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**Oral History Interview with Natalie Chassler**

**Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.062**

**Interview conducted by Charis Shafer at the narrator's home on August 29th, 2013 in  
New York City.**

CHARIS SCHAFFER: So we'll start. Um, if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself.

NATALIE CHASSLER: OK. My name is Natalie Chassler and I've lived here -- I really don't know -- about 37 years, between 37 and 38 years. And before that I lived in Larchmont for 12 years and before that I lived in Brooklyn.

[phone ringing]

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Oh.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: You're fine.

NATALIE CHASSLER: So Larchmont and then in Brooklyn.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Yes. And I just want to say that this is Charis Schafer and this is an interview for the Brooklyn Historical Society and today is August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Uh, could you tell me a little bit about your early life, where you grew, what your childhood --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Could you talk a little louder?

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Sure. Could you tell me about where you grew up?

NATALIE CHASSLER: You want to start where I first lived when I was a little, little, little girl?

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Yes. Even you can go back and tell me about your parents and where they were from.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well when -- the first recollection I have is the fir- uh, the apartment that I lived in, I guess I was about three or four years old. It was on Eastern Parkway near Rochester Avenue. And I lived there until I guess I was about four and a half. And then we moved to a whole new neighborhood in Brooklyn that was Flatbush. And we

moved into a brand new two family house and there were farms around the area. And my aunt had a hou- uh, rented an apar- uh, an apartment in a two family house not far away. Right near -- that was on a far- near a farm, on farmland -- but near Brooklyn State Hospital. Uh, it was a two family house and we lived on the ground floor and the people above us were the owners. And they had three daughters and the fourth one was a son. So you could imagine what went on. Then they had a big party that I remember very clearly. I started school, I guess, about five or five and a half, kindergarten. I guess my mother walked me three or four blocks, it wasn't far away. Maybe twice or three times and after that I did it myself and all kids went by, to school by themselves.

CHARIS SCHAFER: You say it was farmland.

NATALIE CHASSLER: There was farmland and they were just putting up houses on the, the boulevard and on Lenox Road and near where the, uh, Brooklyn State Hospital was, is, it's still there, all around that, that area.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Uh-huh. So there were other families in that area that you knew?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Next door to us was another two family house the same as ours, put up at the same time. On the corner was a big one family house with a very big garden because we used to look in the garden. And one of the things I remember is that -- I can't remember when they caught a guy stealing something or whatever it was -- but he was in the garden and he was having an epileptic fit. And I remember I was about four or five years old looking at it. And I remember that they put something under his tongue or something. I was -- I guess it was our breakfast room window that looked right out onto their big garden. And I never saw anything like that before. And I, I guess put it out of my mind. I thought about it every once in a while but as a little girl I put it out. And I went to school. And then my sister was born I guess when I was about five years old or five and a half. And I remember I was very jealous because I was my daddy's

[00:05:00]

little girl. And because my sister was five years younger than I was I didn't really have very much to do with her at all, all through her life. I mean, just we weren't close. Uh, I went to public school and one of the things I remember is my cousin went to the same

school, the one who lived on Lenox Road. And he was very bright. And one of the teachers once said to me when I said I was Daniel Holland's cousin, she said, "Well I hope you're going to be as smart as your cousin." Of course I wasn't. And Daniel grew up to be one of my favorite cousins and he turned out to be a professor of economics at MIT and worked for the UN and all that. And we -- although he lived in Cambridge, we were pretty close and we saw each other until he died maybe eight years ago or so. And, uh, after the sixth grade we had to take a test to go to junior high. And I went to junior high and that was a whole new ballgame. Because it was one of these places -- that was called Graham Junior High or something -- that you had to wear a uniform, a blue skirt and a white either shirt or mini blouse and a red tie. And at that time I guess the depression was really setting in, so it was really hard for my family to have to buy me blue skirts and all this business. And, uh, I didn't have mini blouses but I wore little white shirts of boys because my father was in the shirt business. And in sixth grade we took the test and then we went this junior high. And the junior high we had to wear the uniforms, but they all had something else. Every couple of weeks we had achievement tests, like they talk about now. And everything was taught to that. And I remember I was not a good math student. I took Latin because you, I think you went in junior high until you finished the first year of high school. I took Latin that I hated and didn't do well. Wasn't very good in math but managed to pass. Then I wanted to go to high school. Everybody in my junior high went to James Tilden High School, if you know Brooklyn. It was a brand new high school. I didn't want to go there because I wanted to go to Erasmus, which was a very well-known fancy high school. And another one of my cousins had gone there. Well I was out of the district. But -- and I didn't know what to do. I wrote them a letter but they didn't accept me. So my father who was not an active or, or aggressive man, knew people in the democratic local club and I guess then the local club had something to say. And my father went up I got into Erasmus. And I went to Erasmus and it was a good, a good school, I, I liked it very much. I met two of my friends that continue in friendship. We went to college together. And I guess one died -- maybe 15, 20 years ago and another died maybe 10 years ago. The one who died a long

time ago, I'm still friendly with her husband and the woman he lives with I guess the last 10 or 12 years. And I speak to him all the time. I gradu- when I got out of, uh, Erasmus I  
[00:10:00]

you could either go to Brooklyn College or Hunter College. I didn't have any money -- the depression, it was terrible -- uh, to go out of town to college. Now to get into Brooklyn College at that time, you had to have a certain average, uh, depending how smart everybody else was. I knew my average was not going to be good. But I also knew I was a very good crammer. And Hunter College would take you in on your Regents exams. So I got very good marks for Regents exams, although I didn't know anything, and got attend to college. And I went to Hunter. And --

CHARIS SCHAFER: Can I take you back a little? Um, can you tell me a bit about your parents and where --

NATALIE CHASSLER: About what?

CHARIS SCHAFER: About your parents.

NATALIE CHASSLER: My mother was a very smart woman who came from a family, uh -- well I don't know what, what to say. My grandfather was pretty orthodox, but nobody else, none of the children were. They had pretensions or maybe it was true, of being very intellectual. One aunt was an artist who was married and she died at, at 99, a couple of years ago. And my uncle was a concert pianist in the second rank who, you know, gave concerts at town hall and stuff. So she, my mother always felt she was a little better than her neighbors, you know, comes from an intellectual family.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Had they been in the United States for a long time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: My father was born here. He was born on, uh, what the hell is it, not Essex Street, I forget, Hester or one of those streets. It was Ludlow Street. All is that, all I know is that when my oldest son went got an apartment on Delancey Street, I thought God it's the lowest -- there was a round circle. Anyhow, uh, my -- I had one aunt who never married, my aunt Mary. And she worked for Con Edison. And I remember as a little girl discussion because her name was Holland, she was able to get in and they didn't think she was Jewish. Of course she's, she was born in this country and everything. My

mother came here at about two or three years old. And, uh, the uncle and my two aunts, Mary and Molly were born in this country. My grandmother had 7 children. And all the children were very close, there were no fights or anything. As a little girl some of the happiest moments were going to my grandmother -- we used to go every Sunday and have chocolate cake. And my grandmother lived -- when we lived in Brooklyn -- well I have to go -- after we, we left Linden Boulevard because the depression was on and we couldn't afford the rent. I think the rent was \$90 a month or something. And --

CHARIS SCHAFER: This is Flatbush?

NATALIE CHASSLER: In Flatbush.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK. Did you call it Flatbush?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK, at the time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I think they used to call it East Flatbush.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And, and we had to move. We had a big apartment. My father had, had, uh, shirt business, manufacturing men's shirts. And I guess he lost it or went bankrupt. And it was very hard going because he worked as a salesman and everything. So we had to move. And we moved back to Brook- uh, we moved in Brooklyn and we moved to Carroll Street. Do you know Brooklyn?

CHARIS SCHAFER: Yes.

NATALIE CHASSLER: We moved to Carroll Street between Utica and Rochester Avenue. I remember it was 1710 Carroll Street. And my grandmother lived in Union Street between Utica and Rochester. She owned a, a two family -- it wasn't a brown stone, it was kind of a, uh -- these attached

[00:15:00]

houses with the stoop.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Uh-huh.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And so we lived and at that time in a three room apartment. My sister and I had the bedroom and my mother and father had a pull out couch in the living room.

My, my mother's sister lived on Rochester Avenue in a house that my grandfather's brother always -- my grandfather's brothers were all affluent<sup>1</sup>. Uh, one brother owned an iron works that is still in existence, Holland Dime Works, and another owned lots of real estate. My grandfather never really did very much because he was the student and the educated one and the rest of the family supported him. And I guess when their children got bigger they helped support my grandmother and grandfather. My grandfather also worked at -- I guess certifying that chickens were kosher or something, I don't know. And I lived on Carroll Street and that's when I went to the junior high. I went to the public school there. I changed from the one in Flatbush which was 135 to this one which is, I think, 189 or something. I --

CHARIS SCHAFER: So that neighborhood there on Carroll near Rochester, did you call that Crown Heights?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I think it might at that time called Crown Heights.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And there were, there was a nice park right near there. And there were a couple apartment houses but mostly one and two family houses. Because another cousin lived in a two family house and, and my other cousin sister they lived another, they lived in an apartment outside -- practically everybody lived around there. The only one who did not live around there was my uncle Abe that, who was a father of my cousin Daniel, the one who taught at MIT. He opened a business with a partner in Jamaica Queens selling ladies clothing, dresses and suits and he did very well there because Jamaica was up and coming. And he had a very nice house in Jamaica Estates, so it was very nice. And that brother Abe was very close with my mother. They, they loved each other and depended on each other and he used to help her out a lot. And my, my aunt Anna was a friend of my mother's before they got married.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I've digressed.

CHARIS SCHAFER: No.

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<sup>1</sup> My grandfather's brother owned the house that my aunt lived in on Rochester Avenue.

NATALIE CHASSLER: My, uh, my uncle was in World War I, but -- and went overseas. My father was a lieutenant in World War I, but he didn't go overseas. I don't know, he trained in some camp in Long Island, I think, I forget the name of the camp. I think it's still there as a matter of fact. And after the war my aunt and uncle got married and my mother and father got married.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: So your -- you said your mother's family moved when she was a small child. They moved to the United States?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right. First they lived in a house and what was, the beginning of East New York, the end of Eastern Parkway. I remember the house because years ago some houses would have a block, a cement block or something with the name written in it, the name of the house was Daisy. So when my mother showed it to me -- and she lived there as a little girl -- then I guess when she was growing up -- I don't know when they bought this house that my grandmother and grandfather owned -- and I remember they had a mortgage on them because they used to talk about it --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: This is on Eastern Parkway?

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was on, uh, Union Street right behind Eastern Parkway near Utica Avenue.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: This is the Daisy?

NATALIE CHASSLER: No.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: No.

NATALIE CHASSLER: The Daisy was in, in,

[00:20:00]

uh, beginning of East New York.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: But they moved from there, they bought this house. And I guess all -- my mother must have gotten married from there, I don't know where she got married from. But when I was a little girl my two aunts and my uncle still lived in the house with my grandmother and grandfather. It was when these houses -- well they weren't railroad flats because every room had a window. But because they were attached houses bought -

- there was like a little courtyard so I remember the dining room window was on this little courtyard. And they had a back yard and a front yard. And they had, always had a dog. And the first dog I remember was a little white poodle called Prince. And I don't know, I guess Prince died. And then when I starting to go to school, I must have been about eight or 10, more around 12, 10, 12, I had to walk -- I got the job walking my grandmother's dog because they lived only two blocks from me. And I got 25 cents a week to walk Patch, which was a Boston Bulldog, every day after school. Uh, then --

CHARIS SCHAFER: Where was your mother's family? Where did they come from?

NATALIE CHASSLER: They came from a small place near Odessa, I think.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Uh-huh.

NATALIE CHASSLER: But they were kind of vague about it. And they, you know, were very Americanized, they had absolutely no accent, the, the children. My grandmother did, she didn't talk too well and my grandfather. But children in all -- where -- in Oxford they didn't, they all went to high school here and graduated. Matter of fact my mother used to drive me crazy. Because when she went to high school they used to teach her how to parse a sentence and she would make me parse sentences --

CHARIS SCHAFER: That's OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Awful.

CHARIS SCHAFER: And your -- the -- your father's family then.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I -- they had very little contact. My father's family, he was one of the youngest and there were 10 children. And for some reason, I don't know, they were, they were a family that this, this one then talked to that one, or that one didn't talk to this one. But my father had a sister Becky who lived some place near us in Brooklyn and we used to see her. And she had two children and one daughter died, I, I think in childbirth or something. And then he had a couple of brothers that he had very little contact with. He had a sister, Dora, who lives in the Bronx -- that my mother didn't particularly like. And his younger sister, Lily, lived close to them. And her husband died when she was pregnant with her first child or he was a baby. And then she married a guy who was a bootlegger.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Fascinating.

NATALIE CHASSLER: So I used to hear really problems that she had because she was very close to my father and she didn't live too far away. She moved -- first I remember she lived on Ocean Avenue and then she moved to West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan. And she was -- had a lot of problems because she did not want her first husband's family to get a hold of the baby. She never told my cousin, Ira, that her present husband was not his father. He didn't find out until he was a grown man. I mean I used to hear this, you know, quietly listening to what went on.

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CHARIS SCHAFFER: Wow, that's a huge secret.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. When she -- she was married to the bootlegger, [Murray Bieler] She had two children, then she had Joan, yeah, just Joan. And she had Joan and then she -- and Ira from the other marriage, yeah. And after Lily died -- she died, I think it was some stomach cancer of something -- my mother kept in touch with Joan. And I remember we went to Joan -- got married and we went to her wedding. And then, I don't know, they -- we saw them, we went some place -- my husband and I, and we took my mother maybe because we were invited. I guess maybe Joan's children to a wedding in, uh, New Hampshire or something. And then we -- when my mother died we lost track of them.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: How did you know he was a bootlegger? Did everyone, did everyone know that really he was --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well I heard the stories.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: They didn't, they didn't announce it.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Can you tell me, do you remember any of the stories?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well I remember it was my aunt who was, you know, trying to get out of the house when the house was being raided or whatever, I can't remember. But I remember during the depression my aunt had a mink coat. Yeah. And great -- and also

he used to talk about the fact that it was just crazy that she never told her son that this man wasn't his father.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. (inaudible).

CHARIS SCHAFER: But you, you -- your father's family never talked about, uh, when they had come over to the United States or where they had come from?

