

**Interview with Harry Gelb  
December 13, 2001**

**Beginning Tape One, Side A**

Question: Okay. **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum, **Jeff** and **Toby Herr** collection. This is an interview with **Harry Gelb**, conducted by **Regina Baier** on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in Mr. **Gelb's** home in **New York City**. Mr. **Gelb** is the son of Holocaust survivor **Regina Gelb -- Regina Gelb**, who has been interviewed for the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum's oral history collection. This interview is part of the **USHMM's** post Holocaust interview project. The **U.S.** Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges **Jeff** and **Toby Herr** for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side **A**. My first two questions are sort of questions that we'll ask everybody. They are kind of formal, but easy. Give us your full name and your date and place of birth.

Answer: My name is **Harry Gelb, G-e-l-b**. I was born on May sixth, 1956, and I was born here in **Manhattan**, in **Washington Heights** on -- it's upper **Broadway**, near **Dighton** Street.

Q: Were you named after anybody in particular?

A: Yes, I was named after my paternal grandfather, who died about two years before I was born.

Q: Was he -- did he die during the -- during the Holocaust, or was it in **America**?

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: No, no, this -- my -- my father is born in **America**, and his father was also born here, a newly, newly new -- I believe his parents are newly arrived on the Lower East Side, perhaps at the e-end of the last century.

Q: Okay, let's talk about your parents a little bit. When you think back -- we're doing this chronologically, I think, which is easier in some ways. We can always jump back and forth later.

A: True.

Q: When you think back as a small boy, how do you remember your parents? Difference in -- difference in personalities, wh-what kind of -- when you think back, describe them to us, when we haven't seen them.

A: Mm-hm, well actually they're both alive, so when I say -- you ask, how do I remember my parents, i-it's -- it's an unusual question. I -- I remember them, seeing them, talking to them virtually every day now. If you're asking about the differences between them, and -- and to compare and contrast them, they're -- they're quite different people. I think the most salient difference that one would notice even at first blush is that my mother is clearly European born, you can tell that just by her accent, and my father is an American Jew. A-A -- their personality types are also quite different. My father is a r-reasonably calm and excessively well organized person. My mother, although she is -- is quite well organized, is a very

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

intellectually driven person with a -- a constant thirst for a-acquiring new knowledge and reconsidering and re-evaluating things in her life, both the significant and the trivial on a day to day basis, but her mind is constantly focused on that sort of endeavor.

Q: I guess my -- my question was sort of trying to first of all get you back into childhood, but also trying to bring out whether or not your perception of your parents has changed over the years [indecipherable]

A: Oh, I can answer, I do -- I do not think that my perception of them has changed over the years. I think that w -- the one thing one can say about each of my parents, even my father, who is American, and brings with that certain cultural baggage, is that they don't -- th-they don't move with -- with the changes and ebbs and flows of American society. They've been very consistent in their own personality types throughout my life. And the things that they were concerned with or dedicated to at the time of my birth, a-and mine and my brother's upbringing continue to this day. They -- they behave and -- and dress actually, very much in the ways that I recall them having done so when I was a child.

Q: Interesting. Talk about your brother a little bit. Who is -- what's his name, when --

A: My br --

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Q: -- when he was born, and -- and what -- what type is he?

A: Mm-hm. My brother's name is **Paul Gelb**. Right now he lives in **Albuquerque**, but obviously he lived here in **New York** with our family when he grew up. He was born April 13<sup>th</sup> of 1960, also here in **Manhattan**, which makes him four years younger than me. And I remember very well the time when he was born, and having been sent for a -- a sleepover to a friend's, while my mother gave birth to **Paul**. I remember him coming home from the hospital and having a -- a reasonably good memory myself, I recall details of our upbringing very, very well since the day he came home, because that was his fourth birthday and my memory goes back even farther than that. And is there anything in particular you'd like to know about him? The way he looks, what his interests are?

Q: Describe him -- just describe him a little bit to us. Sort of as -- over -- against how you think you are, how you see yourself, maybe.

