



## Interview with Iola Caplan

Under the Auspices of the  
Monmouth County Library Headquarters  
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.  
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

**Date of Interview:** February 23, 2000  
**Name of Interviewer:** Ms. Newman  
**Premises of Interview:** Ocean Township, NJ  
**Birthdate of subject:** August 12, 1925



**Iola Caplan**

**Ms. Newman:** From 1968 to 1972 Mrs. Caplan was affiliated with the Madison Township Board of Education and from 1972 to 1989 she held a position of social worker on the Child Study Team at Henry Hudson Regional High School District. Mrs. Caplan, how did you first come to this area?

**Ms. Caplan:** I was raised in Chatham Township in Morris County, and as a teenager I moved to Newark. I graduated from Arts High School in Newark, New Jersey in June, 1942. And then I entered New York University. I commuted from Newark everyday for four years and graduated from NYU with a major in music education in May or June of 1946. After that I began teaching music in New York City in Jewish afternoon schools. Then I taught in a Jewish day school, the Ramaz School, in New York for two years in the late 1940s. I guess I was at Ramaz from 1947 to 1949. In 1949, I received a scholarship to spend one year in the newly born State of Israel, so from 1949 to 1950, I was in Israel. I was in a youth leadership training course there. It was an intensive course which included, among other courses,



**Iola Caplan after a full day of hiking the Judean Hills in Israel, 1949**

participating in music education activities throughout the new country, meeting with teachers and learning the folk music and so on. When I came back in 1950, I had forfeited my tenure year at Ramaz, so I got a music teaching job in Detroit, Michigan in 1951. That's where I met my husband, Philip Caplan. He was born and raised in Detroit, and his family dates back to the 1880s in the city of Detroit. He had just graduated as a physicist, and he was able to secure employment at Fort Monmouth which was then the Signal Corps Engineering Laboratories at Fort Monmouth and at Camp Evans (now being converted to a historical site). His first job was at Camp Evans with the Diana Project, the moon project. And not being people who moved around very much, we landed here and stayed here. We were married in the summer of 1952 and we stayed here in Asbury Park. We're still right here. We haven't moved very far. I had an encounter with Asbury Park when I was a teenager living in Newark. I belonged to what was then called the National Youth Administration or the NYA Symphony Orchestra. This was during my junior and senior years in high school.

**Ms. Newman:** What was your instrument?

**Ms. Caplan:** Violin. We had some outstanding conductors in those days. The musicians and the artists and the conductors didn't have means to make a living, so the government created work projects under the New Deal. One of them was a youth orchestra. We gave concerts in the summertime for one entire summer. I forget which year it was; it was in Asbury Park at Convention Hall. Coming from a rather poor neighborhood in Newark, coming down here on a Saturday was just like coming to heaven. Asbury Park was just beautiful with the gardens, the layout of the lakes, the water, the boats, and the people. I believe this was 1940, was just about the time of the war. I think it was 1940 or 1941 that I was in that orchestra. And never thinking that years later I would end up here because my husband secured a job at Fort Monmouth by chance. When he came here, there were already about thousand engineers and scientists employed by the Signal Corps Laboratories, and so we settled here as a young couple. I had given up my job in Detroit and he was just starting to work. My mother was very ill at the time, and my dad was not working. So here we were, moving down to Asbury Park and as we didn't have any means, we rented a room with kitchen privileges in Bradley Beach on McCabe Avenue. It was not a very ideal honeymoon situation, but I think we were paying thirty-five dollars a month rent. It was about what we could afford, and that was good, and we stayed there three months. As I began to become acquainted with the community, I particularly sought out Hadassah and Jewish organizations. I think the first person I met in the Jewish community here was Sylvia Meistrich, who is still living in Florida; most of her generation is gone. She immediately introduced me to Marion Cohn, who just moved down to Florida. Marion and Harold lived on 4th Avenue in Asbury Park, raised their children there, and then moved to West Deal. Marion is a musician and a piano teacher. When she was pregnant with her first child, she was conducting the Shore Area Hadassah Choral in Bradley Beach. She needed somebody to take over, and since that was my field, I began to conduct the Hadassah Women's Choral Group.

We used to meet at the Congregation Sons of Israel in Asbury Park, which was considered the largest and most important congregation in the shore area at that time. All the towns along the shore had small Jewish congregations, and still have, to a certain extent, but the Asbury Park Congregation is now gone. But at that time, it was the center of the Jewish Community here. So I conducted a choral group; most of the women in my chorus were from Bradley Beach. In fact, one of the last of them, Dottie Bernstein, passed away just a couple of years ago. Dottie had a gorgeous voice and she was my soloist. And I could go into the details of the people if you are interested in names.

**Ms. Newman:** Were you in great demand by virtue of the fact that you had been in Israel? Was that so unusual that you spoke to local groups about it?