NATALIE CHASSLER: My father?

CHARIS SCHAFER: Your father's family.

NATALIE CHASSLER: No. My father never -- I think he said they wanted to, stopped in England, but I'm not sure, I'm not sure. My father was not very open about his family because they were always fighting with each. And there were 10 children. He had, I forgot, he had a sister, Annie, who married very well, who married a doctor, and she lived until she died for many, many years in, on a Central Park West and 72<sup>nd</sup> Street I guess it was, or 6, in the Majestic, uh, apa- apartments. And I remember when we got married -- my father told her that I was getting married -- and she gave us \$50 or \$70 for a wedding present. And I went to -- I don't re- what was it, all of it -- so I think it was in B. Altman's or Lord & Taylors, they -- no, that I bought in Wanamaker's, had an antique department. And I bought a chest of drawers, an antique chest of drawers that I still have now.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Wow.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Because I decided I liked American Antiques and when everybody was using Swedish Modern I tried to buy antiques. And I -- every once in a while when I was, uh, early marriage I would go to Lord & Taylor's or B Altman's -- one of them, I think B Altman's had a shop called Going, Going, Gone where their prices would go down after a couple, couple of weeks. Yeah. And, uh, then I -- and the depression was terrible. There was really no money. When we lived on Carroll Street near my grandmother's, it was terrible. It really was. I remember there was a long discussion in my household. Because I think there was a march on Washington of the, um, veterans of World War I, uh, for a bonus. And I think the bonus came through, a couple hundred

dollars and that was very helpful. It would pay for some of the back rent we owed, the landlord, M. Goodie, was pretty understanding. And then things I guess started to improve.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Can you tell me about that area, the area around Carroll Street and Rochester?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Carroll -- Utica Avenue was a shopping district.

[00:30:00]

They used to have a lot of food stores. They had a famous place called Jack's Appetizing where they had all kinds of smoked fish and good stuff. They had a couple of shoe stores and eye places. And you -- and druggers. It was a very active -- Utica Avenue was, uh, really very active. Uh, there was this, uh, express subway station at Eastern Parkway and Utica Avenue. And one block from Utica Avenue was Albany Avenue and there was the New York Public Library. And when I was old enough I got a card and I used the card all the time. And I was introduced to all kinds of books. But they wouldn't let you take out certain books when you were children, you couldn't take out adult books, we could only take out children's books. They were very rigid about that.

CHARIS SCHAFER: What other kinds of people lived in that neighborhood?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Mostly Jewish. It was a, a Jewish ghetto. I'm thinking a couple of people weren't Jewish, but most of them were. I had a friend in the apartment house, it was a, a good friend. I only -- I never had a, a lot of girlfriends. I always would -- different phases of my life I would have a good friend. I had this girl, Evelyn Lischner, I guess. And then she got married way before I did and, uh, she moved to the island or something. I -- when I was -- lived on Carroll Street there I had a boyfriend, I had two boyfriends. I had one boyfriend I remember, Gilbert. And we were very close, good friends. We went to the library together and we went to all kinds of places together. In fact, we were such good friends that one time when he went to the tailor shop to take out his father's suit, they gave him my father's suit because they thought we were brother and sister. He later married and committed suicide. I remember that so distinctly because I was married and my mother and father shared a, um -- what do you call it -- at the, uh,

Philharmonic, a box with my aunt and uncle. And my aunt and uncle couldn't go so my husband and I went. We had just about gotten married. And I, you know, Saturday night you buy the Sunday Times and I saw it on the front page. I thought I would die, I couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it.

CHARIS SCHAFER: It was on the front page?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. Because what he did was so horrible. He took his car -- I remember it so clearly -- and slammed into an abutment purposely. But it didn't kill him so he took out some kind of an instrument for the car and started to beat himself with it and that's how he killed himself. So it was so horrible that it was on the New York Times. Terrible. The other thing I remember the New York Times was about that time or before that. My aunt Anna, that was my uncle Abe's wife, her youngest brother, Oscar, and his wife and his mother and father were killed -- and that was on the front page of the New York Times too -- because they were speeding, they were going to the Hampton's or something. And they were sitting in the rumble seat -- years ago they used to have them. And he crashed into something, I remember that. (inaudible) things as a little child, stick in your mind, not so little, but stick in your mind.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And there were a couple of things like that. Then I guess --

[00:35:00]

and my last year of high school things had started to get better because I think it was in the 30's. They started to have lend-lease to Britain and things were moving along and my father was doing better. I think what he used to do is buy things at auction and then sell them or something. He was a very handsome man, a very well liked, very quiet but very well liked. And, um, we moved from that one bedroom apartment to, uh, Union Street near Rogers Avenue. It was a very quiet neighborhood, it was the only small apartment house among all these brown stone single family houses.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Is this also still a Jewish area?

NATALIE CHASSLER: No.

CHARIS SCHAFER: No. This is different then.

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was mixed, mixed. It was mixed.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Can you describe the kinds of people that lived in that area?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh excuse me, before we moved there we moved to Carroll Street, 1384 Carroll Street, but we only lived for two years because I think the rent was up so high, it was high. And then we moved.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Is that was still in that Jewish area, Carroll Street, that Carroll Street place?

NATALIE CHASSLER: No, 1384 was near Kingston Avenue, that wasn't so. But my, uh, grandfather's brother and his wife and children lived in a one family house near there. And I remember they had a piano. And my mother insisted that I learn the piano, I was absolutely klutzy. I have no ear, never did. And I used to practice in, in their house until we bought an upright piano. Uh, we only lived in that apartment I think for two years and the rent was too high or something. And we moved to Carroll, uh, to Union Street and we lived there while I went to college. And my last year at Erasmus -- all I remember is it was near the Brooklyn Museum. It was before the main library of the, um, uh -- the library was built -- you know where it is on Eastern Parkway now?

CHARIS SCHAFFER: I do.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I used to have to go to Montague Street to the main library if I had to look some- you know, something up.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Because the, the library that is now on Eastern Parkway was not there?

NATALIE CHASSLER: No.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: No. And my favorite place was of course the Brooklyn Museum because you can walk from where I lived to the Brooklyn Museum and they didn't charge anything there. And the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, the Japanese Gardens, I used to love, love and so I spent a lot of time there, a lot of time at the Brooklyn Museum.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: So that neighborhood at that time, was that the Prospect Leffert's Gardens?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I don't know what it was called then, I don't know.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Did you call it anything?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Not really. It was Eastern Parkway. Eastern Parkway was very fancy. My aunt who had lived near us on Rochester Avenue and then the same apartment house, her husband studied, studied, studied and he finally became a CPA and quite successful. So she lived on Eastern Parkway near Plaza Street. She had a beautiful and a new house. And were very fancy houses there, uh, apartment houses. There was Turner Towers and there was a, and there was a big Jewish Center there because I remember when my cousin Betty got married it was at Brooklyn Jewish Center. And I remember I bought a dress in Klein's. Klein's used to have wonderful clothes.

CHARIS SCHAFER: That's amazing.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: So you said that that neighborhood  
[00:40:00]

was more mixed than the previous neighborhood?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yes. Right, right.

CHARIS SCHAFER: So what kinds of people do you remember being in that neighborhood?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well in the house that we lived in my neighbors were not Jewish. I remember the man had taught in, in, uh, not Turkey I forget where, one of the American universities there. And there were very few Jewish people in the house. There was a, um, another young girl and her name was, um, Carlyn, Schluseland they were Jewish. But German-Jewish which is, was a whole lot different than Eastern European Jewish. Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: So you're going to Hunter at this time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Then I started to go to Hunter. Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: So you're commuting into the city?

NATALIE CHASSLER: First I had to commute to the Bronx, what a long schlep. Because Lehman College then was part of Hunter College. And because Hunter College was so crowded they still had the old building and they were building the new building, which is

the old building now at Park Avenue. So we were one of the first classes to come to the Park Avenue building. Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: So you started up in the Bronx and then when they opened the new building you were --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. The first two years you had to go to the Bronx.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Around Park Avenue.

NATALIE CHASSLER: The first year or the first two years, I can't remember.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Were there many other students from Brooklyn?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh sure, sure. My friend Aviva was from Brooklyn. And my friend, uh, Ruth was from Brooklyn. Yeah. And we went to high school together. And Aviva went to junior high with me too. Yeah. So we went to Hunter and --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Was it expected that you would go to college as a woman at that time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Expected. Expected. Expected. And also I knew I did not want to be in a position where you had to depend on a man. I just knew that because I see my -- you know, I could understand why my mother wouldn't go out to work. I mean she just thought it was a terrible thing for women to work. When I started to work she said to me, "Your husband won't love you anymore. You'll be working so ... " But, um --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: What did you study then at Hunter?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well at Hunter they didn't have any social work. So I studied psychology. But I -- there were two -- I was very interested in history. But you wouldn't believe this. I said to myself, history. And I looked at all the girls that studied history that had such frappy behind from sitting so long. I said that's not for me. When I started Hunter there was a national, I think, NYA, National Youth Administration. And if you didn't have any money you could get a job through them while you went to college. Of course when I went to Hunter all you needed was five dollars for registration. It was free, free, just like Brooklyn College. That's why I was able to go. So I got this job after school when I was down town, down at Hunter, working in a settlement house on 104<sup>th</sup> Street between Lexington and 3<sup>rd</sup> and it was called -- oh my god, I forgot -- it'll come to me [Union Settlement House]. Uh, and I worked in a settlement house with a group of

girls. At that neighborhood it was East Harlem, was purely Italian. And I had a group of Italian girls who worked in factories there

[00:45:00]

who I couldn't believe had never been below 99th Street. They just lived there. But as things got better their families moved to New Jersey and there were very few girls in that group. While I was working at that settlement house I met a young man who was half Japanese and half American. His, uh, father was Japanese, his mother was American who was in Japan to open some kinds of kindergartens there. And we, uh, we liked each other very much. But I guess that was before the war because I remember the day of the war he -- I was out with him and we heard that Pearl Har- about Pearl Harbor were about to go to -- so that wasn't so pleasant. He, uh --

CHARIS SCHAFER: What was their -- what was your reaction to it?

NATALIE CHASSLER: He, his reaction -- well he always thought of himself as American. He, he really, he really did. Although he told me his father came from Kobe and was a Samur, Samurai officer or something. He -- at one point he wanted to marry me and I said to myself, I, I really like him but there's cer- he's not nice, he's not kind. He was -- and, and I had also met my husband at that time so I'm going out with the two guys. But I, I liked him, I was very attracted to him, he was charming, he was interesting. And I said, he's not going to be good to me. And he later married a girl that he knew for a long time that he had met when he went to college down south. He went to social work school. He -- when I went to social work school -- and he sent me a letter that he wanted to meet me. And I said I'm not going to do this because I'm not going to upset my husband and I'm not going to do -- so I, I just didn't. And I guess he told people at school that he used to know me but I nev- I never met him in school. And then he die- he died. I don't know how he died. He moved out west and you know how you get the alumni news from school, I read he died. In the meantime I went to Hun- Hunter and I did this job and I started to think well maybe I should be a social worker. Then I realized that I was not a really good group worker. I, I wasn't that great with groups. But social work I

thought would be interesting. I didn't want to be a school teacher. I didn't speak so well and everybody said, oh the exams to be a school teacher -- excuse me.

CHARIS SCHAFER: No problem.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I think I met him, I met my husband -- I was going out with a young man, Dick Adler, that I had met in the country. As things had improved my mother and father would rent some place in the country for the summer. And I --

CHARIS SCHAFER: Where in the country.

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was near Hunter, New York. I forget the name of the small town but it was right near Hunter. And I started to go out with this guy. And he took -- he was -- went to Pratt and he was going to be a, uh, what do you call it, industrial designer. And he took me to a party New Year's Eve at a friend's house and I met my husband. And I don't know, I said to myself, that's the guy for me.

[00:50:00]

You know, for some reason a quiet guy, wasn't that good looking, but I just felt it. So I said to myself am I going to do something about this. So I borrowed a book -- I -- we were talking and I said I was -- at Hunter you had to take, uh, introduction to philosophy. And I borrowed some kind of a book from him, because I knew that I'd have to return it. And when I returned it I think I had -- what -- asked him to dinner. And my mother made a nice dinner. And we started to go out because his father would let him have the car on Saturday night. Because his father played poker on Saturday night every night, every Saturday night, and he didn't use the car. So we started to go out.

CHARIS SCHAFER: And where did he live?

NATALIE CHASSLER: He lived in Brooklyn. And I didn't know him. He lived in a fancy house and when the depression came they bought a, a little house. And then after I knew him for a short time they bought a nice big house. His father was -- had a linoleum store or two. But then, I don't know when, but before I met him, my husband, his father went into the wholesale business of -- you -- as being a distributor, not for Armstrong, for another very big company, for the whole east coast. And he became pretty well to do and they were very generous people.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Where was the house?

NATALIE CHASSLER: So they bought this nice house in Brooklyn and as a matter of fact when we got married the war was still on. My husband had graduated from school, from college he went to NYU. He had a twin sister who didn't go to college because I guess they felt they could just send one child. And she worked in her father's business. And after he graduated from college he was pupil teaching, I guess, substi- no pupil or substituting or something. And he got drafted. But as child he was run over by a car and he had osteomyelitis in his leg. And because of that they wouldn't take him and he was 4F I guess he was embarrassed to go back to the school. So he got a job as an office boy for, uh, the March of Time. What in God's name and (inaudible) Roger de Boschwent or something. Anyhow he wanted to get into broadcasting or doing something like that and writing, he was a good writer. His uncle was a vice president, my mother-in-law's brother was a vice president at CBS. But he said he didn't believe in nepotism so he would (inaudible).

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Were you, were you married by this point?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Uh, I think, I can't, I think we got married when he got the job at, um, March of Time. And I went -- got into social work school. At that time was, it was, uh, called the New York School of Social Work or something. And in order to get in you had to write your biography. And he helped me with it and he was a good writer so that did the trick. And I have a feeling I was put on a waiting list but then they took me. And I went to

[00:55:00]

social work school. And he helped me write a lot of papers.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Are you still living in Brooklyn at this point?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. We -- when we got married we couldn't get an apartment. And my mother-in-law's house had three floors. And the third floor had two rooms and a bathroom. So we had one room and a bathroom and the other room was a guest room. And we stayed there until I got pregnant. And I got pregnant, I guess, I didn't expect to because I was using a diaphragm, so I don't know how that happened. And my mother-

in-law found us an apartment on Ocean Avenue and it was a lousy apartment, but it was the only apartment we could.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Was that close to where your --

NATALIE CHASSLER: My in-laws lived.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Were they on Ocean Avenue?