A: Physically my brother, i-it's obvious to anyone who would see us, is -- is -- he's a very -- looks very different. I am about six feet tall, weigh about 155 pounds, I'm a very thin -- thin framed person. And my brother is about six feet five inches tall, is physically built -- the only way I can describe him, as I've often said, is that he looks like, literally like the statue of a Greek god. He works with his body, meaning he's a landscaper and he designs things and works with things outdoors, heavy

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

things, all day. And I'm sure in large part because of this, he's able to keep up the tremendous physique that he has. But he's always been a very physical person. I've been a very much more intellectually oriented, and my brother has always been oriented towards sports, the great outdoors, and using his body and keeping it moving and doing things at all times. Very different type of person from me. We had very similar education though, we went to the same grade school, the same junior high school and the same high school. And we went to similar colleges. We went from **PS 187** to junior high school **143**, both in upper **Manhattan**. Then each of us went to the **Bronx** High School of Science. And then I went on to **Hamilton** College, and four years later, **Paul** went on to **Saint Lawrence** University. Both of those are smaller, upstate **New York** institutions.

Q: Did you get along when you were small? Were you kind of friends, did you sh -- did you share things, or was it difficult because you were so -- such different people?

A: I think actually we got along very well. There's always sibling rivalry, and any pair of brothers who are four years apart who say that they don't have periodic, or sometimes unrelenting battles between the two of them would be prevaricating. I'll -- I'll just say that we -- we got along just fine. He, because of his great physical abilities was often welcomed in with my circle of friends, almost as a co-equal, so

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

that he could so-called hang with them, and play sports with them, and they looked at him very much as one of their own friends. I'm sure that he -- that being welcomed by -- by my friends made his life a little more easy, or fun.

Q: It's a -- it's a good chance, actually, to go back into your childhood, because you said your memory goes back so far. I'm -- my own does, too, which is interesting, it does in -- sort of in glimpses. Put -- give us those glimpses that you remem -- give us a few, sort of impressions from what you remember, what it was like in your house, what -- what do you remember?

A: Hm. Well, I rem -- first of all, looking at our general family constellation, some of the most interesting and fun things that -- that we did, meaning **Paul** and I did as children, was to go and visit our relatives. My mother's family, each -- she has two older sisters, one sister lived with her family in **Vineland, New Jersey**, the other sister lived with her family in **Toronto, Canada**. And travels out of **New York City**, to different venues are always interesting to any child. What was very unique -- visiting **Toronto**, of course, is a foreign country, but I don't think there is anything in **Toronto** that particularly grabbed our attention when compared to our lives in **New York**, except that it was always fun to see our cousins and that sort of thing. Going to **Vineland** was very interesting because at that time, our aunt and her husband, our uncle lived on and owned a chicken egg farm. And they had dogs and

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

rabbits and people who worked there. And imagine coming from **Washington Heights** and then all of a sudden being allowed to play in -- in a wide open farm with your cousins who took you around and showed you all of these things that you'd never been exposed to before. You had the run of the land, you had the run of the animals, you had the run of the house. It was really a big adventure. We also had a paternal grandmother, who lived in **Asbury Park, New Jersey**, very, very close to the beach. So when we visited there it was always pleasant for my mother to take us over to the shore. It was only about four or five blocks directly to the beach, and we could go on the little rides, and -- and get a salt water taffy, and orange-ade, and waffles with ice cream and hang out on the shore, and if the weather is right we could even go in the water. But we could go to the beach any time of the year, as long as it was clement weather. That was always a fun thing to do. My brother and I had free run of the neighborhood i-in **Washington Heights**, that's near **190<sup>th</sup> Street** and **Fort Washington** Avenue. In those days -- and these days as well, but in those days it was a very, very safe, and the children could wander the neighborhood freely, enjoying everything from the **Cloisters** Museum in **Fort Tryon** Park, all the way through playing ball in the schoolyard as most children would do. So we had quite a range of things to keep us busy in that neighborhood. **Fort Tryon** Park in

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

particular providing a spot where a lot of different sorts of recreations and adventures could be had.

Q: Do you recall -- before I -- we talk a little bit more about what it was like at home, in your home atmosphere and so on, do you remember the particular circumstance or event or so when you first realized, understood, that your mother was what we now call a Holocaust s -- a Holocaust survivor?

A: There was never a time that I can recall that I was not aware that she and her sisters were Holocaust survivors. As a matter of fact my mother has always made it a point, and I know this not only because she did it, but because she said to me, and has reminded me that she has done so, to be very honest a-a-about her background, and I'm quite certain knowing her, that she told us things in an age appropriate manner, meaning age appropriate as far as we children were concerned. But we have known as -- as long as I can remember, what our roots were.