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes, yes. I did a lot for local groups. I was a program chairman for Hadassah for many years, and we used to put on programs based on Israeli songs and the folk dances, and I was kind of a culture resource here for Hadassah for a long time. I never desired to become President of the Organization or anything like that, but I was a good consultant and resource. I was active, and I was also active in the Sisterhood of Sons of Israel. My husband was active in the Synagogue for many years, too. I don't know what you call it in English; he was like a sexton, I guess. Before we had our children, we were immediately volunteered to conduct groups on Saturday afternoons for the children who were affiliated with the Synagogue and the community, and we were a resource for Jewish culture and Israel, and so on.



**Sylvia and Hy Pardes (left) with Philip and Iola Caplan during lunch near Ashkelon on the Mediterranean**

**Ms. Newman:** How long did you live in a furnished room in Bradley Beach?

**Ms. Caplan:** After three months, we moved to Asbury Park. We graduated to 7th Ave. in Asbury Park. The owner of our house was -- I don't remember her husband's name, but her name was Fan Golden, and she was in the choir at Temple Bethel, which was across the street on Asbury Ave. Her husband owned that building; it was an old, very large single family home that had been converted, as many of them were in those days, to apartments for the income. She lived in Allenhurst in a big mansion, and so we got a rear apartment, and lo and behold, that apartment actually had a kitchen. It looked like a closet. We stayed there until I became pregnant. We must have stayed there about two years, because our child wasn't born until 1955. When I was about to give birth to Hannah we moved to Sixth Avenue to a second floor apartment in a house that was owned by the Edelstein family. He was a lawyer here. It is an old family, Edelstein. That apartment had a big bedroom and a big living room and a kitchen you couldn't sit in, but it had sunlight, and we lived there until I was about to give birth to my son. My daughter was born in 1955 and Benjy was born in 1956. I had four children in

four and a half years, so at that point there was no room for two babies. So we moved to the West Side of town which was then uptown. The people who were "real" residents of Asbury Park lived on the Northwest side. My dad, who was from North Jersey, was a carpenter and we couldn't afford to buy. A lot of people were buying housing in Wanamassa even in those days, trying to get into developments and things like that. We preferred to stay not far from the Synagogue and also to stay in the community, and we really couldn't afford to buy anything, because I wasn't working at that time, only my husband was working at Fort Monmouth. I did work part time; I was a music teacher when I was pregnant with Hannah. I taught music at the Lakewood Hebrew Day School, a Yeshiva which still exists. I did a little activity but I wasn't getting any income. So my dad came along, and he took this house which was on Fifth Avenue where Fifth Avenue and Locust Drive meet. There's a little park across the street; it's like a triangle. The house was tipped over to one side... these old houses list, but this one was so listed that it was just about condemned. It had been a house that raised a whole family of Asbury Park residents. One man who raised his family there -- I think his name was Heckman - - was a math teacher at Asbury Park High School. He was the one who sold us that house. When we bought it he had retired and his children were all grown, and we bought that house, I believe, for \$10,000. We didn't have any money to have builders come, but we did get an architect. We figured we'd better divide this big house into two apartments so that we could sustain it. My dad raised that house by himself -- literally by himself -- with no help -- little by little until it became level. I bet it's still level. I've seen it. We remodeled the kitchen. People were remodeling kitchens. And we lived in the downstairs apartment with a living room, but no dining room. The dining room had been turned into a bedroom. We had two bedrooms and then in the back hall there was a little tiny room; we built a little bathroom next to it. So we had the third bedroom; you know we were having children. And then in the back hall, the back entrance became a bedroom for our son Benjy, who was born in the 1956. Benjy now has been living in Israel for twenty-five years. We have three grandchildren in Jerusalem. We had four children altogether and we stayed in that house until the last child was born

**Ms. Newman:** What are the others' names?

**Ms. Caplan:** Hannah and Benjy and Joshua and Jonathan. Three boys and a girl. I could tell you how come we had the children so fast, but that wouldn't be for publication. We wanted children; we were both only children. We didn't realize what was involved. We wanted to make up for the fact that we were both only children. We wanted descendants. Hannah and Benjy and Josh and Jonathan were all early students at the Hillel School in Wanamassa. Hannah was in the first kindergarten in the Logan Road building, which was the first building. The Hillel School started at the Jewish Community Center in Asbury Park, Comstock Street, west of the railroad. There was a frame building that was the Jewish Community Center and that's where they started the Hilo school. They were renting that space. And then they had to get out of there because that building was razed and a senior citizens home was built there between First and Asbury Ave. The Hillel

school was moved with the help of the city of Asbury Park to the Solarium on the Boardwalk at First Ave. It was there for several months. They had to put up sheet rock and partitions at The Solarium to form classrooms. The new school was being built on Logan Road and Park Blvd. in Wanamassa. It is still there. And so all four of our children attended elementary school at Hillel and all four children went on to Ocean Township High School.