NATALIE CHASSLER: They lived on East 19<sup>th</sup> Street in Ocean Avenue.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK. So the other side of the park?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Um, further down.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Further down -- Flatbush.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Uh-huh.

NATALIE CHASSLER: It's now called, I think it was called Midwood.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I think now it's a very, uh, orthodox-Jewish neighborhood and

Russian, Russian too. So we lived there and then she found us a, this apartment on Ocean Avenue near Avenue L. And it had one bedroom and a little kitchen and was on the ground floor. And while we were living there about a year, my husband got an offered -- I don't know how it, I can't remember how -- to work at new magazine called Cornet. I think he knew the guy who was starting it all, Oscar Dystel. I don't know how he knew him. And -- but Cornet was in Chicago. So he was going to be the picture editor or something. So he worked first in New York and then they moved to Chicago. And I remember he went to Chicago first and then I followed. And my son was a little over a year old by that time. And Chicago was a terrible place for apartments. The company put us up in a hotel that we lived in for a long time. And then they got us a furnished apartment in what was called -- it was almost Evas- Evanston but not quite. It was across the street from, uh, Maudlin College and across the street from the beach so it was very nice. And my husband complained, well we're talking about a (inaudible) Oscar. I

remember so distinctly. My husband wanted a raise and Oscar kept telling him how hard it is for him to manage. And Oscar had a maid and a governess for his children. And, and I tried to explain to my husband, everybody lives in a different level. He, at his level he's having a hard time. At our level we're... And, and in the meantime I hadn't finished social work school. I had only done it a year or a year and a half.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Did you take time off to have your son?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. I had -- no, because I had moved. And we stayed in Chicago. We lived in this fro- from the hotel we moved into this first apartment which was terrible. But I made friends -- met down at the beach -- a woman who was extremely wealthy and had one of these gorgeous mansions right out near the beach. I couldn't believe my eyes how -- the, the kids' bathroom was bigger than this room. But she was very nice and we had a nice time together. And then I guess after a year or two -- no, we were there longer than that -- about two and a half years. We moved back to New York, but before we moved back my in-laws bought us a house. They didn't consult us.

[01:00:00]

They bought a house a block from their house, a big old Victorian house. It was nice.

CHARIS SCHAFER: And this was still in that area of Brooklyn where they were?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: So --

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was a block away.

CHARIS SCHAFER: -- near Ocean Avenue?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Ocean Avenue is right behind us and we were on 19<sup>th</sup> Street in Ocean Avenue. And we moved into the house so we had to furnish it. Uh --

CHARIS SCHAFER: Do you remember that address?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yes, I do. It was 1245<sup>2</sup>, I think, M -- it was 1245<sup>3</sup> because I think my mother-in-law's house was 1170. And we lived there --

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<sup>2</sup> Correct number is 1235.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: And that's on 19<sup>th</sup> Street?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Huh?

CHARIS SCHAFFER: That was on 19<sup>th</sup> Street?

NATALIE CHASSLER: East 19<sup>th</sup> Street between L and M.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: East 19<sup>th</sup> Street. OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And my father-in-law bought, also bought a house, a summer house in the country on La- in Lake Mahopac and of course it was too small. It, it had two little bedrooms downstairs. And upstairs like an attic bedroom where we would stay. And his daughter would -- the daughter that got married and lived where we used to live in my mother-in-law's apartment. And then she moved to a place in Brooklyn that was opening up called Shore Haven. That was on the other side I think near -- not Bensonhurst but the other -- Bay Ridge, and she lived there for a number of years until she and her husband got divorced. Her husband was a very nice guy who was an actor. He played on Howdy Doody and everything. She could not stand acting. And in the summertime when he did summer, uh, I, stints I guess in summer theater, she stayed with her mother-in-law all the ti- with her mother all the time. And eventually they got divorced. He was a nice guy. She never spoke to him. She was angry at her aunt who was her favorite aunt, my mother-in-law's, uh, youngest sister -- or the half-sister or whatever -- uh, because she kept in touch with him. Uh, eventually she married somebody else. My father-in-law was a very nice man except he had a hostile sense of humor. And if you were the pit of his jokes, it was horrible. And which I couldn't stand being in the same house when my father-in-law, my ha- my sister-in-law's new husband was there because he'd make the most horrible, hostile -- my sister-in-law thought it was hilarious. She was so tied to her father the whole, whole mess. Anyhow we stayed in Brooklyn. My three kids were born in Brooklyn. They went to school in Brooklyn. My eldest son -- oh, I go have to go back. When my -- we moved to Brooklyn I got in touch with social work school and I went back to social work school. My husband said he didn't, it was OK with him if I went to school. I mean, I didn't ask him, I said, "I'm going." He said, "Well I want you

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<sup>3</sup> Correct number is 1187

to know you can go to school. However I expect the house to run there and I expect to have dinner there." You know, men were different then, then a woman. His mother and father were very gener- good to me. My mother -- they would take my kid to nursery school. My father, father-in-law had a driver. The driver picked the kid up at --

[01:05:00]

and kept him at his house until I came from school. In the summertime because they went to, uh, Mahopacmy mother would take care of my son. And eventually I graduated from social work school. And I guess when I graduated I had, I purposely planned -- I was pregnant for the last couple months in social work school and then I had my son, Phillip. And then later I had a daughter. And we lived in Brooklyn and I had a neighbor next door to me, the Streets, who were old fashioned Brooklyn people that came out of, I don't know what book. I mean they would play bridge on the porch every night. They had maiden daughter, the na- their name was Streets and they owned the mortgage on my house. And the Streets had this maiden daughter whose name, she's -- what the hell was their name, [Helen] I can't -- And they went away one year and she must have stayed home, she worked as a secretary some place. And she must have had an affair with somebody in her office and she became pregnant. And got, of course, her family made her marry him. And let me tell you, when she was expecting the baby -- years ago you, you didn't have driers you had washers. There were lines that went from your back porch to the tree in the back. They took out all her nightgowns when she was a baby, all her -- then I guess when she was a baby wore belly bands and shirts, all these old fashioned things. But they washed for the new baby. In the meantime my daughter I guess had -- I must have had two cribs because they were only 21 months apart. So Phillip must have outgrown his crib so I gave it to Mrs. Street. Well they continued to live there for a while and then I guess the daughter -- what was her name, Helen-- decided she wanted to get a divorce. So they packed up their old Packard, it was from the year one and they drove to Reno with the baby and everything to get the divorce. Well she got the divorce and they decided they were afraid he would contest it, I don't know what the story was. And they decided to move to Reno. And they rented their house -- first they sold some of the

furniture because my friend Ruth bought a couple of things from them. And I stupidly -- they had Tiffany lamps and I didn't like them. My husband said, "Buy them, they're nice." I said, "Nah." Anyhow I bought a couple of wash, a wash stand or something. They rented the house and I knew the woman that they rented the house to, Sylvia Stone, because my son, Joseph, went to school with Bonnie Stone who now is the, uh, Chief Officer of Women in Need or something. Anyhow we were very friendly. And then I guess my, my husband left Cornet and he went to work on Pageant Magazine. And he also worked as a consultant for Conyers Magazine doing some kind of work. And every -- he did something and he got \$200 for every throw. And that's how I got my dining room chairs. Because I bought good, expensive dining room chairs. And then from Coronet --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Can you tell me about, uh, the neighborhood at this time? Because --

NATALIE CHASSLER: The neighborhood was mixed.

[01:10:00]

But most of the storekeepers were Jewish on Avenue M. There was a vegetable store and I always remember saying to myself, such a lovely, uh, loving couple, people who owned the vegetable store. And I thought she was calling him lovey, but that was his name in Yiddish. Lieber, [or something I don't know. (inaudible).] There was that place. There was a meat store. And on Avenue M there was the old movie house thea- uh, theater, but there was also movie studios. I forget the name of the studios. I think they're still there (inaudible) now TV Studios. And there was a famous place called Cookies where we'd go Saturday morning for breakfast. Saturday or Sunday morning every, uh -- that's what we did, we took the kids for breakfast. Uh, the neighborhood -- when my kids went back to see what it was like, it turned Russian. The, uh, drug store on the corner, Mussoor something, all the signs were Russian. There was a egg, uh, uh, little store that dose, sold and eggs and butter and stuff, signs were in Russian. Also a very expensive children's clothing store came in just about when we were mo- moving. Because what happened is a lot of, uh, uh, rich orthodox Jews started to move in and then a lot of Russians.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: And you said your family -- part of them were orthodox, or there were some --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SCHAFFER: You, you had said earlier something about, um, the orthodox tradition in your family. There was no --

NATALIE CHASSLER: No.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: -- just -- OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: No. No. My husband's family was more religious. They -- when I say more religious, they went to, they belonged to a -- a shul. And they went into on the High Holy Days. When my kid -- the two -- my husband wanted the two kid, the boys to be bar mitzvahed, said I didn't care less. But I figured I'm not making waves. And, uh, they went to Hebrew school and my daughter went to Hebrew school. They belonged to Midwood Temple. And I mean modest Bar Mitzvahs for them. When I guess we lived next to the house -- our house was in the middle. There was -- the Stone's had the rented house and next door to me were the Ballingers. Mr. Ballinger was a -- I guess in his 50's or 60's. On the -- in their third floor their son and daughter-in-law and two children lived, but they moved out. Mr. Ballinger must have -- when I look back at it -- been bipolar. Because what happened was he became very high and very active and started to buy up houses. And he wanted to sell my house, his house and where the Stones lived for an apartment house. So he gave us all, I don't know, money, 10% down because he was going to give us \$26,000 for the house, the house cost \$13,500, so good deal. Mrs. Street's house and his house. Well what happened is, I don't know, the deal fell through. And poor Mr. Ballinger committed suicide. But knowing my instinct I knew something was wrong because his garage -- my, your -- you know, I could see from my kitchen window. And I said, "Something is wrong"

[01:15:00]

that garage he ran again. I wouldn't do anything but I stopped a man on the street just because I am very self-protective. And I said, "I think something is going on in that garage. Will you please look?" And he had committed suicide. And the deal fell

through but somehow or other, I can't remember, somebody did buy the three houses so we had to move. So first we looked in Brooklyn at different houses and there were some beautiful houses. Then my husband said to me, "I spent my whole life in Brooklyn, I don't want to live in Brooklyn anymore. Let's move someplace else." So I said to him, "OK." I said, "You look and when you think you saw something you like let me know, I have too many things to do. You can look on Saturday or Sunday." So first he looked in Chappaqua and when he saw a couple of houses he, we, I looked at them, they were nice. Then we decided it was a very long commute. In the meantime my cousin Lita, or his cousin Lita who was my father-in-law's nie- sister's child, Lita had moved to Mamaroneck. She had married a dentist. And we spoke to Lita and Lita said it's beautiful up there, it's a short commute. So my husband went up there, looked at a couple of houses, called me up and, um, took me up there and I saw my house, I liked it. You know, you could look at a house in five minutes and you can tell, like a husband. Fine. So he bought the house and never regretted it. It's a great house. We paid \$32,500 for it I remember, unbelievable. It was on a third of an acre, the most gorgeous piece of land with a huge back yard and a big terrace. And then we built a terrace, it was, it was gorgeous. When we sold the house after 13 or 14 years, to someone who worked with me who had visited me in the house and said to me, "Mrs. Chassler, if you ever want to sell the house, I'm looking for a house." And I called up my husband and said, "Listen, Nancy Hoffheimer wants to buy the house, what do you say?" He says, "Good." So I (inaudible) a price, I said, "OK, I'll ask for \$88,000." She was happy. She was so happy. I said -- she said, "Oh, Mrs. Chassler, I'm so happy. It's the best thing that ever happened to me." I said, "Nancy, it's only a house, it's not the husband." I said, "And besides which I want you to remember that the door in the kitchen goes down the cellar and you have to very, be very careful because the kids could fall down the cellar if they open the door. And don't forget there's no bathroom on the main floor you have to go -- the bathroom's on the second floor or on the third floor or on the basement. Just remember all that." "I know, I love it." So she bought the house. I didn't have to clean it, I didn't have to do anything. She later sold the house for more than a million dollars. My sister

sent me a clipping from the local bank but -- and when -- well she put in a bathroom downst- in the main floor. But it was a beautiful house. It had a big, beautiful bedroom, big living room, small dining room. I had redone the kitchen and opened up the kitchen, a breakfast room to when (inaudible). And I had really worked at garden I had -- I liked gardening. So it was nice. So my kids at that time also were interested. They were all out of the house, they were in college. And my daughter said to me, "You know, it looks -- when I come home it looks like you don't love the house anymore. This bedroom you used for a sewing room and this one we used for a junk room, what's going on here." So -- OK, so that how we came to New York. But my kids went to Mamaroneck High School. They went to public school there.