Q: Do you remember partic -- a particular sort of w -- how she talked to you about it, or do you -- its -- an-and your response, your feelings? How do you -- how did you f -- how did you feel?

A: Well --

Q: What -- what was your response to it? Sort of, curiosity, fear, anger, resentment, what sort of happened?



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: Speaking for myself, I -- I -- then, and now, my reaction is always curiosity and further curiosity. I in no way ever resented this. As a matter of fact, since so many o-of my mother's relatives, and -- and of course her extended circle of friends were survivors as well, this was not something that seemed in any way aberrational or different. This was just something that I accepted as the norm, that some of the people in the neighborhood I lived in, in **Washington Heights**, had come over after World War II as survivors, as compared to the many, many other, particularly German Jews who settled along **Fort Washington** Avenue in the late 1920's and 1930's, before the war. Many of the children in my neighborhood were the descendants of that group of people, as well, but basically those are the types of people that lived in the neighborhood where **Paul** and I grew up.

Q: Did you perceive any differences that might be attributed to Holocaust experiences among your aunt as over -- against your mother?

A: Well, I think i-it's -- they're -- both aunts, and you have to remember that my mother, a-as you might know is the youngest of three sisters. My -- when the war broke out, as my mother was born in December of 1929, and the war broke out in September of 1939, my mother had not even celebrated her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday. So her outlook on the war, both then and now, i-in retrospect, is I'm certain quite, quite different from that, let's say, of her oldest sister, who is significantly older than she.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

My -- my mother's oldest sister, if I'm correct, ha -- was already attending gymnasium, and my mother would have just been a grade school child at the time. So the -- the -- how do we say, perspective that -- that a -- a child who's 10 years old would have on the outbreak of war is certainly different than a high school child would have. My -- I-I -- I'm sorry, I just -- I was wondering what it -- exactly it was that you'd like me to get at, because it's such a -- a broad area, and --

Q: Well, I was just -- we can -- can leave that alone and bring it up later --

A: Just go right ahead.

Q: -- and talk more about it, but I was kind of thinking, because of the a -- wh- whether you saw, as a -- this, still trying to be in your childhood somewhere, it's kind of hard to **[indecipherable]** --

A: No, no, I understand --

Q: -- separately.

A: -- but you were asking about my mother and her sisters.

Q: Yeah, whether you perceived certain differences. The way they were, or the way they talked, or what they talked about, what they didn't talk about --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- that could be attributed to experiences in the -- during the Holocaust.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: I think that the amount of -- of discussion that any o -- that either or -- of her sisters, and compared to my mother, that any of the three girls had about Holocaust activity, or what ha-had happened to them, I mean, in the Holocaust, is more reflection of their -- just of their basic personality. For example, my oldest -- my mother's oldest sister, my oldest aunt, I was just going to say, is just slightly more reticent, but that's just her -- her -- just innate character. She's always willing to discuss, and always was willing to discuss their past. She married a survivor, and someone that she had known overseas, of course, and she -- he was a -- he was a guerilla fighter, as was the husband that my mother's next oldest sister married. They were all survivors, so within the family, issues of discussing their past are certainly -- were n-nothing to hide, this was part of their joint and several backgrounds. And actually, my father would be the only one who would be viewed or -- I shouldn't he would be -- he could have been, but he wasn't viewed as an outsider, having been born here in **Brooklyn** and grown up in **New York City**. It's a -- but my father fit right in with the family, he -- he's just a -- a very gentle and welcoming sort of person and -- and that is reflected in the way that these five other people treated him and accepted him. The sister -- my mother's middle sister, so to speak, the sister that lives in **Vineland, New Jersey**, and her husband have always been, out of the three sisters, the most involved in Holocaust related activities. As

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

you might know, the sister who lives in **Vineland** married a gentleman names **Miles Lerman**, who eventually became the chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Commission and Museum in **Washington, D.C.**. So all of our family has always looked up to Uncle **Miles** and his activities as exemplars of -- of what one could in reference to remembering or commemorating the Holocaust. But that doesn't in any way mean that I wish to give short shrift to the concerns and activities, both of his wife and of my mother and her oldest sister, who live in **Toronto**.

Q: Her name is **Hania**?