**Ms. Newman:** You had said that when you came here as a school girl you thought Asbury Park was the most beautiful place you'd seen. Did it live up to your expectations when you actually moved here?

**Ms. Caplan:** Oh, yes, yes. We moved here about ten years later, and it was like a dream. Philip at the time was looking for jobs in Detroit. He was just out of school. Then this one in Monmouth County just came up. It was the only place he could get a job at the time and we needed him to get a job at that point. It was like a dream that we were going to come down to this paradise of Asbury Park. We came down here to look around and it was just marvelous. We spent much of our first two years walking the boardwalk, eating lunch by the ocean out there, picnicking. We just drank in the beautiful environment; we couldn't believe where we were, and we still love it. We still walk the Boardwalk whenever we have a chance. What can I tell you about Asbury Park? I'm sure that all of this has been recorded: the Boardwalk was in tiptop shape and it was always crowded. On Saturday nights we always used to go for a walk on the Boardwalk. We'd keep the Sabbath so we were at home during the day. It was hot and we had no air conditioning. Believe it or not, the kids grew up without air conditioning and we had heat waves then that were equivalent to what we have now, but people managed somehow.

**Ms. Newman:** You lived to tell the tale.

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes, we lived to tell the tale. And we had some very cold winters. I remember ice skating and taking the kids for ice skating on Sunset Lake; hundreds of people there in the cold winters. We haven't had so many winters where you could ice-skate, but in those days there were several in a row. I guess it was in the 1950s when we had really heavy snow. There were some storms! I remember when Josh was born. He was born January 6, 1958; there was a terrible storm that night; it was eight to ten inches of snow. It was so bad that you couldn't go visit patients at Jersey Shore Medical Center. At that time it was called Fitkin Hospital. Hannah was born in Monmouth Medical and the rest of the kids were born over here at Fitkin Hospital. I can still see my room in the old building. The older children came to wave at me from the lawn below. You know children were not allowed to come into the hospital at that time, and we had little ones. When Benjy was born, Hannah was only fifteen months old. They would bring the children to the grass below to look up to the window. You know, we couldn't show them the new baby, because the baby was in the nursery and there was

crying and all that stuff. And you know we had circumcisions for the boys. Nowadays the circumcision event is almost the size of a wedding. In those days, the Banker family, which had owned Banker Furniture Store, dedicated a room at Fitkin Hospital for circumcisions. A nice little room was all equipped. In those days, of course, mothers stayed at least seven days in the hospital. I mean we weren't allowed to move around or do anything like that. So we had two circumcisions at Fitkin Hospital. When we had the third one, I said, "No more at the hospital," because in those days after the circumcision, the baby would be put in isolation, because they worried a lot about infection. I mean nobody could come in, nobody could go out. Nowadays the family comes in and the kids come in. I said, "No more babies over night in the nursery isolated by themselves where I can't reach them." So we had the third circumcision on the youngest child at the rebuilt home on 1302 Fifth Avenue. Incidentally, the second apartment was 510 Sixth Avenue and the first one was one Seventh Avenue.

**Ms. Newman:** But it was in the neighborhood.

**Ms. Caplan:** The first one was near the ocean on Seventh Ave. and the second one was a little closer to Grand and the third was on the west side all the way up here, near Wanamassa where Bridge Street is. It wasn't Bridge and Fifth.

**Ms. Newman:** How long did you stay there?

**Ms. Caplan:** We stayed there until Hannah was eleven. We stayed there about ten or eleven years and from there, in 1965, I entered graduate school. This might tie into some of the social trends of the 1950s and the 1960s. You've probably heard of the *Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. I was kind of weary then, you know, with four kids in a row, and working very hard at that. I borrowed the Friedan book from the library. I had graduated in 1946 from New York University and I had been a teacher for three years before I went to Israel, and then I had taught part time after that. I just felt that I needed to do something, and this book said, "Hey, you're allowed to do it; it's okay, you know." But I chose something very, very difficult at that time: graduate school. There was no part time program for graduate students in the Rutgers Graduate School of Social Work. There was no such thing. Now all the schools have part time programs. So I, in a sense, was a pioneer, as were one or two of my colleagues from various other parts of Monmouth County.