[01:20:00]

Phillip was in the fifth grade, he, he had Mr. Mansfield. My daughter, Deborah, my daughter was in the third grade. And my son who was bri- he was really brilliant, he was in his third year in high school. He came in with the -- the principal said he was the second highest in the grade. The boy who was the first highest lived on our block across the street, Donald Finkelstein. Anyhow, they went to school, they did fantastically well, they told me later they hated it. Then they told me it horrible, they hated living in Larchmont. Seemed to me they enjoyed themselves, but they -- but OK. They, uh -- my son, his best friend is still -- uh, his friends he made in third and fourth grade, when he comes in New York he always see his friend Andy Schwartz who lived across the street. Uh, my daughter had one friend, Kristin, who was a very interesting little girl. Her mother worked in the, um, underground of Norway during World War II. Her father was killed, her mother remarried. She was a very nice looking little girl and her sister was a beautiful girl. And low and behold she was working on the street one time in Italy, Kristin, I guess she was about 17 or 18, and she got picked up to be a model. And she turned out to be the famous Colette or Cordette or something, of Ralph Lauren. It was hard to believe. You know (inaudible) healthy looking girl. She was a beauty- nice looking girl but I guess he -- the way they posed her she looked gorgeous. She -- my daughter really didn't keep in touch with her. But in the last couple of years Kristin lives

up in Mamaroneck or Larchmont. She had written, you know, Christmas cards to my daughter and my daughter sent her... Her mother died recently and the New York Times had a, a big article about her. Uh, my son, Joseph, went to Mamaroneck High School. He graduated, uh, of course on the honor society and salutatorian of the class. He didn't get into Harvard, he got into, uh, Columbia. Don got into Harvard -- and he went to Columbia and, uh, he started to have all kinds of problems. He -- I guess suddenly met people who are just as smart as he was. So he kept complaining all the time and this and he was this and that and the other thing. And I guess one of the -- in his third year he met a girl, or a second year, I'm thinking -- I can't remember, she was going to Vassar, her name was Arden Harrison. And I remember her mother called me up, couldn't believe it, and she said, "I understand my daughter is going out with your son. I want to tell you my daughter spells trouble." Whoever heard her own mother talking that way? She said, "She's very willful, she gets what she wants all the time." She went to a very fancy girl school in, uh, Troy, New York or somebody's school I forget the name of it. "Anyhow, I'm just warning you're going" -- you know, she said, "Your son shouldn't go out with her." Well who could stop them. Anyhow they went out and they -- when he was due to graduate he said to me he didn't graduate, he didn't write all his papers. He was going to Europe.

[01:25:00]

What happened was my father-in-law, I don't know, made shares of the business so all the kids every year would get money and shares of the business. And my son Joe took that money and he went to Greece and Paris and stuff. And he said he wasn't gradu- he didn't graduate. OK. I was aggravated but what the hell are you going to do. The meantime, in the local paper, in maybe August or something I see an article and it says, "Local boy graduates Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia University," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I said, "What?" So I told my friend Silvia who just called up. I said, "Would you believe that?" She said, "Oh my god." Anyhow Silvia's husband -- that was another story -- they were going to Europe and maybe to Greece, he was a photographer. So by accident she met him and he with Arden and another bunch of people. And she said,

"Joseph, you know you graduated" she told him. Anyhow that Joseph in Greece and he was in Paris and he was in Italy. And luck would have it he and Arden did go with a group. They went some place and they all got killed in a car. And I heard about it on the radio, uh, I thought I would die. But he was OK. Anyhow Arden was a year behind him in, in Vassar and she graduated from Vassar finally, Phi Beta Kappa. Oh, what happened is the last year she decided she's not going to Vassar, she's going to go to Barnard and live with Joseph in his apartment. But she graduated from Vassar anyhow, Phi Beta Kappa, the whole shmeer. She got a, uh -- what's a kind of fellowship, I forgot? They used to give out a good --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: Woodrow Wilson Fellowship?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, something like that. Anyhow they got married. Her mother made a little wedding in her house in Jersey. And of course the minute they got married that was the end of the marriage. Because I guess each one had a different expectation when you're married and didn't work out. So I think that marriage was in the -- her father was a big lawyer so it was annulled. And --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: But he graduated.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Huh?

CHARIS SCHAFFER: How did he graduate if he went to Europe?

NATALIE CHASSLER: They just graduated him.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: They graduated him anyways?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right. Because he had all the points and everything, so he just wasn't there at graduation.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: OK. OK.

NATALIE CHASSLER: He may have known he graduated. He was, um, a drama queen. He may have known he -- but he just told me he wasn't graduating. Anyhow --

CHARIS SCHAFFER: So you would --

NATALIE CHASSLER: -- he had no job and my heavens he -- my father-in-law said, "Come to work for me" and set up something. So I know he went to work for my father-in-law for a very short time and he set up some kind of a business thing that my father-in-law said

was wonderful, how to keep track of things. And then for -- he got a job teaching in a community college. And then he got a job -- oh, he started to go for his doctorate in philosophy. And he did all the course work at Columbia. And he got it because he did all the course work and he just had to do his thesis. He got a job at, uh, University of Wisconsin. In the meantime, he had met Beverly, his wife, my former daughter-in-law. And he and Beverly got married.

[01:30:00]

And they moved to Wisconsin. He didn't know how to drive but he bought a Volkswagen and learned to drive. And he and Beverly moved across country to Wisconsin. And they rented a farmhouse. I suggested that they put an ad in the paper and they did and they got a wonderful little farmhouse in Oregon, Wisconsin. And that's where there was all of a sudden Zack was born and their, uh, daughter was born, Nora. Then he I guess his thesis started to fool around with women again. And he had a girlfriend. And when they came back east -- I guess he didn't write his thesis and his contract was for two or three years, they came back east. And he started to try to write his -- he wrote his thesis on Dante and he did not agree. Dante was, uh, uh, I guess advisor, and didn't agree on when Joseph thought -- I, I forget what he wrote, his subject was something about, about speech. And, uh, they had a falling out and he didn't accept his dissertation so he never wrote it. And in the meantime he and Beverly separated. And he found this girl at University of Wisconsin, Barbara, came from a very wealthy family from St. Louis or someplace like that. And he and Barbara opened up some kind of a business doing typesetting and they were very successful until computers came in.

CHARIS SCHAFFER: My father was a typesetter.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Then I'm thinking started to take up with drugs. And he and Barbara kind of eventually split. He kept in contact with Beverly all the time and his children. And, uh, when he got sick with cancer about 10 or 12 year, 10 years ago, not even that, he asked if he could come and stay with me, I said, "Nothing doing." Because I knew he and I never could get on and it would ruin my whole life. My son -- my husband had just died just a couple years before. So Beverly, his ex-wife took him in. She's a wonder-

wonderful woman. And she got, eventually she got, um, hospice service and he stayed there until he died. And Beverly has always been very close, we were very supportive. When they didn't have money I, we paid their rent, we did all this stuff with them, sent their kids to college. And, um, at this moment my granddaughter, Hannah, is sitting with Beverly's cat. So Beverly goes to California to see her grand, her son (inaudible). So I got out of social work school and the kids were I guess, uh -- I wasn't working. And I had someone come in the house, everybody had somebody clean, I never cleaned. My mother-in-law used to send over Rosie who was her cleaner and everything. And on Thursday night she sent over Rosie every Thursday night so my husband and I could go out to the movies or to dinner. She was a marvelous mother-in-law. Never met a woman -- as I used to say to her, "I can't say I need this because before I close my mouth I have it." I wanted to send my kids -- one of the boys -- to camp, I think Phillip, because they were doing a lot of building on our street and he we- the kids were climbing on all our stuff and I was too nervous and I needed \$500 quick. So I borrowed it from her, she wouldn't take it back, but eventually I told her I would never borrow money from her again if she didn't take it back (inaudible).

[01:35:00]

She -- so I started to go to work and I had this woman who came in three times a week. And those days you'd leave your door open and the, the other two days the kids would come in and pick up their lunch and go -- school was close by. And my friend, Silvia Stone, also would look in on them. And then after we sold the house in Brooklyn, we moved to Larchmont. And we moved to Larchmont -- I had gotten this job working part time at Brooklyn State Hospital. Because I knew the woman who ran -- who was the head of the social work department, that had gone to social work with me, Rosalind Richmond. So I called her up and I said I would like a part time job. And they were very happy to get graduate social workers because it's still hard to get -- there weren't that many graduate social workers in the early '50's. So I got the job and I worked until I guess about three o'clock, got home when they got home from school. Then when we moved to Larchmont she had transferred to a clinic in New York. So I called her up and I

said, "Ros, I'm ready to come back to work the clinic." I said, "But part time." She said, "OK." You know when you work four fifths time you do the same work (inaudible) get four fifths salary. But I did it. I took the train every day. I took the train back. And sometimes I was kind of late for the train so I took a taxi to, to Grand Central. And I worked with, uh, a doctor Demassamo that was a pain in the ass. Uh, young kind of gay guy, really tough, tough mean guy. But he was very nice to me. On Thursday night when we had, uh, work we went out to dinner together and everything. And one day I said, "Oh I'd love to go to Europe." And he said, "Well, Mrs. Chassler, if you wouldn't take a taxi every damn day you'd save money." I said, "That's true." Anyhow I worked there for years. I (inaudible) then I became a supervisor. Then I became the head of the clinic. And then there was a whole new revamping of the Department of Mental Health. And they decided to have -- and when I have the clinics I had a clinic on Broadway. Anyhow they decided to move everything back to the hospitals. And they eliminated my job. So I didn't have a job for a while with the department. But eventually -- I can't even remember how -- oh I guess they could not hire anybody because I was still on the list and they had to re -- get me a job first before they could hire anybody else. Because people whose jobs were eliminated in the state, that's how it worked. So I got a job working at Manhattan Psychiatric Center. And the job they gave me was kind of some social work job. But eventually I became the head of service and I was the head of service until I retired. And my husband retired before I did. After he left Cornet and he went to, uh, I forget the name of the magazine, another little magazine, then he went to the Harold Tribune had a ma- a magazine called This Week and he worked there for a while. He hated it, drove me crazy complaining about it. And then his friend became the editor of Redbook, so he hired him to be managing editor,

[01:40:00]

and he was managing editor. And then his friend went to be editor of a McCall and he became the editor of Redbook for years. And he was the editor of Redbook and was very happy. The magazine did very well under him and it became a very well-known magazine for women's rights. He was on the, uh, President's committee for equal rights.

And we went to the White House to meet, uh, I guess it was Carter or something they did a lo- was very active in the movement. So he did a lot of things.

CHARIS SCHAFER: When you sold the house in, uh --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Larchmont.

CHARIS SCHAFER: -- Larchmont, where did you move from there?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well I said to my husband, "I sold the house in Larchmont, you find us a place in, uh, New York in the city." In the meantime we had bought a house in the country. We had a house in Clinton Corners because my friend Ruth had a house nearby and we used to go up for weekends and my friend Ruth was very outspoken. She said, "Instead of coming up here all the time, why the heck don't you buy your own house." "OK." Sounds logical. So we went around and we looked at a couple of houses and we saw this house and we fell in love with it, it was an old farm house house, loved it. And we have that house and it was near Rhinebeck which is a very nice community. And we thought, well when we retire we'll live up there and when we get, move to New York we'll just get a nothing apartment. Well so I sent my husband to look for apartments since he worked in New York and I was working on the Island and it's a pain in the neck to get off the island and park your car, blah, blah, blah. So said he wanted to live around a place where he could walk to work. He worked in around Grand Central. So I said, "OK." I knew I didn't want to live on the west side because I had a clinic on the west side and I didn't want to meet all my patients. And I didn't like the west side, it was too hustling and too bustling. Beverly lived on the west and, and 72<sup>nd</sup> Street. My aunts -- I -- when I grew up as they left my grandmother's house they lived on 71<sup>st</sup>, one lived on 72<sup>nd</sup> and, and West End in the, in the house next to where Beverly lived. And another lived in a brownstone on 71<sup>st</sup>. I didn't like the neighborhood. So he looks and he doesn't have very much pa- patience. First we decided well maybe we'll look for another house in Larchmont. So we looked around, we wanted a house with a pool. And that's what when we decided we would buy the summer house. Then we decided, OK, we're going to go into -- we bought the summer house, we didn't buy another house in Larchmont with a pool or near the water. So he found this apartment -- in fact wasn't somebody else lived

here -- my theory is if someone else lived here it can't be that bad (inaudible) can't be that -- and we moved here. When we went -- we stayed in Clinton Corners for a week. A week is OK but two weeks, you could go nuts. Not for me, I like the city. So this became our home. I -- once I settle in -- as I said to my husband. I kept this work for the Department of Mental Health my whole life (inaudible) my whole life. I had inertia, I don't like change, so we stayed here. In the meantime my friend Silvia before we moved here moved, rented an apartment on 56<sup>th</sup> Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and she has a gorgeous, a set back from her living room. You know, the roof is bigger than this so she has a beautiful terrace with plantings and everything. And that's what I would have liked because I love to garden. And in Clinton Corners I had a gorgeous garden and I

[01:45:00]

would dream about it every night practically when I did -- when I sold the house. So we lived here and it was easy to get to work. I just go on the East River Drive (inaudible) work, it was fine. And then when I retired, and my husband retired about a year or two before I did, I, uh -- we would go to country for lo- you know, weekends on Thursday night or something. And then when my husband died, he got sick and he died in a very short time, I kept the house for about two years and I said this is crazy. I drive up to the house alone, I have, I go shopping (inaudible), pack my car up with the food and come back to the city Thursday night to -- that's crazy. So I, I sold the house and, uh, to my regrets -- I guess I was so upset I sold to an auctioneer everything in the house for very little money. Because the man kept saying to me, "Are you sure, are you sure?" I, I sold some books first and I think that's all and then I took a lot of books to the library for book sale. But when I think about all the great things I sold in the house for nothing, I get aggravated. But I think, oh, what, that's it. And I've been living here. And once, once I retired I did volunteer work on a helpline for a while. And my mother was still alive so I'd go and visit her. And she had, uh, a compan- uh, someone take care of her. And as she got older she got like frailer and she, her memory, she got -- I don't, I don't think it was Alzheimer's, I think she more, I don't know what it was. But and like I said, (inaudible) psychosis. And then I got somebody who was very good who came -- first I

had Lana who was a Ukrainian woman who was great. But Lana met a guy and they got married, Eugene. But Lana had a friend who was looking for a job, Zoya. And Zoya came to work for my mother and Zoya was wonderful. And Zoya had two daughters who were in Ukraine that she wanted to bring here so Zoya was here illegally. She had, uh, overstayed her visit limitation visit, a visitor's visa I guess. And, uh, she wanted to bring her daughters here. And they have like a lottery for different countries. And low and behold one daughter won the lottery. And I don't know, I had to go to get the daughter and her husband to the (inaudible). When that became a public, uh, you know, dependent and so I had to send all my taxes to the government and everything for her. And the daughter came over here and three days of son, son-in-law Serge got a job working with another Ukrainian who owned a ironworks business. And the daughter went to, uh, one of the schools to learn English, LaGuardia something. Eventually she went to Baruch, she graduated. She beca- uh, became an accountant. She became a citizen. And because she became a citizen fi- her mother became a citizen because if you're a citizen for five years, you can ma- sponsor someone, so she sponsored her mother. Her other daughter, Galina, well she didn't win a lottery. So there was a big problem. If she paid some guy \$10,000

[01:50:00]

who had a green card, he would marry her and bring her here. OK. So Zoya tells me the whole story. So I said, OK, I'll lend you \$10,000. So I lent her \$10,000. So she said, "I'll pay you every week." I said, "Zoya, don't do that. Save it up, when you get your \$10,000, give me the \$10,000." I can't -- I, I don't like to keep track like that. She said, "OK." Well Galina marries this guy then she has to -- she comes here, then she has to divorce him, the whole (inaudible). She paid, Zoya paid me back the \$10,000 eventually. Zoya got paid I think 8 or \$900 a week from my mother. My, my mother when died she was 190, 104 in the six years, so her money had run out so I had to pay Zoya all the time. And Galina came here. Galina went to community college, learned English, went, went to Staten Island School of Nursing, meets a Jewish guy, gets pregnant, doesn't marry him she doesn't want to marry him. Zoya's beside herself. I said, "These things happen,

forget it." The guy turned out not to be good, he's the only son of a Jewish mother and Jewish grandmother. He was spoiled, he didn't work, he was a miserable. Anyhow they had all kinds of problems because they wanted custody, the family wanted custody of the baby. But fortunately they did a stupid thing, they lied and said he was the husband and but he'd never marry her. And because they lied they had trouble. Anyhow Galina got the little girl. Galina graduated and got her RN. And she worked in a doctor's office and she meets this guy who comes to her she marries him. And a couple months ago they had a baby. In the meantime Natasha, who came here years ago<sup>4</sup>, couldn't get pregnant. But lo and behold, I don't know how, but I guess she had a baby too recently. Zoya and I talk to each other all the time. We have lunch together. Now she's working for a lady who's very, very, very sick but also very, very rich. So Zoya had to learn how to drive because she has to drive the car out to, uh, the Hamptons every weekend and come back. And she lives in this fancy house next door to Bloomberg so I know all about that. (inaudible).