A: **Hania**. Her name is **Hania Wilson**, her -- people call her **Anna**. And the sister who lives in **Vineland** is **Kryisia**, but people call her **Chris**, their last name is **Lerman**. And I forgot to say that the uncle that I had, by marriage of course, in **Toronto**, who is now deceased, his name was **Adash Wilson**, but he was known in **Can-Canada** as **Adrian**. And the uncle in **Vineland**, who is the hol -- Holocaust Memorial Museum is **Miles Lerman**.

Q: Di -- I -- I gather yet that you did get along with your cousins, but --

A: Oh sure.

Q: -- speak a little more about that relationship. Is it particularly close or just sort of, and did you talk about, amongst yourself about the experience of your parents?

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: There is -- looking back, there was some discussion about it, but more in latter days, more since the time I would be college age, and in a way that isn't really reflective of how we were raised. Seeing our cousins was basically seeing our cousins and having fun. Of course, visiting **Canada**, those cousins from the oldest sister were a bit older than me and **Paul**, and I'm sure they looked at us as -- as their nice, very much younger cousins visiting from **New York**. But we were entertained when we visited there, largely by my mother who -- who took us around and made sure that **Paul** and I had fun things to do. However, when we went down to the farm in **Vineland**, my cousin **David**, who is the younger of **Kryisia** and **Miles's** two children, and was a boy as well, and was also involved in boy's scouting, was a hero to me and **Paul**. He led us through adventures on the farm, and -- and starting little campfires and cooking potatoes and hot dogs and chasing the chickens through the coop, and taking fresh eggs [**indecipherable**] under the nest and just generally having a lot of fun. All of the other three cousins, meaning his older sister and the two cousins in **Canada** are female. So I -- I suppose one could say that **Paul** and I had a bit of a closer relationship to **David** at the time we were children. Also, when we were growing up there came a point where **David's** older sister, since we saw th-this family more often, they were living in **New Jersey**, **David's** older sister was away at **Brandeis** for four years, and then went to **Stanford** for graduate school, so

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

we didn't see her for long periods of time. But **David** was around a lot when I was in high school, and **David** was at **Harvard**. My first ever college field trip was to visit **David** up at **Harvard**. That would be in the spring of 1972. And that was a big adventure for me too, it was a big trip away from home.

Q: Okay, let's go back to home. That was a good -- and if you want to take a sip of water, you can do that. Yeah, let's go back to home and see sort of what kind of values were stressed? What -- with regarding t -- with regard to education and religious upbringing and so on. What was important to your parents and what -- what -- what happened?

A: With regards to education, I can speak both for my mother and for each of her two sisters. They were extremely devoted to the -- the value of education and a classical education at that. Each of the three sisters a-and their spouses as well, drove all of us cousins, so to speak, to a-achieve academically as much as we possibly could. And virtually all of us have graduate degrees and we all did excessively well in school. We went to excellent schools and did well in them. I'm proud to say. Education, though, isn't only what one does in school. My -- my mother, as -- as well as her two sisters exposed the -- their very -- their respective children to all sorts of -- of -- both performing and fine arts, to make sure that we had a -- a breadth of knowledge and familiarity with the -- the humanities, that

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

would not make us simply narrow academics, but to make us a broader and more fulfilled and self-fulfilling people.

Q: Yeah, your mother actually said in her interview that the emphasis as far as she was concerned was not so much on succeeding, but on broadening their horizons. So you would say that's how you would see that -- how -- how you see that too, right?

A: Absolutely, it's both. It isn't just -- ne -- she -- I -- I agree with her, even in her own self estimation. I think that she both was very interested that -- that we succeeded on both a substantive level and of course competitively, which don't necessarily go hand in hand. And also that -- that we became more familiar with other cultures and other histories that weren't our own. And I know her two sisters felt exactly the same, because you can see it in -- in the way their children are now.

Q: Was that a burden to you sometimes too, that you felt that you had to kind of move on and make her proud, or was it something that just sort of came naturally to you anyway?

A: I don't think that it was a burden that I felt that I had to make her, in particular, proud. I think that any student of any parent, who is at all competitive in the academic environment, wishes to succeed and knows that his or her parents will be proud, but I don't think that that was the moving force that would make me work

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

harder in school. I just wanted to do well in school so that I could learn the material I had, because that was basically my job.

Q: Was it equally important to your father, or was there a slight difference in -- in emphasis?