**Ms. Newman:** What made you chose social work?

**Ms. Caplan:** Okay, here's the interesting story. When I read that book, I said, "I have to get out," and at least I had been busy with volunteering and organizations, and doing whatever I could in the community to get myself out of the house a little bit in the evening, now and then. But I wanted to do something with what I was trained to do: something professional. I said, "I'm going to take a course at Neptune High School." I heard that Newark State College offered courses at

Neptune High School in the evenings. I looked at the curriculum, and at one course called *The Family*, and wow, that was right up my alley, at that time. And I went and I took that course. I think it met once a week for one semester. The teacher happened to be somebody who was the Head Social Worker at Marlboro State Hospital; I guess he was teaching a course to get away from it all. I became intrigued, and of course he needed volunteers over there. This was when Jonathan was in nursery school. He was the only one who ever went to nursery school. Everybody else was at home until kindergarten. I figured he's in nursery school, maybe I could get out a few hours twice a week in the morning or whatever it was, I don't remember, maybe three times a week. I used this time to go to Marlboro State Hospital. Well, Marlboro was a place that never had the staff that it needed, and certainly not social work department staff, and this is why this teacher recruited me. I think Marlboro is one of the three or the four state hospitals for the mentally ill. It was just closed, but there's one down in Angora, and there's one up in Greystone Park, and there's another one maybe somewhere in Bergen County. They are distributed throughout the state according to counties. Marlboro was a regional hospital for the mentally ill. Now this was the time when there was a great change in the way the mentally ill were processed and treated. This man who was the Head of the Social Work Department was involved in something called deinstitutionalization, a project they started to get the patients out into the community. They were established in boarding homes. They started to establish these boarding homes, especially in Long Branch and Asbury Park; most especially in Asbury Park because there were so many large homes.

**Ms. Newman:** Half way houses.

**Ms. Caplan:** They really weren't half way houses. Half way houses are more for drug addiction or parolees. These were just shelters, custodial care places. The philosophy behind this was to get the patients out of the hospital and into the community, to get them in a family kind of home.

**Ms. Newman:** And did these homes have social residents, social workers, or visitors?

**Ms. Caplan:** Social workers, due to large caseloads, visited only infrequently. Medications were loosely monitored, and the ideal of integration into the community didn't or couldn't happen. The project turned out to be a disaster for the city and for the people involved. I'm not going to be a social critic here, but that's one of the things that led to the downfall of the City of Asbury Park. Because they had these wonderful big houses that could be converted into homes for these recently released mental patients. Also, people were moving out of Asbury Park because of the race riots. Because of the riots and because of the tensions, people started to move out of Asbury Park. As these homes were being vacated, the hospitals started to send these people out for family care, and that's a whole chapter.

**Ms. Newman:** When you went to Marlboro as a volunteer, what was your experience there?

**Ms. Caplan:** I had zero experience in social work, and in order to go to graduate school, I would have to have some social work experience. So here was my big opportunity. For three months or four months I volunteered there. They needed somebody to do the intake as the people were being brought in with the First Aid Squads and so on. There was no professional to greet them and to get some basic information; there were separate men's and women's intake departments. I was put in charge of women's intake for a few hours a week with little or no supervision.

**Ms. Newman:** This was in an area where you had no experience.

**Ms. Caplan:** Absolutely none.

**Ms. Newman:** Were you shocked at conditions?

**Ms. Caplan:** I certainly was. I was more than shocked, I was traumatized, but I plugged on. I'm a person who takes a challenge sometimes in a stupid way. I don't want to say stupid, but I don't give up easily. I had a wealth of experience there. I can say that what I had there was a richer experience in social work and social problems than I had subsequently in two years of graduate school with field placements and in any of my career work with the mentally ill. I had a lot of compassion and still do. You really have to go to graduate school to learn how to not get burned out. Here I had four children at home. I do give my husband a lot of credit because he tolerated all this, and he did the best he could to support what I was trying to do. I think my in-laws in Detroit and my parents must have had many sleepless nights, but we persevered. So for a half a year I was at Marlboro, and then I still needed a half a year training to enter graduate school, so I worked part time for the Monmouth County Welfare Board and that was also a very rich kind of training. I went on monthly home visits to welfare recipients. I was exposed to all the aspects of the welfare system and to the poverty in Monmouth County. I mean I had come from poverty: we had never been upper class or even middle class until post World War II, but the poverty that I saw at that time in Monmouth County was just traumatizing. It was in places out in Freehold Township among the migrant workers, and among many African Americans. It was an education. For the six months that I worked for the Monmouth County Welfare Board, I was exposed to the bureaucratic system of social welfare agencies, and that was an entirely new area for me. I was a music teacher and had experienced quite a bit of frustration with bureaucracy doing that. But when you come in and see people hurting and suffering, and you feel helpless; that's the beginning experience with social work. So then you go to school for two years, and you're supposed to take these two years consecutively, so I should have graduated in 1967. But between those two years, my mother became terminally ill. We were still on Fifth Avenue, and by that time the apartment upstairs was vacated. We brought Mother into the



