children?

ED: Not on me. I don't see any difference. I didn't marry her because she was a Holocaust...I married her because of the person. And on my children. On Rhea, no. On COSTM very much so. On COSTM very much so. And it's only been recently. And Frieda has never...over the years, we've had a little conversations, not a whole lot. I never pressed her about it. I figured it's something that's very painful for her and why would you want to bring up pain. Nobody likes to bring up pain, that I think. And last Seder, Frieda blurted out all about her Holocaust time, and that was the first time she's ever done that. And the boys were very much affected by it, and they both asked for the tapes. She made a tape about her-

INT: Yes, that's Gratz College tape.

ED: Right. And she gave them each a tape on it. And it had a profound effect on COSTM especially, David some, Rhea no.

INT: Do you think that the reason she never talked about it is because it was too painful to talk about?

ED: Definitely.

INT: You don't think that she was in any way trying to protect her children?

ED: Not protect, but to realize what had happened and what could happen.

INT: But if she wanted them to realize what could happen she would have talked about it. She chose not to talk about it.

ED: Well, as you know, Frieda's a very verbal person and she just couldn't bring herself to talk about it.

INT: And you think that was because of the pain. Personal pain.

ED: Absolutely.

INT: When I asked you if it had...the fact that she was a survivor had an impact on your family life or on your three children and you said not on Rhea, but it seems to me that one of the reasons that Frieda pressed so much Judaism on Rhea was because she was a survivor, or don't you think that there was a relationship there?

ED: Frieda has a very deep rooted feeling that Judaism will not survive, and she is very...it's very important for her to keep Judaism alive and to have Judaism survive, and that she sees the

intermarriage and going out with non-Jews as an erosion of the Jewish faith, and she's very, very much caught up on that.

INT: However, she must have given a barrage to her children the way your mother did to you about the danger of going out with somebody who wasn't Jewish, and yet two of your children married non-Jews.

ED: Well, I think in Rhea's case she was so anxious to get married that she would have married anybody in a sense there. That was the uppermost in her mind. She wanted to be married. She wanted to have her...either to get out of the house, to get away from Frieda, to get her own family and marriage was very important to Rhea. Uppermost in her mind. David, in his case, went out to Chicago by himself there to go to school, and he met this very lovely person, and he was lonely and David has gone out with Jews, Jewish girls, Jewish schools, going in camp and he has dated them and he was also in Brandeis in college with one of the few non-Jewish girls. She lived with him. Then when he got out to Chicago he was by himself and met this person there and it just clicked for them, and his Judaism was not that important to him for choosing a wife, although he says if he has a family he will raise them Jewish. Remains to be seen. And I think that Judaism really comes more from the mother than it does from the father. I think the mother is the one that imparts the strong Jewish feelings and Jewishness and the education, more so than the man.

INT: Do you think Frieda's being a survivor is the reason that she pushed things Jewish so much on Rhea?

ED: I would say yes. I think that she did it to the other children too. I think she did it to all three.

INT: And Rhea is the only one that rejected it.

ED: Resented it.

INT: Resented it.

ED: Yes.

INT: Do you think it's because she's the girl? Because you said something earlier about two women in a home.

ED: It has a lot to do with it. I think so. It has a lot to do with it. I don't blame Frieda. Like I say, it's...I have a lot of strong feelings on certain things which I will not deviate on that thing, and it's the same thing with Frieda. And she is a person and I'm another person. Why should you change if you feel that strongly on something?

INT: Do you think that being married to a survivor has affected any of your opinions on the world, politics, relationships with other minorities? Has it in any way affected the way you look at the world?

ED: No, and I'll tell you why. As I said, I was raised quite a bit by a Black woman, who I thought the world of. And I have worked with Blacks and I have a lot of feelings for them. And I

always had employment in my own business of Blacks, and I have never distinguished between somebody else different as far as wages or whatever reason. That has no bearing on me whatsoever. Being Jewish, I feel that I'm a minority and I know what it is to be a minority, and I have feelings there that I can understand. I can empathize with other ones there.

INT: How about non-Jews? Does your social life revolve around Jews or non-Jews, or doesn't it matter to you?

ED: Social life is mostly, I would say not mostly, it is all Jewish. All Jews.

INT: Now is that because you choose it to be that way or because of Frieda? Why do you think that is?

ED: Well, I would say mainly because of Frieda. Yes, definitely. Most of the friends that we have are her friends, not my friends. I mean I'm friendly with them and I have good relations with them, but how did we get started? How's it kept up? Why is it kept up?

INT: Through Frieda.

ED: Exactly.

INT: Okay. How about your political views? Have they in any way been affected by the fact that she is a survivor?

ED: No. Because when I do things and vote on things I vote my beliefs on these things. Although interesting thoughts that we had a while ago whether would you vote for Specter because he's Jewish and the other man that is running is non-Jewish and he's a good man. Would that influence you? Somewhat. And would I like to see a Jewish president? No. I wouldn't want to see a Jewish president for the simple reason that I feel that the good that would come out of it is minimal. In today's world, the problems that a Jewish president would have would come down to affect a lot of the Jews and being part of it, it would affect me.

INT: You think it would be bad, then, for Jews if we had a Jewish president?

ED: Yes. What the world hasn't come to that point, my way of thinking there, that we'd accept him for his ability and not for his race. And I think the same thing happens to, we'll say, to other minorities. We have still not respected ability over race. And you can see that happening all the time. All the time.

INT: Has being married to a survivor...has Frieda's pain...By the way, did you ever have any evidence of her pain? Did she ever have nightmares?

ED: Absolutely.

INT: She did.

ED: Absolutely. A lot of them.

INT: What did you do about it?

ED: When we were married for a few years, a lot of times she would have a nightmare and she'd wake up screaming and grab me and hold onto me. In fact, I always had nails in my back from the...and she would be shaking. She would be shaking. I would calm her down and say, "Do you want to talk about it?" And she said, "Well, I just had a nightmare. They were chasing me." She would have more or less a recurring nightmare. She got over it after a while, but it was two, three years after we were married that she had this.

INT: But you don't think it's...the Holocaust, her experiences, have in any way affected your relationship with each other or the kind of marriage you have.

ED: No. None whatsoever. No. She might not think so, but I don't. I don't feel that way. As I say, I married the person and not the background that the person came from.

INT: Is there anything additional about your life together, your values and the way in which you've lived that you think...that I haven't asked about that might be important for me to know?

ED: No. Nothing I could think of. I am what I am. I'm not a difficult person. I don't have any strong things that I believe that should be done or shouldn't be done. I am no longer a leader. I'm no longer a follower. I'm just an observer at this stage in my life.

INT: Thank you very much, Ed, for participating in this study.

ED: Okay.