A: I'm -- I'm sure it was equally important to my father, but in every household, each parent fulfills different roles. Some overlap and some are very distinct a-and separate. In our household this is just -- education of the children and the supervision of it and the guiding of it was something more within my mother's province, than within my father's, although he certainly would help me with anything from mathematics to French. But when look -- when looked at from the big perspective, it was always my mother who was the one who was involved in all of the school activities for the parents and in support of the children. In scouting activities my father helped, but my mother helped when we were in the cub scouts, which was what the -- what parents did in those days. But it was my mother really, who was more involved with us in making sure that we academically achieved what we could.

Q: What about cultural and religious upbringing, sort of Jewishness?

A: Mm-hm, yeah.



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Q: What -- what -- how important was that, and -- and what -- kind of what coloration did it take on?

A: I think that my brother and I were raised as American children in that the primary focus of our upbringing was not on the fact that we were Jewish, but that we were growing children that needed education. This is not in any way to minimize the role that religion played in -- in **Paul** and my upbringing. From our -- from my earliest recollection my parents have been members of the Hebrew tabernacle of **Washington Heights**, which is a synagogue that used to be on **161<sup>st</sup>** and **Fort Washington**, but around 1972 or '73 moved closer to their home, to **185<sup>th</sup>** Street and **Fort Washington** Avenue. The Hebrew tabernacle is a -- a synagogue or a congregation largely made up of the German Jewish émigrés that I had referred to before, but there are quite a few people like -- like our family, who came from other backgrounds, but who were Jewish as well. My cousins all ri -- belong to synagogues and in each of their families they were very, very ab -- involved in their religious upbringings. Even more particular is the zi -- Zionist upbringing and religious upbringing that went hand in hand with that, that my cousins in **Vineland** enjoyed as children. While I was very, very involved, for example, as an adolescent in -- in boy scout activities at wa -- a-at the same time, in tandem with my shul activities, but still I -- I was very heavily involved in boy scouts. Both **David** and

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

**Jeanette** were deeply, deeply, deeply involved in Young **Judaea**. And each of them became national officers, they worked in camps. As a matter of fact, my cousin **David** met his wife at a camp Young **Judaea** in **Texas** when he was a counselor there many, many years ago. Many years, obviously, before they got married. But as a j -- as a general matter, all of our parents had us involved in a religious upbringing, but the **Lerman** family was very involved in Zionist activities as well.

Q: What kind of friends -- who were your friends? Jewish in background, or a mix, or sort of who were your friends and did you talk -- did they know that you were a child of a survivor?

A: Everyone in the class knew what -- where everyone's parents came from. For example, one of my classmates in grade school, **Steven Guttman**, was not a child of survivors, he -- but he was from a German Jewish family that had come over just before the war. He was very proud though, to say that his maternal grandfather had -- who was obviously Jewish, had served in the Kaiser's army in World War I, and was a wounded and decorated combat veteran, having taken some sort of shrap -- shrapnel in the belly, and had been very proud of the service that he had offered his -- his government, meaning his country, **Germany**, during World War I. They subsequently emigrated to the **United States** in the 1930's, and what happened

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

thereafter is indeed history. But **Steven** was never embarrassed and was actually proud to point out his grandfather's history. On the other hand, there were other children in our class who were not Jewish, there were other children who were not even from our neighborhood, who were bused in during the desegregation years. One of tho -- one of my classmates then, with whom I'm not in touch now, but o-of whom I'm very proud, is now the chair French horn -- lead chair French horn at the **New York** Philharmonic. And he's a student who was bused into our neighborhood for desegregation purposes. Another one of the children that was bused in eventually became a leader of the **New York** Black Panther party. So there were quite -- was quite a variety of children, but most of the children in our class were Jewish and lived in the neighborhood, but a few were Italian, a few were Irish, a few were Greek. It was a regular mix of **Washington Heights** children that attended **PS 187**. My brother, being only four years younger than us had basically the same sort of balance in his classes as well.

Q: What your -- what was sort of your impression of s -- during the school years, high school, sort of the Holocaust education? It didn't exist in the way it exists now, but what did you learn about the Holocaust and did you know much more, and why, if you did.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: By the way, I -- I did want to state -- you asked me if I knew other children who were survivors. Yes, I did, and the few of us all -- we didn't walk around talking about this, but we all knew each other's parents and knew where they had been and our parents all knew each other. But I don't think it bore in any way on the way we interacted as children. We just were classmates in school, and we did everything that all the other children did.