apartment apartment just when I had finished my first year of graduate school, which in itself was something unbelievable, something unbelievable, for a full time mother of four children. There's another woman, who's name I might mention, who was for many years the Dean of Community Education at Brookdale. She was in my class and she also had four children. The two of us were unique. There was nobody else in the world we could talk to about what it was like. She is Norma Klein, and she just retired recently from Brookdale Community College. You ought to interview her. She also worked for the Welfare Board and then went to graduate school. We didn't know each other, but we met in school. We commuted together every day from here to New Brunswick. There was no Route 18 at that time. We went through the country roads until we could get to Route 9, but it was nice. I learned so much about New Jersey. I had grown up in a rural area in Chatham Township, and this territory that I was traveling through was like home to me. Central New Jersey was the Garden State. It was the agricultural center of New Jersey for most of the last of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, until the cities started to expand and the suburbs started to develop, and you know what has occurred. In 1967, my mother came to our home and I was about to give up my social work career. I had finished a year in fieldwork at the Family Counseling Service of Middlesex County. It was one of the best family agencies in the state, and it was used by Rutgers as a field placement. It was hard to get in there, but I chose to go there because of its quality of the service, but I had to commute from Ocean Township everyday. We had old cars that used to break down occasionally.

**Ms. Newman:** Very bad winters, too.

**Ms. Caplan:** Bad winters. I remember the car on a country road, which is now in the Marlboro section, which was just absolutely empty. There was nothing but forest at night coming home. The car just turned itself around 360 degrees. But there were nice adventures, too. But then my mother got sick, so we took her in, and Dad came down. It was a very difficult time. I figured I would give up graduate school at that point. She came in June and stayed until the fall of 1966. I figured I was certified to teach music in the state of New Jersey in the public schools. I figured I would take a job because the kids were all in school. So I took a job in the Bangs Avenue School as a music teacher. The music teacher had gone on maternity leave, and I taught at the Bangs Avenue School for six months from January to June. The first few months I was busy with the illness and with everything. The superintendent of the schools of Asbury Park wanted me to stay, and gave me all kinds of inducements to stay in Bangs Avenue. It wasn't that I was such an outstanding musician. It was just that I really loved to work with those children and it was kind of a combination of my interest in music and also what I had experienced in social work. I really fell in love with those kids, even though they were very, very difficult to manage. Are you familiar with Bangs Avenue School?

**Ms. Newman:** Yes, I know where it is.

**Ms. Caplan:** It's on the West Side. It was always a segregated school. But it was certainly segregated by population at this time. I think there must have been about three or four white children in the school. They were from poverty-stricken families who lived in rooms in Asbury Park.

**Ms. Newman:** So your experiences as a welfare worker, you felt, helped you to help these children in their lives.

**Ms. Caplan:** Well, I had fun with them. We sang and we danced. It was nice. It was really nice. My mother, of blessed memory, had come to this country when she was sixteen all by herself, and she was a very bright person. She couldn't go to school because she had to work in the sweatshops in New York. I mean hers is the typical immigrant story, only she came without family. But she was interested in social issues, always interested. She used to tell me stories that when she first came here, she went to night school for a while. I don't know how. And she met this very outstanding Black person who was advocating civil rights at that time in 1907 and 1908; it was the famous DuBois. She used to tell me, she would take walks with him and listen to the plight of the Black people, and she identified with it because it was so similar to what she had come from: a small town and poverty in Lithuania and a dysfunctional family and all that. So I was ingrained at an early age with the idea that everybody's fine and okay. It's not a question of tolerance. So teaching at Bangs Avenue was a very nice experience for me because I loved those children. Anyway, I don't want to advertise my great "non-racism" here, but it sort of came with the upbringing and with the Jewish experience. So I taught a half a year and then my mother seemed to be in remission. I thought now is the time we had to make a move, because we had four kids in this apartment with two and a half rooms that could be used for sleeping and living, and a kitchen and a living room: that's what we had. No playroom. Upstairs was an apartment. We were tired. We had a very short career as landlords. It was not a very successful one. We just weren't cut out for it. We wanted to find a home in Ocean Township.

**Ms. Newman:** So you were leaving Asbury Park for Ocean Township.

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes. By that time, the truth of the matter is that everybody we knew in our community had moved out of Asbury Park. This was 1967 after the riots. The people who belonged to the temple had moved. We were Sabbath observers, so we had to find a place that we could walk to on Saturdays. So we had to find a place either in Colonial Terrace (the Rabbi lived in Colonial Terrace at that time) or further out. We couldn't find anything further out in the Township, it was impossible for us, because the kids were walking also. Well, I just about gave up the idea of going back to graduate school, but somehow there was some magic -- something that happened. I used to go down Bimble Boulevard with the car; this was always a thorough fare, a shortcut from Wickapecko to Asbury Ave. It still is. That's been a big problem for years, many years. I saw this beautiful house with an attached yard, and the yard was just full of the most magnificent flowers of