CHARIS SCHAFER: How wonderful.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And life goes on and on and on.

CHARIS SCHAFER: On and on.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Well it's about 5:18 or so. I'm thinking it's probably a good time to --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right.

CHARIS SCHAFER: -- stop for today, unless you have anything else you want to add.

NATALIE CHASSLER: No. All I could tell you is that after I worked at Helpline, then I went to do a group with homeless women. And then I decided to, uh -- I joined the club and did exercise five, I used to do five days a week. And I met a couple of women there and made a good social life for myself. I go to theater, go do all kinds of things. As I get older it's a little harder for me. But I manage to run around a little bit.

CHARIS SCHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. So if you decide you wanted something more let me know.

CHARIS SCHAFER: OK, I will.

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<sup>4</sup> Galina's sister

END OF AUDIO FILE

**This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only.**

**Oral history interview with Natalie Chassler, 2013-2014, 2011.019.062; Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations Oral History Collection, 2011.019; Brooklyn Historical Society.**

**Oral History Interview with Natalie Chassler  
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.062**

**Interview conducted by Charis Shafer at the narrator's home on January 14th, 2014 in  
New York City.**

NATALIE CHASSLER: [00:00:00] -- it was one of the best hospitals in Brooklyn. Now, I don't know, but for many, many years, it was called Interfaith Hospital. And when I went to social work school, my first placement was there. I think -- no, it wasn't, it was supposed to be there, and I decided I didn't like working with sick people. (laughter) I don't care if they're crazy, but I don't -- physically ill, I kept thinking I would -- everything was the matter with me.

CHARIS SHAFER: That you were going to catch something?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah. So, I just want to -- I want to start the interview and say that it's January 14<sup>th</sup>, and I'm here with Natalie Chassler, and this is an interview for the Brooklyn Historical Society, and I'm Charis Shafer. And I will speak louder. (laughter) So, at that time, around the -- so you're born at the Jewish hospital. Do you have any other memories about the Jewish hospital, or the area around the Jewish hospital there?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I remember the area, because not far from the Jewish hospital, I think I told you, on Bedford Avenue was one of the first Loehmann's, and I remember -- one of my first memories was going there with my mother. I must have been about three or four years old.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember anything else on Bedford? Was it a busy street that a lot of people went to?

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was a busy street. They had a lot of little stores, and then they had a big, I think -- I forget the name of the company, but they were selling cars.

CHARIS SHAFER: Was it the Studebaker?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Hmm?

CHARIS SHAFER: Was it Studebaker?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I think it must have been.

CHARIS SHAFER: Because there's a building that says "Studebaker."

NATALIE CHASSLER: Then it must have been Studebaker, yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: It's quite a large building, it's still there.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right. And also around St. John's Place, there was supposed -- there was a rumor that there was a -- a home for nuns. Is that still there? There was a big -- a Catholic church, and a big --

CHARIS SHAFER: Like a nunnery.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Uh-huh.

CHARIS SHAFER: I'm not sure --

NATALIE CHASSLER: A convent, a big convent.

CHARIS SHAFER: I know there is the St. John's that I assume the street is named for.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right, right.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, hello!

NATALIE CHASSLER: Lie down, lie down. Lie down!

CHARIS SHAFER: We have a cat participant in the interview.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Did Debra -- did Deborah tell you about my leg?

CHARIS SHAFER: No.

NATALIE CHASSLER: (laughter) I guess in early November, I was walking in weather like this, and I was looking at the ground, because there was still a couple of leaves on it, and I was on 57<sup>th</sup> Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, and a blind man walked by, a young guy, swinging this thing, and he swung it into me. I think he thought he hit a tree or something. Well, by the time I got home, my sock was full of blood. My shoe was full of blood. Fortunately, Isabella, who's my cleaning woman, was here on that day because she couldn't come the day she usually does, and she looked at it, and she said, "Where's the peroxide? Where are the bandages?" She takes charge. And she wrapped it all up, and it was OK. The next day, then, I said "I cannot face going to New York Hospital

emergency.” I’m going to a place that my friends had recommended, because she had fallen. An emergency care on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, 49<sup>th</sup> Street. So I took a taxi there, and they were wonderful. That’s a good -- these walk-in clinics are wonderful. They took me immediately, and they bandaged it, and they looked at it, and they gave me an antibiotic -- antibiotic, and they told me to come back -- no, they did not give me an antibiotic. I said to the doctor, “Should I have an antibiotic?” And he said “No, you don’t need one. Come back in two days.” Two days I came back, a different doctor and a physician’s assistant, and they said, “No, you have to have an antibiotic.” So they gave me an antibiotic, burned it up, and said, “Come back in about three days.” To a different doctor, and he said, [00:05:00] “No, we’re going to give you a stronger one.” And he did, and he also told me to take something called a probiotic once a day. And the thing started to heal, and about three weeks later, it was healing, but it wasn’t great, you know? You could see the wound. But he said “You know we’re an emergency care place, and you should think about going someplace else.” In the meantime, my good friend a while ago had told me about her sister who had fallen and had a bad leg, and how the doctor had helped her, so I called up my friend, and she called up her sister, and I got the name. And I went to that doctor, Dr. Robinson, and he looked at it, and he said it was coming along, and he stopped the antibiotics, and he gave me a whole routine, a regimen of doing -- putting compresses on twice a day. And then I had to buy compression stockings because the foot swelled up -- the leg. And he said it was the lymph glands. Well, I couldn’t put it on. So I called --

CHARIS SHAFER: They’re tough.

NATALIE CHASSLER: So I called my friend across the street who, many year ago, was a nurse, and she came, and she struggled. And she did it every day, she came every morning before she went to bridge, or before she went -- after a while, it wasn’t that hard. Then comes Christmas time, and she said, “You know, I’m going to visit my grandniece in Bos-- no, she was going out to Boston -- to Delaware. Her mother had, I think, eight or ten children, so she has all kinds of grandnieces and all. She never had any children. So I thought, “Oh my god, what am I going to do?” And that day, I had to go to the

doctor, and I told him, he said, “Well, you can come into my office every day, and one of the women will help put it on.” All the way to 60<sup>th</sup> Street and Madison Avenue, between Madison and Lexington. I said, “OK.” Well, I thought about it, I said to myself, “This is ridiculous. Make up your mind. You’re going to do it.” Well, the first time, it was very hard. The second time -- now I do it very easily. The only problem is -- (laughter) it’s so stupid -- they give you a slippery kind of not quite a sock to put underneath, so it would slide. Well, I can’t it off after a while. You know, when she’s here, she can pull it, but I can’t get my body into that --

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: So sometimes I have to practically take the thing off, put it on again, but I’m doing it. So I said to him, when I saw him last Friday, “How long am I going to --”, he said, “Probably forever.” I said, “Well, forever isn’t so long for me anyhow.” (laughter) But it -- I looked at it today, it’s practically all healed perfect.

CHARIS SHAFER: Good, good.

NATALIE CHASSLER: When I went Friday, he was surprised it was so good. I said, “Listen, somebody tells me what to do, my superego makes me do it all.” (laughter) So that -- however, I lost the ability -- certain kinds of strength, so that when I used to go to the gym and get on the floor, I could get up again. I can’t do that now. So I have to practice, I haven’t. So if I go to gym, I only go for half the class where they stand up. But I have to get my strength back. So that’s my tale of woe.

CHARIS SHAFER: Well, I’m glad you can get it on now.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: The sock. I’m glad you’re able to get it on yourself.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. Between two minutes and five minutes, depending -- getting it on, it’s getting the damned thing -- the other thing off.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: You have to just get the heel in right.

CHARIS SHAFER: It’s the secret. [00:10:00]

NATALIE CHASSLER: I suspect when this one kind of wears out, I’m going to go to CVS -- I

noticed they have different kinds, and I will get one that doesn't have to be the one that I got in a surgical supply store.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah. Maybe it'll be easier.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right. It gets easier as it gets older, and also my leg isn't swollen, so it comes off easier.

CHARIS SHAFER: Right. That's good.

NATALIE CHASSLER: So what questions do you have?

CHARIS SHAFER: So maybe -- will you tell me the story about the plane? Eastern Parkway?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: Will you tell me the story about the plane landing on --

NATALIE CHASSLER: That was all that happened. I was on the telephone. I remember I was working in the clinic, and I don't know, she called me up, or I called about something, I can't remember. But in the middle of the conversation, she said, "Oh my god!" She's looking out the window, because she lived on Plaza Street near Eastern Parkway. And then, I mean, she said "I can't talk to you anymore, this is unbelievable."

CHARIS SHAFER: And this was your aunt?

NATALIE CHASSLER: My aunt. My mother's sister. My Aunt Shirley. Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: When was this?

NATALIE CHASSLER: It must have been in the late '60s.

CHARIS SHAFER: Was it a large plane, or like...?

NATALIE CHASSLER: A regular big plane, look on the internet.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Right there on Eastern Parkway.

NATALIE CHASSLER: As a matter of fact, within the last couple of months, I thought I saw an article commemorating the time -- you know, how many years it was.

CHARIS SHAFER: I'll have to look that up. Interesting. Well, your family did have the question about technology, and how -- when you were growing up, how -- some stories about technology and new innovations, and how they affected your life, or people's

reactions to them.

NATALIE CHASSLER: When I was growing up, the new technology was a radio. (laughter)  
But I remember going to the World's Fair, was it 1936 or something? Yeah. In where  
was it, Fresh Meadows, or no, some place --

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, around there. And they had all these new things. They had --  
General Motors had, I guess, a kind of model of how the roads are going to look, you  
know? You know, all these highways with different levels, and I think there was some  
place, but I did not go in, because it was so crowded, about one of the first TVs that they  
had. But I didn't go in. They were talking about it.

CHARIS SHAFER: You say "radio." Do you remember when you first had radio?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I have a -- you see, I have either a vague memory, or I heard my father  
say it, that he bought a radio when I was a very little girl. Yeah, I remember the radio.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember anyone's reaction to either radio or television at the time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: The radio I don't. The TV, I guess we got it in the '50s or something.  
Early '50s. We didn't have one. My mother-in-law and father-in-law had one, and I  
think they bought one for us so the kids could see *Howdy Doody*. I think Phillip and  
Deborah, or maybe just Phillip. And also because my sister-in-law's husband had a part  
in *Howdy Doody*. He was -- I forget, not Buffalo Bob, but one of the other big characters  
there. So I remember that. And then I remember listening to -- before I went to work in  
the morning, the *Today Show*, [00:15:00] and the different people who were on. On the  
radio, I remember we used to listen to -- we had a little radio that was much later set on  
WINS. That's all it played. To listen to the people who were talking. Oh, what the hell  
was their name? Klavin and Flinch. One of them was a friend of my husband's, because  
when we lived in Chicago, he came -- he worked for my husband, and then he went into  
the radio business. He was very -- I'll think of his name. He died a while ago. His  
wife's name was Phyllis. (inaudible) When you don't use a name and think of someone,  
it's hard to remember them.

CHARIS SHAFER: It just goes out of your head, yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, it's out of the computer. Take the computer a while to think of it.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) You have to reach back to that back file.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right, right. It's in the dead letter file.

CHARIS SHAFER: Exactly.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right, right.

CHARIS SHAFER: So do you feel like people's reactions to, say, television in your circle -- was it mostly positive?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, yeah, except for my daughter. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh really? Can you tell me more about that?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Isn't much there to tell you. She has a TV. She never let her kids watch TV. They all knew what was going on, because they go to their friend's house. You know, it reminds me of when my kids were growing up, I used to let them read anything. When you go to dinner parties, and everybody had young children, they would talk about what they allow their kids to do, what they don't allow their kids to do. And some of the women, I couldn't believe they don't allow *Life* magazine in the house, they didn't allow *Time* magazine in the house, which -- one had pictures of naked ladies, another one had all kinds of stern -- I just -- it was beyond me.

CHARIS SHAFER: What was the --

NATALIE CHASSLER: But now, when I look back, the people who were the most adamant about it were Catholic women. You know, I never thought about it, but when I think about the Mannings, I think, "Well, I guess she was a Catholic." She never flaunted it or anything, but maybe that was embedded her.

CHARIS SHAFER: That cultural difference.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right, right.

CHARIS SHAFER: The issue -- I sort of understand the *Life* magazine, but the *Time* magazine?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Because they sometimes had story -- lurid stories.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh.

NATALIE CHASSLER: About murder and something, they didn't want the kids to --

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: My theory is, read the cereal boxes, read the comic whatever, as long as you're reading. And as a result, all my kids were big readers.