every variety through all the seasons. These trees out here were lower, and it was just a magnificent garden, and this house looked friendly and old-fashioned to me. We had to move, we had to get out of the house we were in if we were going to start the school year. Actually, Hannah didn't go here the first year. I can't remember what it was that compelled us to move out that year. I think we got a buyer or something and here we were: we had sold the old house and we had no place to go. We knew a real-estate agent, a woman, and one day she said, "You know, there's a house out on Bimble Boulevard. It's owned by an old couple." By the way, the people who lived here were named Smythe. He was in the roofing business in Asbury Park long before we ever came here. He was from the older generation. He was aging and he couldn't keep up this place. He wanted to move to Florida. His wife had been a teacher at Bangs Ave. School all her life, and she didn't want to sell this house. But somehow this agent convinced them one night to sell the house. My parents passed by this house, took one look at it, and they said, "This is it." My father was a carpenter, and I guess he appreciated the way it was built. But we couldn't afford a house like this, we really couldn't, and I don't know what the agent did, but she made it affordable for us. At that time many of our friends were buying homes out in Ocean Township and Dwight Drive and all of those fancy developments. Middlebrook first began to become a development at that time. They were converting farms. Somehow this woman pulls up to our house and says, "Do you want the house on Bimble? Sign the paper and you can get it right away." My mother was dying, I wanted to go back to graduate school, we had four kids, not enough room, and we didn't know what to do. If there was any chance that I could go back to graduate school in the fall, I intended to do so. We were entertaining ideas of moving into an apartment, but with the pressures of graduate school, I would not have survived. So that's how we moved into this house.

**Ms. Newman:** When did you move here?

**Ms. Caplan:** I think it was September of 1967. Mother was in remission, and my parents were back home in Chatham Township. I registered to go back to graduate school, and then I got a phone call that my mom was very ill again. So we brought her to this house, and I did go back to graduate school. After I graduated in the summer of 1968, she died in this room.

**Ms. Newman:** But you were living in Asbury Park during the riot; is that right?

**Ms. Caplan:** We were living there during the riots. I think there were two sets of riots. The first set we were living there. Now I'll tell you something that the kids loved when they were little. I bought all their clothing. I didn't have much time to go shopping. When they were little, I was totally occupied in those days. We had one car, and the logistics of getting them to school were involved. I had to drive them to school because they weren't in Asbury Park Schools, they were over here at the Hillel. I was very, very busy. So we went to Fish's Department Store to shop for clothes. Fish was a member of our congregation, and that was an

adventure. We went several times a year to outfit the boys. I had three boys. Of course for the girl, we had to maybe go to the Asbury Youth Center, which was really too expensive for us, that was on Cookman Avenue. We loved going to Fish's department store. My husband used to walk the children from home on 5th Avenue in Asbury Park to the congregation which was on Asbury Avenue off Grand. That's a good mile. So he used to walk the kids on the Sabbath morning. He wrote an article about this once. I think it was in the *Jewish Voice* a couple years ago. On Fifth Avenue and near Main Street, there was the Fisher Baking Company. It was a very well known bakery in New Jersey. It was right here on Fifth Avenue. The kids would walk, but they would walk down Fifth Avenue with my husband. Any kind of weather, it didn't matter. I remember rainy days when we were up to here in water and we didn't know how we were going to get back home because it was flooded. We walked in all kinds of weather: we walked to shows, we walked to the shore on Saturday with the family. I stayed home when the kids were babies, I stayed home a lot, but he would take the older ones everywhere. I just remember this little thing: they were baking bread at the Fisher Bakery on Fifth Avenue and the smell was delicious. The bakers had the windows open and they let the kids come over the window and peek in and look at what was going on. I mean this was one of the adventures on the way to the synagogue. And another one: there was an Italian business that manufactured very fancy cookies on Main Street, and they used to watch what was going on there, too. There were lots of things that were so interesting on Main Street. They were all kinds of food stores and shops, and they would walk down Fifth Avenue to Main Street and then up to Asbury Avenue. They'd pass the firehouse where they always greeted the fire trucks. The fire station is exactly the same building as it was then, and I understand it was there maybe fifty years before that. The fire chief is the Mayor of Ocean Township. We didn't know too many of our neighbors. I guess it was already past the time when people were neighborly. I guess in the early part of the century, people really lived in their neighborhood, but we didn't know too many of our neighbors. We didn't even know where many of the members of the congregation lived.

**Ms. Newman:** But you had an active social life at the temple?

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes. About the neighbors, we knew a woman who lived alone in a house who was very old, and there was a recluse on one side. On the other side there was a family with children. Sometimes we used the neighbors for baby sitting because they had older children. The mayor of Asbury Park lived down the street on Locust Drive. Locust Drive was upscale because it backed up on Deal Lake. You know there's a triangle formed by Locust Drive, 5th Avenue, and Sunset Avenue. There was a little park there where everybody brought their dogs in the days before the scooper laws. The kids used to love that park, especially when it was full of snow, and they would chase all the dogs in the neighborhood. In the back yard, there was some neighborliness where they played with the kids in the back yard. They had some associations with some of the children in the neighborhood.