CHARIS SHAFER: Even though they watch television? (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, I do both! I watch television and read. Sometimes, I'm so involved in a book, I look up, I say, "What happened to that program? It's the end?" (laughter) And I was waiting to find out what was going to happen. Who won that cooking contest? I like to have noise in my head. And it's interesting, my oldest son used to do his homework with the radio on, and all the rock and roll, and talking. I said, "How could you do that?" He said he liked to have it in his head. Now I know how I feel.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, I listen to a lot of podcasts, like all the time. (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. I used to listen to music, but now I like to see people. So I pick up my hand, and I see -- oh, my favorite for when I'm reading is the cooking channel, because you don't have to really concentrate on that.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) It's true.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Then came the computer.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, yes.

NATALIE CHASSLER: My husband had -- what the hell was it called? Kaypro, one of the first [00:20:00] computers. He was very particular. I never went near it. Then he got -- I guess he got an Apple.

CHARIS SHAFER: One of the rectangular ones?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I don't think -- I think so. It must have -- I never even bothered looking at it too much, because it was in that room, and that was his. But I guess it might have been, because when he died, the accountant and the lawyer came, and they took out some of the hard drives, or something, where he had all his -- he kept all his charities on it, all of his investments, and all of that stuff. So I remember they took it out. And then I guess I got rid of that one, and I guess Phillip -- I don't know, they got me one. I mean, I got it through them or something. Oh I know what, we went to the place on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street

and bought a laptop. And that was the first one that was mine. But I'm too impatient. The only thing I really use it for is for the email back and forth, but I don't bother to look things up, because the couple of times I did, first this, then that, forget it. Whereas I have a friend, when she wanted to know how old I was, I said -- the woman -- my stocking -- a couple of years ago, I said, "I'm not telling you, Margaret." And so she didn't say anything. Then two days later, she said, "I know how old you are." I said, "How do you know?" She said, "I went on the computer." I don't know how she did it. She put my name in, and she found it.

CHARIS SHAFER: She Googled you. (laughter) Sneaky.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I don't even know how to do Facebook. I have to find out how to do that, because when I was talking to my daughter-in-law, my former daughter-in-law yesterday, she was telling me that her daughter, my granddaughter, who lives in Scotland, has a Facebook page that she writes every day. So I want to see it.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I am absolutely, absolutely ignorant, and I should have gone to school to learn how to do all these. Apple would teach you how to do all these different things, but I don't -- I can't do anything. The stove, which is relatively new -- one of the burners didn't light, so I took it apart, couldn't figure it out, so I said, "Oh well, I'll use a match on that burner." Today, when Isabella came in, I said, "Isabella, don't use that for making your tea," because it's a backburner, and she said, "Why not?" So I said, "It's not working." She said "What?" She takes it apart, she studies it, she looks at it, she puts her finger here, she says it's lighting, but it's not lighting up when you put all the things on it. So she said -- cleaned out this, and she cleaned off that hole, and put it back. It's working that way. (laughter) But there's some people, no matter what you tell them, they know how to do it. I said -- that's the way she is.

CHARIS SHAFER: Very handy.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. Yeah, well, what I always say. She's not the best cleaner, but she's the best person to have around, because she can do anything, and she'll bring food, and then she cooked and stuff.

CHARIS SHAFER: That's great.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. And it's very important to have someone handy. When my daughter-in-law's mother's husband died, I said to her, "How's your mom doing since Connie died?" She said, "Well, she's in happy mood again." I said, "My god, her fourth husband?" She said, "No, no, Natalie. She found a very good handyman." (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: That's funny. [00:25:00] I was thinking about plane travel. Do you remember taking a plane for the first time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yes I do. I was working in the clinic, and my husband got a -- I guess, I don't know, an assignment or something, to go to Lon-- was it London? No, Italy and Israel. They were doing -- it was a junket. They were doing Paul Newman's -- what was that Israeli movie? Very, very well-known, very popular movie. Paul Newman's movie about Israel.

CHARIS SHAFER: I'll find it. *Exodus*?

NATALIE CHASSLER: *Exodus*.

CHARIS SHAFER: *Exodus*?

NATALIE CHASSLER: *Exodus*. (laughter) My computer (inaudible). OK. So he said, "Do you want to go?" So I always had a lot of time coming to me, and I told my director I was going, then the psychiatrist I worked with, I said, "Dr. Demassimo I'm scared to death flying." When we lived in Chicago, I would never fly back to New York. I would always take a roomette. So he said, "What's there to flying?" I said, "It makes -- I'm too anxious, I can't go. I'm upset." He said two things. He said, "I'll give you a compazine, and that'll take care of your stomach, and that'll take care of your anxiety. The other thing to remember, Mrs. Chassler, when you die, it's the end of the world anyhow. There's nothing left."

CHARIS SHAFER: What a sweetheart. (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: You don't have to -- oh, he was a monster. (laughter) He was a very troubled young man. He must have gotten AIDS when we didn't know about AIDS, because he couldn't work anymore, and he went home to -- where'd he come from? Rochester or Buffalo? Rochester. And he used to call me up because he was lonesome.

But all -- the couple of years that I worked with him, he never asked me to sit down in his office once. When I'd come in to talk to him, I'd stand up. He was -- ugh. He was a tyrant. I liked him, you know, we'd go out to dinner when I worked at night and he worked at night. But after that happened, I went to Israel, and I went to Rome after that. And I was fine. I was fine.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember the experience on the actual plane?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, I think it was kind of dulled, because I took the compazine. And I never take any kind of pills except aspirin, so it's not -- that's my pill of choice. If I can't sleep, I take an aspirin. If I can't wake up, I take an aspirin. It's for everything. Anyhow, I was anxious when it was taking off and landing, but I remember thinking what he said. He said to me, "You're not going to know it. It's the end of the world, so what are you going to worry about?" Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember flying after that?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh, sure. No problem.

CHARIS SHAFER: No problems?

NATALIE CHASSLER: No problem at all. One time I went to visit my -- my husband and I went to visit my oldest son, who was teaching at the University of Wisconsin, and at that time, I guess they didn't have an airport there, because we had to land in Milwaukee, take a small plane, and go to a place called Janesville. And it was a big snowstorm, and the hostess is praying, and the --

CHARIS SHAFER: You're in a small plane in a big snowstorm.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, I guess 12 passengers, or something. And she -- and the pilot said, [00:30:00] "We have a 50-50 chance of making it." But he took the 50-50 chance. So we landed in Janesville, and my son was there. He said, "I heard the plane circling and circling and circling." The other plane I experience that I wasn't nervous about that I should have been is years later, we went out west and we took -- we went with somebody, I don't remember why -- I think we went to a meeting or something. Anyhow, we took one of these planes at the Grand Canyon that -- now they can't do it, they fly low, so low you can see everything going on. And I wasn't nervous, but two

years later -- a couple of years later, I read that they had an accident, and they don't do that anymore.

CHARIS SHAFER: Scary. (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: But it was very interesting.

CHARIS SHAFER: I bet.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: It sounds very adventurous.

NATALIE CHASSLER: But I wasn't nervous when I should have been.

CHARIS SHAFER: I was thinking about plane travel then seemed very exclusive, whereas plane travel now --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh, it was -- then you could get a meal. If you went first class, I once went first class because I guess my husband went for -- I remember the elder Mrs. Kennedy was in the first class when we were going to Florida, to the Breakers for a meeting. And first class, they gave us baby lamb chops. (laughter) That I never forgot. But, you know, regular class was -- it wasn't so damned crowded as it is now. The last experience -- I don't know how many years ago it was, but it wasn't too long ago -- you had to take your shoes off, and I guess they frisked down every eighth person, or something, so they have -- remove this, and lift up that, and -- pain in the neck.

CHARIS SHAFER: It really is. (background noise) Oh, there was a question -- that's very pleasant.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Now that's in the house, it sounds like. I was dreaming about it last night -- not dreaming, thinking about it. I'm going to look to see if any of my walls get cracked from all the banging and have them redo something.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm. It seems pretty intense.

NATALIE CHASSLER: That's like the time there was a big earthquake, and my grandson Zach was out in -- where the hell was the name of the town -- place in California -- and he called me up to tell me he was OK, and he said, "The only thing that happened was the dishes fell out of the closet." So I said, "Well, if you'd keep your doors closed, the dishes wouldn't fall." He said, "Grandma! (laughter) The door popped open."

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) There was a question about how you heated your house when you were a child, or what kind of, like, I guess, electricity or gas, do you know?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: How you heated the house? Do you know?

NATALIE CHASSLER: How I did what to the house?

CHARIS SHAFER: How the house was heated.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh, the house was heated with coal. When I got married, there was a shortage of apartments, and my mother-in-law had a family house that had a third floor. Didn't have a kitchen, but it had two rooms and a nice bathroom. The house was heated by coal. That house was so cold. So cold. I always lived in apartment houses, so there was no problem. I was furious, so I said -- I used to argue with my husband. "If my father-in-law [00:35:00] doesn't want to put the coal on so early," I guess you have to bank the furnace, and then you put coal in when you -- right. "Get up and go down in the morning and do it!" Oh, god. I couldn't wait to get out of there.

CHARIS SHAFER: So it was in the basement? Or where would it have been?

NATALIE CHASSLER: The -- a coal boiler and everything was in the basement, and we were -- just down the stairs. And then when we bought our own house, I made sure we didn't have coal. We had oil. And then the next house, I think we converted to gas from the oil because of the oil shortages and everything. And I didn't have to worry about it again.

CHARIS SHAFER: That's good.

NATALIE CHASSLER: But I'm used to a cold house because of all that. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: Because of the coal stove.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh my God. Did you ever see what those boilers look like?

CHARIS SHAFER: No, I haven't seen one.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Never saw a furnace?

CHARIS SHAFER: I mean I've seen a --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, you have to -- they're big. And then you had a coal bin, and you had to take out the coal and shovel the coal into -- that's where my father used to hide his money, in the coal bin.

CHARIS SHAFER: Really? Interesting.

NATALIE CHASSLER: He must have had black market money or something, I don't know.

CHARIS SHAFER: That's interesting. (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: That's what I heard. I didn't see it.

CHARIS SHAFER: And do you remember what kind of cars you had, and what kind of transportation you used at this time?

NATALIE CHASSLER: The first car we had was a Buick, because at that point, it was before the depression, or just -- whatever, it was a very fancy Buick car. After that, we didn't have a car for a while, and then we bought a Pontiac. And I think the Pontiac must have been secondhand. And then when we got married, we didn't have a car. When we were courting, my father-in-law used to play cards on Saturday night, so he would give my husband the car, and he had -- I can't remember, he may have -- I can't remember whether he had a Buick, or Pontiac -- it was a nice car. I know it wasn't a Packard, and I know it wasn't Cadillac, but it was a nice car. And then after the war, we didn't have a car, and I had a cousin who was a lawyer in Washington, and he had an old car, and he sold it to us, I think for 100 or \$150. And it was a pretty dilapidated car. And at that point, my father-in-law was buying a new convertible Pontiac, and he gave us -- I think he was embarrassed -- a hard-top -- they used to have what they called the hard-top Pontiac that we had for years. Then when we moved to Larchmont, we still had that car, but my husband got through -- I think he was working for *This Week* magazine, and I forget where, and we got a new Falcon that came out from -- came from Detroit so it didn't cost so much money. And I gave my daughter -- my former daughter-in-law the Pontiac because she needed it and I forget why. And then we, I guess, when I decided to go to work, we decided to buy another -- my husband bought -- I like fancy cars. But he bought himself an English Rover. That was beautiful, but I didn't drive it. I drove the Falcon. And then I traded it in, and I bought a Datsun. [00:40:00] I remember cars were so cheap then, it was unbelievable, because I think what happened is I decided to -- my son had an old Volkswagen, or something -- to get him a car, and I said to the dealer, "Here's --" I forget how much hundreds of dollars. I said, "I'll give you all the cash,

give me two cars, the best you can do.” So it was really cheap then. Really cheap. My son had -- interesting story -- had a Volkswagen car, not a car, but a minibus. He didn’t know how to drive, but he got this teaching job out of the University of Wisconsin, so he had to learn how to drive to drive out to Wisconsin. So he drove -- he learned, and he got his license, and he went out to Wisconsin. When he was in college, he had a very good friend, Austin, who’s a little nutty, and Austin came to him in Wisconsin -- he was living in a place on an old farm in Oregon or Wisconsin -- to borrow his car, because he wanted to go to Wounded Knee. And he took the car to Wounded Knee. I think it -- I don’t know, in the meantime, I don’t know, I can’t remember all the things, because my son had to have the car, and maybe he left his car to go to work. And something happened at Wounded Knee, and that’s where the car remained, the minibus. That was the story of the minibus. And that’s why I had to buy him a new car when I bought my car.

CHARIS SHAFER: Did you do a lot of driving?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Not -- I drove to the station. I started to drive to work when they finished the Brooklyn Boulevard, because then I could take the Brooklyn Boulevard, take the bridge, go down to Randall’s Island, and go to Ward’s Island. When -- my husband always drove where we went. Living in the country, occasionally I drove, because I remember I was driving to Boston one time, and I got a ticket for speeding. I was a very aggressive driver. (laughter) And the state trooper gave me a whole lecture, a lady my age shouldn’t be driving like that. (laughter) And I would drive around town, you know, go shopping around town when I lived in Larchmont. And then after my husband died, I used to drive up to the country myself, and drive back, and drive in the country to go shopping and do things.

CHARIS SHAFER: Who taught you how to drive?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I went to driving school.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, you did?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, I remember I learned on my old, old car, and I got my license, and I took my mother-in-law and my mother-in-law’s sister-in-law, and we went for a ride, because I think my mother-in-law took care of my little kids while I was learning to

drive.

CHARIS SHAFER: Did many women that you knew at that time drive?

NATALIE CHASSLER: My mother-in-law had a license. I never saw her drive. She said she never drove. But she had a license that she must have gotten in 1918. Yeah. And she kept renewing it. Yeah. People drove, women drove.