**Ms. Newman:** What happened after you received your degree from graduate school?

**Ms. Caplan:** After I got my degree, I became a working mother. It wasn't easy. It's not easy today. We didn't have all of the conveniences such as the microwave. In fact, we didn't even have a dish washer, so it was a lot of planning to shop and to clean so forth.

**Ms. Newman:** You worked for different Boards of Education as a school social worker. From 1968 to 1972 it was Madison Township Board of Education, and then from 1972 through 1989 you were over at Henry Hudson Regional High School. In both of those you worked as a school social worker.

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes, I was a Child Study Team Member.

**Ms. Newman:** So what kind of work did you do?

**Ms. Caplan:** The main reason that I went into social work was so that I could be finished with my day's work at the same time that the kids were coming home from school. I did have some baby sitters, but it was just for maybe a half an hour or so. There were no kids with keys to the house in those days. Then I would come home and I would have to start all over again, which is I guess what working mothers have to do now. Only I think that they rely a lot more on packaged foods and canned foods. I did everything from scratch. That's the way I was brought up and that's the way I feel health wise it should be. I worked harder than most of my peers, even those who didn't work. I was unique among the women who were raising children. Some of them went back to teaching after the kids entered first grade. Nobody ever thought of going to work before children were in school. Now I'm not saying that's right or wrong, but it was a different way of life, and the outcome will come later in research. It was a different way of life at that time with regard to what family responsibility was and with what the woman's role was. My husband was very tolerant and believed in encouraging women to express themselves. He didn't feel threatened by it, but he wasn't the typical husband.

**Ms. Newman:** So you worked for these different boards of education, and then at some point you set up your own practice, right?

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes, I started my own practice, and I did it right here in this room. I went to Princeton for two years on a part time basis to a course at the Trinity Counseling Service. It was a program for training in family therapy, and I was trained in family therapy, which is different. Family therapy does not mean family agency. Family therapy is where you see more than one person, you see the whole family, you look at the family from a system's perspective. That was the new thing at that time; now we have integrated the idea of dealing with individuals and dealing with the family. The family has so much to offer in the way of

understanding what is going on with a child. So in schools, I used to interview the parents, and I always tried to bend the system. I got in a lot of trouble at times. I would see the child with the parents and get them to participate in what the plans were for the child. I did some counseling in the schools, although that was not the school social worker's role. I was actually overqualified for the job because they didn't need a person with a graduate degree. They still don't. Now, there are many more people with a Master of Social Work. At that time I was an exception. I probably would have done much better if had worked in an agency, but I could not have had the summer off to be with my children. I would not have been able to come home after school and had the holidays off. I had to do what I felt my responsibility was.

**Ms. Newman:** I take it your children never felt neglected.

**Ms. Caplan:** There were difficult times when I was studying for exams. I don't have to tell you what a graduate program is like: they do a lot of busy work. We were doing six papers a semester: presentations, too, and a lot of the research had to be done up at Rutgers. I remember I parked myself in the Long Branch Library. I found that to be a nice quiet place to work where the librarian was very, very helpful. Often I would take books out at Rutgers and bring them to the Long Branch Library and find a corner there to study. I would seek out library corners where I could just try to forget everything and study.

**Ms. Newman:** So how did you happen to set up your own practice?

**Ms. Caplan:** I had always wanted to do private psychotherapy. I did some of it willy-nilly in the schools, not on a formal basis. I took the two-year post-graduate course. I would see parents and I would see children and I did some group work with children. I used to go into the classroom, take a few children in a corner, and we'd have a group discussion. There were dangers in doing that.

**Ms. Newman:** So you worked with the teachers and they moved you to children who were having problems?

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes. All the Child Study Team members there were qualified in one of three basic disciplines. The learning specialist knows all about the learning problems and the proper learning materials and curriculum, and then there was the psychologist who did batteries of tests on the children. The psychologist's and my counseling role often overlapped, but I was looking more at environmental and social factors. Then we would come up with what is still today mandated by the state and by the Federal Government. There is an individual aid educational program called IEP. That's a whole story in itself. We tried to come up with a plan that services the needs of a child, but you know how limited the resources are, and the bureaucracy, and the legalities. We had very high intentions, but it didn't work out that way, and you do the best you can.

**Ms. Newman:** But you had some gratifying experiences?

**Ms. Caplan:** Mostly with the children and their parents. I was always taking courses. I got certified in Parent Effectiveness Training in the early 1970s, so I taught a few courses at the Jewish Community Center in Deal in Parent Effectiveness Training. Then I taught one or two courses in the schools where I was teaching. I was always looking to expand my skills and my role. There were a lot of limitations which caused a lot of frustration. But I kind of smile at it all now because I guess I was innocent enough to think that I could do all of these things perfectly.

**Ms. Newman:** So by 1989 you no longer worked for the Board of Education.

**Ms. Caplan:** Towards the end of my career at Henry Hudson, I cut down to three days a week because I wanted to develop a private practice and I wanted to have experience. For two years I was a social worker counselor at the Hillel School where my children originally attended at Wayside. They have a very large institution there; it's like a college campus. They have preschool and high school and everything. So I did social work there and there I was able to do a lot more counseling, and there I was able to engage with parents, some of whom eventually became my clients on a private basis. I developed an ongoing private practice. Then when Mental Health Care swung into the HMOs, I began to be affiliated with HMOs. I do this for joy. I still enjoy my work very much, and it's kind of balanced because I have a limited caseload and I also teach yoga. Before I left the school system, I started to go up to a place in Massachusetts for vacation and studied yoga. I decided to become a yoga teacher. I certified to teach yoga at the Kripalu Center for Yoga in Lenox, Massachusetts. I started going there on vacation in 1984 and I received my certification in 1990.

**Ms. Newman:** You went there just for vacation?

**Ms. Caplan:** Yes, and I started to get interested in yoga, and then in 1990 I took the certification training for a month. I lived up there for a month. This was after I retired. I was doing private practice, but I was finished with the public schools in 1989 and then I started to do yoga with just friends and my husband mainly. We love it and we still do it today. Now I teach yoga classes at home.

**Ms. Newman:** Have you seen differences in the kinds of problems that people have had since you set up your private practice in 1980?

**Ms. Caplan:** Addictions were beginning to be prevalent at that time. I think they're even more severe now. There was a steady increase in children becoming involved at an earlier and earlier age. Their parents of course were also addicts, but I don't think you saw it so much from one generation to the next as you do today. There is also the break up of the family. Most of the work today is not so much with parent-child problems, but post-divorce, post-separation problems,

problems with being a single parent, court conflicts over custody: I try to stay away from that. Also problems of stress are more prevalent today. In fact, the average American family is in a state of high stress. Everybody is stressed out. Everybody is working longer hours than we ever dreamed of. My husband used to come home at 5:30 every night. There is no such thing now. Two working parents is a necessity now; the woman does not work for self fulfillment. You've heard these things before. It becomes overwhelming as people try to rise on the social economic ladder. Sometimes they go way beyond what they can afford, and this is a constant problem, too. We're biting off more than we can chew in every way, financially, emotionally, and physically. I haven't come across any Internet problems yet, although you know our kids' generation was the first to watch television, which was the first big distraction. Now the Internet is becoming even a competitor to the television. What's amazing though, on the positive side of this, is that a little child a year and a half to two years of age knows how to press the buttons and how to make the music come out and how to take a tape out and put it back in. They know that everything comes instantly with the press of a finger. Everything happens. Entertainment, everything. Children are bored today. There's much more peer interaction than parent-child, too, much more. I think that's because of the change in the geography, with the people moving far away. The three generational family is almost nonexistent. I mean relatives don't even live in the same area. And while the telephone and the car and the plane have made it possible for people to visit, it's not the same as having a grandparent around or having a grandparent to help with homework. We have three grandchildren in Israel; I just spoke with one of them this morning. Although you do have contact over the phone, it's a more distant relationship. The peer group decides the values and what's in long before the advent of the adolescence.

**Ms. Newman:** But your children have essentially kept your family values.

**Ms. Caplan:** They definitely have kept our values. Each one in a little different way. We have been very fortunate that way. Two of them live in Highland Park and Edison -- the two younger boys. The oldest one is in Israel. The daughter, who lived a West Side New York lifestyle, with a career that kind of stuff, married six years ago -- very late. She lives in Marlboro and she has a little baby. The two boys are similar, but their families are different. They married very different types. One married a girl from Seattle, Washington. Well, didn't I set the example? I married a man from Detroit. I was on the cutting edge of what was coming, and I thought it was so wonderful. Now I'm sitting back here in my rocking chair and thinking, you know, the three generational family is not such a bad idea. There were a lot of negatives to it, such as having people interfere with one another's lives. But now when parent gets sick in Florida, for example, it's just an impossible situation. You have to have third party people to handle things or you have to run by plane to them. A friend of mine's daughter is the next generation. She lives in Australia and her father is isolated in Wanamassa. He's ninety something and declining and she's running from Australia to manage what is going on at Monmouth Medical Center, New Jersey, and this is not atypical.



**Ms. Newman:** Well it's been fascinating. Thank you very, very much.