CHARIS SHAFER: And this is my last topic in the technology sector, (laughter) is how in your lifetime, how has technology changed the way people relate to each other? In your opinion.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, it's certainly changed a great deal. First of all, people used to write letters. I mean, even in my time, when you read a book -- a novel that was written, say, in 1900, [00:45:00] or before then, an English novel, the mail would come two or three times a day, people sending letters back and forth, if you read Jane Austen or Charlotte Brontë or something. Mail goes back and forth. But you would communicate by mail mostly, or telephone. Now, it's mostly email. My granddaughter in Scotland sends me an email, "Grandma, when can I call you up? Send me the right time." So I send back, "Call me Saturday between 9:00 and 10:00." So then she calls me up. But it changes everything, I mean -- I don't know what I said to her one time, within the last couple of weeks, and she sent me -- oh, she sent a picture of her daughter doing something in her house, and I sent back, and I said, "Oh, your house looks lovely!" So she sends back a picture of every room in the house, which was great. So now I can see what the study looks like, the living room looks like, and it's interesting because when she was growing up, her mother, my former daughter-in-law, was the sloppiest, sloppiest, dirtiest housekeeper in the world. She's a wonderful woman, I love her, but -- one time Hannah was co-- Hannah, Nora was complaining to me because we used to take Nora and Zach to the country on weekends when they were little. I said, "Well, why don't you help your mother? She goes to work, she has all this to do." She says, "Grandma, put it out of your mind, put it out of your mind." So then recently, within the last two years, when her dog died, and I think cats died, she refurnished the house, and it's beautiful. But Nora, as a little girl, she would ride with us in the car, and ride back, and she'd say,

“Oh, when I have a house, I’m going to have curtains on the windows.” This is totally (laughter) -- nowadays, nobody has curtains. I look across, nobody. Communication has changed tremendously. I mean, you sit on the bus or the subway, or any place, and people are texting all day long. You communicate constantly, you know, back and forth, back and forth. As a matter of fact, in the *New York Times* today, there’s a story, I don’t know, did you read it?

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, I haven’t read it today.

NATALIE CHASSLER: In Florida, there was a movie going on, and a man was texting, so another guy said to him, “Cut it out.” And he kept texting. He said “Cut it out.” He kept texting. Anyhow, the guy who said, “Cut it out,” shot and killed the man who was texting. The guy who shot and killed him was a retired policeman or detective, and the man who was texting was texting to find out something about his little girl who was three years old, and she was home with the babysitter or something. Such a sad story.

CHARIS SHAFER: Terrible.

NATALIE CHASSLER: So that’s what happens when you text.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, you know, I watch Judge Judy. She always says, “Four generations from now, thumbs are going to be as big as the index fingers.”

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) From all the texting?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right. And communication is altogether different. I think because of that, people seem more isolated.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, it does seem like we’re constantly in touch.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, because I remember as a little girl, my mother was kind of snobbish, so she wasn’t so friendly. And she was friendly with a couple of people in the house, they would have coffee together in the apartment housing. Nowadays people don’t do that too much. [00:50:00] Across the street, where my friend Marge lives, the people are friendlier, because people are occupied doing other things, and they don’t need, or they -- human companionship. They can watch TV, they can go on the internet, they can look at the TV and see their cousin who lives in Austin, Texas or something.

It's amazing. Now what's going to come next?

CHARIS SHAFER: The telephone, they say, you're going to be able to see what people -- that's terrible. You'll have to get dressed. (laughter) The telephone rings in the middle of putting on your pajamas.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) Exactly.

NATALIE CHASSLER: They'll black out the screen. They'll probably have something to block out the screen.

CHARIS SHAFER: Right. Don't look!

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right, right.

CHARIS SHAFER: There was an interest in knowing all the houses that you lived in in Brooklyn, and I think we almost did it last time, but I think it might be interesting -- (background noise) --

NATALIE CHASSLER: What about the houses?

CHARIS SHAFER: To just -- to list the houses that you lived in in Brooklyn, from the first one to the last one.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And I figured out all the houses I lived in, including this, doesn't cost as much, or never cost as much, (inaudible) as what somebody pays, say, Phillip or Hannah paid for their house. And they didn't pay so much.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: The first house I bought cost \$13,500. It was a big Victorian house in Brooklyn. The second house I bought --

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, can we do the addresses?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Huh?

CHARIS SHAFER: Can we list the addresses or cross streets?

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was on -- it was 1187 -- no, 1235, 1187 was my mother-in-law. Twelve thirty-five East 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and I sold the house to -- and the two house -- one house on each side of me of sold, and the two adjacent houses, they built an apartment house, and I got 26-5 for that house. Then I moved to Larchmont, and I think I paid 31-5 for it, with a half acre of land. Absolutely beautiful house with five bedrooms, three

bathrooms, big living room, big kind of library, nice kitchen that I re-did eventually. The only problem was it didn't have a bathroom on the first floor. When I was ready to sell that house to buy this house -- to leave, I wasn't so -- I was kind of ready, but I hadn't thought about putting it on the market. And a woman -- a younger girl -- young woman I worked with sent to me one day, "You know, Mrs. Chassler, if you ever want to sell your house, let me know, because I really like your house," and she was brought up in Scarsdale, and she had been to my house a couple of times. So I said, "OK." Then my husband was away on a business trip, and he came home, I said, "You know Nancy was kind of interested in the house. Maybe we -- you want to sell?" He said, "Sure." So I called her up. No, did I call her up or tell her in the office? I think I called her up. I think she had stayed home. She had a baby, or something. It was a pleasure. I didn't have to do a thing to the house. I sold it to her for eighty -- I don't know, eighty-six five or something. She was the happiest woman. I said, "Nancy, I'm only selling you a house, you're not getting a husband or anything here." Well, she lived there for a good number of years, and then my sister sent me an article from the local paper [00:55:00] to say that it would sell for one million two, and that was a while ago. And that was a while ago. Then maybe 10 -- more than 15, 20 years ago, I rode by with my granddaughter Nora, who wanted to see the house, she couldn't remember it, and we stopped to look at it, and a lady came out, and I told her I used to own the house, and she was a British woman, and she told me she put in a bathroom on the first floor. That was a wonderful house. It had a big terrace, with a garden around the terrace that you walked down, and there was a big yard. Then we sold that, (inaudible), but before we sold that, we also were thinking of looking for another house, and then we decided to buy -- my friend, who had a house in the country, said, "Why don't you buy a house in the country?" So that's why we bought the house in the country. Then we had a house in the country, and a house in Larchmont, and Deborah said to me, "It looks to me like you're neglecting the house in Larchmont," because we would go away Friday night and come home Sunday night or on Monday morning and go straight to work. And that's when we decided to sell the house.

CHARIS SHAFER: But you kept the country house for a while?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. I kept the country house until about two or three years after my husband died, and then I said, "This is crazy. I go to work, and then I have to--" you know, I had retired already. I mean, I go up early Saturday morning, take the car up about -- go out about eight o'clock in the morning, drive up, do some shopping, clean up the house, visit a couple of friends, Sunday night drive home. So then I decided to sell the house, and it was a nice house. I had trouble selling it because you get a bunch of nuts looking. And interestingly enough, I must be a house person, because for years I dreamed about houses. I used to dream about my house in Larchmont all the time, and then I dreamed about the house in Clinton Corners, and I used to dream about houses in Brooklyn. And I'd dream about the apartment I lived in when I was a little girl. I knew - and my grandmother's house.

CHARIS SHAFER: Which apartment?

NATALIE CHASSLER: When I was a little girl, I lived on Eastern Parkway. Interesting.

CHARIS SHAFER: There was also a question -- and I think these go together -- about, like, your working life as a woman, and then also there's a question about clothing, (laughter) and talking about how the different clothes that you wore throughout -- through the years. Like how clothing has changed. I thought maybe that would --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, looking at me, the clothing never changed. (laughter) I was never much for buying clothes. You know, if I had to go some place, I would go in to Lord & Taylor's, or something, and buy an outfit or something. When I worked at the hospital, thank God you had to wear a white coat so you could hide anything. When I worked in a clinic, I wore a skirt, blouse and a skirt, and a sweater.

CHARIS SHAFER: How about when you were younger?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Hmm?

CHARIS SHAFER: How about when you were younger?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, we -- I didn't have too much money. I mean, my family didn't, because there was just the depression. My mother made me some of my clothes. My mother was very good at that. She could look at a dress, and buy the material, and make

a dress. For birthdays sometimes my grandmother would say, [01:00:00] “Buy some material, and I’ll give it to a lady, who we called Mrs. Mushnik, or something, and she’ll sew up a dress. Tell me what kind you want.” Then my uncle, my mother’s brother, opened up a very nice dress shop in Jamaica. So I could get dresses wholesale. So I’d go and buy two or three dresses. But then you could get a nice-looking dress wholesale at \$14.95. When you went to school, you always wore a skirt and a sweater or a blouse or something (inaudible). I have a funny story to tell you. At the clinic, before women wore pants too much, everybody had to wear a skirt. So one day, one of the young girls said to me, “Mrs. Chassler, is it all right if I stay a little later and change my clothes? I’m going to a big party.” I said, “Yeah, OK.” And I guess I happened to be staying there, so I go to see what she changed into, you would never believe it. Blue jeans (laughter). That’s what they were wearing. And a band around her head. I remember she looked so cute.

CHARIS SHAFER: What year was this around?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Must have been early to mid ’70s. Then gradually women started to wear pants to work. But with Betty Friedan and everything, the women’s movement, there were consciousness-raising groups. I happened to be in one, and I think I was the only one who was really working. And then they all -- all the women started to work.

CHARIS SHAFER: So you were in a consciousness-raising group?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: What was that experience like?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Very posi-- you know, they would talk, talk, talk. Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: That -- it seems like a unique position for you to be the only one who’s working in a group like that.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right. And don’t worry, I kind of lorded it over them. (laughter) I felt superior. Well, my friend Ruth, who has since died many years ago, went to work, and the only reason she went to work, because she really wasn’t interested in working, she had a very good hobby. She made gorgeous jewelry, enamel jewelry, and she took classes and everything. She said every time she’d go to a dinner party, someone would

say, “What are you doing?” And they would look at her like (inaudible), so she got herself a job working at the Bureau of Child Welfare or something.

CHARIS SHAFER: So she could say something at dinner parties?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) She could have something to say. That’s great.

NATALIE CHASSLER: But it’s interesting. With the women’s movement, my husband was very active. If you look in the bookcase in his bedroom, we have walls of Women’s books that nobody wants. Some of them sent to Radcliffe, but others we kept. He had some books by a writer who wrote 1868, George Gissing, and George Gissing wrote about the women’s movement, really. It’s fascinating. I had come across his name, I guess, a couple months ago, and I said to myself, “I remember my husband reading about him,” so I called up my son Phillip, who knows every book on the bookcase. I said, “Phillip, do we have any Gissing books?” He said, “Yes, we have two.” So I said, “Where are they?” So he pointed his way out, told me on the telephone where to look, and I read it. Absolutely interesting. About women who want to do more, and do, and then the husband who seemed to be very willing, or their partners, and then towards the end, the men start to regret it a little bit. Oh, they’re interesting books. Very, very up-to-date in thinking. There’s another one called *The Odd Woman*. It’s about women -- they were called “odd women,” women who never married. [01:05:00] Interesting. But one succumbs.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) Just one? There was a question about what kinds of values do you feel like you learned from your parents, or your grandparents, either implicitly or...

NATALIE CHASSLER: It’s hard to say. It’s kind of a thing that kind of gets assimilated into you. You know, not to be a spendthrift. My mother, I guess, against being vain, because I remember as a girl, maybe 12, 13, she was telling me about a neighbor who lived next door to her that we were friendly with. She said, “Could you imagine, she rubs the moisturizer on her elbows?” I went, “Ooh, my God, I never heard of such a thing.” But I’ve since learned people do that all the time. (laughter) So she was against vanity. Vanity. And certainly to be frugal, and to be kind. To be interested in people, although I

must say, my mother wasn't very interested in people, because I think they were -- they were so involved with the nuclear -- with their family, my mother had three sisters and three brothers, and they were very involved with each other.

CHARIS SHAFER: So she wasn't much interested in --

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: She wasn't very interested in people besides her family?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Eh, she (inaudible). She didn't have very many -- she had one or two friends. She had a friend Elsie that she had since she was a little girl, that I didn't particularly like. And then she had some other women friends, but during the depression, I guess, she kind of dropped them because she couldn't keep up with them. And as she got older, I don't know. She had a woman friend that I didn't know that she used to play Scrabble with. And I guess she played with bridge with a couple of women. She didn't have a lot of friends. You know, it's not like where people come -- constantly coming into the house, or anything. Just her sisters and then children. And it's interesting, because as the children grew up, the cousins are not close at all. I was very close to my cousin, and she died about two years ago, but she and her husband used to come to the country all the time. When we moved to Larchmont, after a year or two, she moved to Larchmont, so we were friendly. Then my oldest male cousin, we were pretty friendly. He was a professor at MIT, and I was kind of friendly with him, and we'd go up there to Boston with his wife. And recently, I was telling my son Phillip, I haven't heard from her, and I called her and left a message, and she used to come to the city because she had a gay son who lived in the city with his partner, and we'd all go out to dinner or something. So I asked him to find out what he can about her. And another cousin, I hadn't heard from for years, years, and her sister who is more toward my age, the other -- her sister was much younger [01:10:00] -- called -- the younger sister called me up two weeks ago, I guess. I couldn't believe it. And she told me, my cousin, her sister, my cousin Marion, was in Virginia, and I said, "What the hell is she doing in Virginia?" Because she used to live in Scarsdale. So she said she was in a nursing home. Then she told me all about her, and all her problems, physical problems, and she said she can't talk

very well on the telephone, but if you call her up, she has an aide with her, so I decided to do that. And she spoke to me on the phone, and she was so happy to hear from me. I was amazed, because we grew up practically next door to each other.

CHARIS SHAFER: And this is in the place in Brooklyn.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: This is in Brooklyn, right?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Which house was that?

NATALIE CHASSLER: She lived on Rochester Avenue, and we lived on Carroll Street at that time. But we used to go to my grandmother's house every Sunday. All of my grandmother's children and grandchildren would come.

CHARIS SHAFER: Did your grandmother cook?

NATALIE CHASSLER: She sure did. She was a wonderful cook, and she was a wonderful baker. She used to make wonderful chocolate cake. My mother was a very good cook. She wasn't a Jewish cook, you know, my grandmother either wasn't that kind of a cook. Very, very good cook, my mother, very elegant, balanced, you know, vegetables, fruit.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, what other kinds of foods -- you say that she wasn't a Jewish cook, but what kinds of foods then would they cook?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I mean, she did steaks. She didn't do things like a kugel or, I don't know --

CHARIS SHAFER: Schmaltz.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Huh?

CHARIS SHAFER: Schmaltz. (laughter)

NATALIE CHASSLER: She didn't do any of that.

CHARIS SHAFER: No? But like steak and potatoes?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah, yeah. Hamburgers, meatloaf, pastas.

CHARIS SHAFER: Chocolate cake?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I get food like that from Isabella. She's Polish, so she makes wonderful stuff. And what she doesn't make, she buys in Polish stores. Really good

pierogi and --

CHARIS SHAFER: Good, hearty food? (laughter) There was a question about World War II, and your memories of World War II.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, my husband was pupil teaching at James Madison High School, and then he got called to go into the Army, and he was 4F. As a little boy, he was hit by a car, and he developed osteomyelitis, which is a bone infection. So they wouldn't take him. So he came home, but I think he kind of was embarrassed to go back to pupil teaching, and he got a job, his first job was an office boy for *March of Time*, and at that time, *March of Time* I think was owned by Time Incorporated. And then he got a job at a small company -- a small magazine called *Cornet*, and I think he was the picture editor or something. And then, I don't know, I can't remember how he knew this other guy who was doing a magazine called *Pageant*, and that was out of Chicago. Oscar Dystal, and so he went to Chicago to work, and that was during the war, and then I went out [01:15:00] when Joseph was a baby, and we lived in a hotel for a while. And then we found a kind of furnished apartment near Evanston, near Mundelien College, but it was wonderful. The area, it was a block from the beach, so we used to go to the beach there all the time, and at the beach, there was another lady who had a little boy my son's age, who was about two at that time, and we became friendly, and she was a very well-to-do woman who lived in a house, you know, these great mansions that you see, limestone, you'd see them in the east 70s, and she had one like that, right near the -- a block from us. So we used to go all the time. The kid's bathroom was practically as big as this living room. So it was pleasant.

CHARIS SHAFER: That's lovely. So you were out there for the entirety of the -- of World War II.

NATALIE CHASSLER: We were out there for a long time. We came back -- now why did we come back? I guess the magazine came back or something. I can't remember. But we came back, and then my husband got another job. Oh, he got a job at *Colliers* magazine, being a picture editor, and then --

CHARIS SHAFER: Did you have any thoughts about the war, or did you know anyone else who

was involved?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh yeah, all of my friends' husbands were in the war. So I heard about it. My cousin Daniel, the one from MIT, he was in the Navy. He said he didn't like the dirt, so he was going into the Navy. And after -- you know, so some of them had their college interrupted, something -- my friend Ruth's husband Harold, that I talk to and see today, he went to officer's training, and when he got out, he got -- went to graduate school and got his PhD. My other friend Aviva, that I went to public school and college with, her husband also went -- was in the -- oh, he was in the -- he volunteered for the Marines. Not the Marines, Merchant Marines. And one Saturday night, we (inaudible), he's there, and I said, "What the hell happened? Did you get kicked out?" And he was. Out of the Merchant Marines. I don't know, I never found out why. Anyhow, he was drafted, and he was in the Army, and when he got finished, he had gone to City College, when he got finished, he went to Columbia also on the GI Bill, and he became a psychology professor, and he taught all his working life at Penn State. And my -- his wife, who is my friend, was very ambitious, and she saw that Penn State didn't have a store, you know, like the museum store? So she started one, and she was very successful. So they sent her all around to buy things, to Europe, to Asia.

CHARIS SHAFER: That's great.

NATALIE CHASSLER: And then one year, we went to France with them, because he was fluent in French. He was a French major. That's where you really see people, (laughter) when you travel with them. She was so difficult to travel with, she wanted to see everything, but she didn't really want to see it. She just wanted to be able to tell her friends she passed it. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: Less about the experience than the retelling of the experience.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Oh, every time you went to a dinner party, for 20 years after the war, that's all the conversation [01:20:00] was. As I said to my husband, that was the highlight of a lot of these peoples' lives.

CHARIS SHAFER: You mean the people who fought?

NATALIE CHASSLER: They talked about the war.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yes.

NATALIE CHASSLER: They talked about the war forever. Forever. And that was the topic of conversation. I'm telling you, 20 years later they were still -- because that was the most important thing that ever happened to them, in various ways. They met people from all over the country, they had experiences all over the country. My friend Ruth Jackson, she said "You can't imagine the anti-Semitism in the South," when she was -- when they would look for a room or something. They would talk about it all the time. None of them, I think, were in many battles, or anything. Harold was in the South Pacific, but he never seemed to sound like he was doing too much. (inaudible) my cousin was on a boat that got damaged, so it was out of the war for a long time. I mean, fortunately, they were all very lucky. Very lucky.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: But it changed their lives, because they never would have had the money to go to graduate school, they all went up the career ladder, they all went from poor working class to professional class.

CHARIS SHAFER: It was really an entrée for a whole generation of people.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Right, right.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah. This question is totally loaded. (laughter) It's -- and Hannah and I both laughed about it when she said this -- but she -- they had the question of do you think -- is now the worst time? Or is there a previous time that you think of as a particularly difficult time, or...?

NATALIE CHASSLER: You mean personally or in the world?

CHARIS SHAFER: In the world.

NATALIE CHASSLER: In the world?

CHARIS SHAFER: I think the idea was in the world, like politically, or socially...

NATALIE CHASSLER: In my lifetime, I guess now. I guess you could say during Hitler's time, that was a terrible time. However, I think now the whole world is in chaos. You know, Hitler was mostly Europe, and Japan. But now there's chaos wherever you go. Every country. Africa. Europe. Asia. Terrible.

CHARIS SHAFER: I often think, do we just -- are we just more aware of it now? Or is it that it's actually bad?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, because we know so much from TV and everything, we know that a place got bombed an hour and a half ago, where we'd know two weeks later. No, I think what happened was, where people were kept down, there were so much -- so many problems. You know, you take an example of Yugoslavia. When Tito was ruling Yugoslavia with an iron hand, there was none of this nonsense with the Serbians and the Croats and all this. The minute Tito died, or whatever happened to him, I forget, look what happened. You know, and in other places, everything was kept down by [01:25:00] terror. Stalin kept things down, he killed people in his own place. And remember England with India and country in Africa. But the minute had a breath of what it's like to be free, they wanted more, more, more. And not only did they want more, they wanted what the other guy had. They may have wanted more, and wanted what the other, but they couldn't even do it. But now they'll have a chance. So what's going to happen? God only knows.

CHARIS SHAFER: It'll be interesting. It does seem like politically, there is no other alternative than capitalism, and that does seem to follow your theory of tending towards more chaos.

NATALIE CHASSLER: I don't know. I don't know what the answer is.

CHARIS SHAFER: No. I don't know either. (laughter) Also, there is a question, and we're at about an hour and 26 minutes, and so we could finish up with this one.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: We're at about an hour and 26 minutes, so I figure we'll talk for maybe five more minutes, and then we'll be done.

NATALIE CHASSLER: OK.

CHARIS SHAFER: This one was about your work life as a woman working in a field where there weren't a lot of women, and your decision to continually work throughout your life.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, I could say that when I was just a social worker, no problem, because women were social workers. When I became a chief of service, the director -- no, he wasn't the director. One of the doctors, I guess, he later became a director, was

furious that they were appointing non-medical people to be chiefs of service. That meant a psychiatrist -- I was in charge of the psychiatrists. So he went on and on at a meeting, about medical ethics, and who has ethics, and all the stop signs. Finally I got so mad, I got up, I walked out. To hell with him. (laughter) Well, he didn't apologize, but he came around. He came around. But it was hard because psychiatrists are God, and if you tell God you forgot to do your notes on this patient, or the patient has diabetes and you're not making sure he's taking his -- he's getting his medicine request -- somebody gave me a thing for Christmas, *The Buck Stops Here*. (laughter) It was hard. And the people underneath me, it was hard because I was white and most of them were black. So whenever I wanted to do something, they'd always say "Oh, Ms. Anne is at it again." Ms. Anne, you know, is the name for the madam in colonial times.

CHARIS SHAFER: So that sounds like an interesting dynamic.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Yeah. And one time, my husband laughed so much, we were having a big fight over something, and I said, "What the heck are you yelling about? I'm black just like you." (laughter) They got me so excited. [01:30:00] But, you know, they always came around. And I always came, when I had a fight with my boss, because sometimes I just didn't agree with the director of the hospital, I finally said to him, "You've known me for many years. I have to argue. I have to fight. But I will do what you tell me to do." You know, I said, "Don't get so excited." (laughter) But, every time I want to try something new there, they'd always say "What comes around goes around, Mrs. Chassler." But we worked it out. We had good -- good units. An interesting time. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, but it also obsessed me. After I retired, the first movie I went to, I said to myself, "My God, I can concentrate on this movie, and not worry about what's happening in the hospital." I realized I (inaudible) time to retire, I was in Europe on vacation, and someone committed suicide. It happens all the time. I got back. I got such a talking-to about it. I said, "I wasn't even there." You are responsible for everything. Early on -- who was it, D'Amato? Was he a senator?

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

NATALIE CHASSLER: He was trying to get a lot of publicity, so he came to the hospital on a

visit, and there was an old lady who had some kind of a disease, I think it's called elephantiasis, or something, where they have -- legs are swollen. So he says to her, "Are they taking care of your legs?" She said, "No." He said, "They're not doing anything?" She says, "No." So of course, ugh, he goes to the director, he said, "I was in this unit, this woman's sitting there, (grumbling noise)." The director calls me in the next day, starts yelling, I said, "We had a chart. He didn't read the chart. The doctor sees her all the time, and this day the doctor's doing this, and the doctor's doing that." It was just crazy. To take a patient, an old lady, whatever you hear, "Yeah, no, no." And what was interesting, we were -- you know, the reason I got to be a unit chief is through the Rockefeller laws, and that really created a lot of havoc, having to discharge all of these people who didn't have places to live. It was a big problem.

CHARIS SHAFER: Could you tell me a little bit more about the Rockefeller laws?

NATALIE CHASSLER: Well, I think it says you can only -- I forget what they were, but there was something about a person can only be -- either they can be admitted by themselves, you know, they want to come for -- or they have to be a danger to themselves or somebody else. And it's very hard to prove, because they can't come in to the hospital if you can't prove that they're a danger to themselves or to somebody else. So it was terrible. And then they also had lawyers who -- I don't know whether they had an office in the hospital, I can't remember -- but they would come and talk to every patient, all the time, and whether the patient wants to be discharged, you have to go through a hearing, very hard. But on the other hand, there were a lot of people who were in the hospital for many, many years [01:35:00] who didn't need to be in the hospital. You know, society should realize there are some people who couldn't manage on themselves, but they could live outside if someone would make sure that they -- they took their medicine, and that they ate, and they're very capable of going to the store, buying their stuff and everything. A friend of mine who just died, she and a group of women decided that they were going to do something about housing for people who leave the hospital. I think she got involved because a friend of ours was the head of a mental health association, or something. Anyhow, so these women got together, and they bought, for practically

nothing, an abandoned house near Avenue A and 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, I forget what street. I mean, the street was so terrible that I was afraid to drive down it. And they painted it, and they cleaned it up, and they took a couple of patients, and they put in a social workers, and that became a very well-known organization now called "Community Access," so that they have houses now in Bronx, Brooklyn, a lot in downtown Manhattan, where they have managers in there, they make sure the people are taken care of, they've trained people to work in bakeries, they have done all kinds of great things, because people can live outside of the hospital if they have a framework of someone who sees that they're doing what they supposed to be doing, you know? That they have a place over their head, and that they're shopping for their food. I mean, one of the first places they built -- I forget, down on the east side near Clinton Street, I think -- it was beautiful. They built a studio room that was large, that had a kitchenette and a nice bathroom, and they had a case manager there, and they had all kinds of things -- recreation and everything. So people can manage. And if you -- even the people who can't manage so well, if you keep track of them, they do OK, because I had a clinic on 110<sup>th</sup> Street, and the woman who ran the clinic was a friend of mine, and we would talk every day about all the patients that I released to her, and whether they saw them, whether they didn't see them, why didn't they see them, and it went very smoothly.

CHARIS SHAFER: You're so passionate about that kind of work.

NATALIE CHASSLER: Pardon?

CHARIS SHAFER: You're -- (background noise) -- I'll wait until that's done. You're so passionate about that kind of work. Where do you think your passion for that work came from?

NATALIE CHASSLER: I don't know. (laughter) My first experience, I think I told you, as a little girl, my aunt had a house in the middle of nowhere, right near Brooklyn State Hospital. And they use to have balconies, and ladies would be -- fenced-in balconies -- would say "Hello, little girl!" (laughter) I don't know. I'm interested in people. I'm interested in people, and I'm accepting of all kinds of -- as I said, I can't -- physical illness makes me too nervous. Mental illness, I don't care, because every minute, as

crazy as a person is, there's always a core that you can reach, and talk to them. And people are reasonable, I mean, you talk quietly to them, find out what the heck -- what's bothering them, you find out. You just have to know how to talk to people. I had a problem on one of my wards. After visiting day, everybody on the ward was crazier than crazy. [01:40:00] What we found out is a visitor was coming and bringing marijuana in. (laughter) So everybody was having a great time. What the hell am I going to do? So I found out who was bringing them in, two or three young guys, and I said, you know, "I know that kind of thing's appreciated," I said, "but you know, they're sick. And it creates havoc. And it's terrible. I don't care if you do it all day outside, it's not my business. But don't bring it into my house. Do me a favor. They're too sick for that." They came again, they never brought it in. If you talk to people reasonably, and explain - I always remember that though. Three tough guys. Well, that was my knack, going in on the elevators, up and down, some of the characters, my God. And I always say, if you carry on a conversation, you don't get into trouble. (laughter) But otherwise, I'm a very quiet person. It's interesting. You have a different personality at work, and a different personality socially. What do you think is going to happen with Christie?

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, that's been really fun to watch.

NATALIE CHASSLER: He made -- I think he was making a speech at three o'clock.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh. Have we missed it? We'll have to find out what happened. (laughter)

Well, if you have anything more to add?

NATALIE CHASSLER: No.

CHARIS SHAFER: Wonderful. This has been such a pleasure. Thank you.

NATALIE CHASSLER: It was so interesting.

END OF AUDIO FILE