Q: Well, it's only interesting if you talked about differently about -- if you t -- if that issue came up in a different way than it came up with others, that would be interesting.

A: These -- these sorts of things came up, but only when -- I-I'd say when I was over -- over the age of 17 or 18. In other words, after -- I graduated from high school early, so after I got out of high school and went to college and people became freer in talking -- or more interested maybe in talking about these things, and I -- I ki -- will tell you later a bit about some of the other people that -- that I knew and the things that we discussed in -- in those years. But as a child, this is not something the -- that the children used as a -- as a conversation item between them. Now, you were asking about -- about how I view education. When I went to the **Bronx** High School of Science, you can imagine that like me there were many other children of survivors. And of course in those days, **Bronx** Science was heavily

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Jewish as a general matter, whether that be American Jews or Jews from other parts of the world, and not necessarily Holocaust survivors, per se. Then, at that point there was no formal Holocaust education class or program at **Bronx** Science, although I distinctly recall that these issues were discussed in social studies classes as -- as one would expect them to be, in the context of studying history. However, shortly after I left, the **Bronx** High School of Science opened what I believe was the first high school Holocaust study center of its kind in the **United States**, and it's there to this day. I actually happened to stop by **Bronx** Science last week cause I was in the neighborhood on business, to see one of my old history, or social studies teachers. And indeed, the center is -- we actually mentioned it, the center is still there, and the high school, though, has changed, and what -- what is wonderful about having the Holocaust center there now is that the student body is made up of children who might not know as much as we did when we were children, the reason being that **Bronx** Science, like **Stuyvesant** and **Brooklyn** Tech is now heavily Asian. And overall one could say that whereas the school was largely Jewish when I went there -- of course, there were -- there were hundreds and hundreds of other children from other backgrounds, whether they be -- were Protestants or Catholic, Irish or Greek or -- or -- or black Americans or Spanish. Now, the vast proportion, maybe not the majority, but a vast proportion of the students hail from **Asia**. And

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

you can see that the minute you enter these schools. It -- this is just reflective, in many ways, of the changing ethnic face of **New York City**. And it's a wonderful thing to know that this center is serving these children's educational needs.

Q: Okay, I think we should stop here and flip the tape. This is the end of tape one, side **A**, interview with **Harry Gelb**.

**End of Tape One, Side A**

**Beginning Tape One, Side B**

Q: Okay. This is a continuation of a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Harry Gelb**. This is tape number one, side **B**. And I think it makes sense at this point to continue with your education. So, **Bronx** High school -- Science school, and then where do we -- where did you afterwards?

A: When I graduated **Bronx** High School of Science, I went to **Hamilton** College in upstate **New York**. Earlier you asked me about my mother's ideas about education. One of the most interesting aspects of -- of -- of my outlook, and the counsel that I give to my children and others nowadays, is -- is my mother's attitude about going on to college. I think it was a given with every family in our neighborhood that their children would go on to college and probably graduate school. It wasn't just that. Many parents, including my wife's parents, believed that a child should maybe live at home or stay in their home city, etcetera, when they

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

went to college. It's just sort of a continuation of high school in many ways. My mother was insistent all along -- she wasn't insistent meaning she w -- she would not ha-have -- put me to the guillotine had I decided to attend **Columbia**, or **NYU** or **Fordham**. You can rest assured, I'm sure she would have been quite proud and supportive. However, from the earliest years my -- my mother encouraged me and **Paul** to think about going away to college. And why was this? She was v-very o-open about why this was. When my mother came to **America**, she came under the supervision and the guardianship of her next oldest sister, which is **Kryisia**, and **Kryisia's** new husband **Miles**. And when they first came to **America** they lived together as a family in **Brooklyn**, and then **Kryisia** gave birth to my cousin **Jeanette**, and my mother was involved in raising her. And then there came a point in time, the exact date I don't recall, but that's not really relevant, when **Miles** and **Kryisia** decided to move to **Vineland, New Jersey**, and my mother was to stay on in **Brooklyn** and attend **Brooklyn College**. She had attended **Thomas Jefferson High School** first, wh-when she first got here, graduated and went onto **Brooklyn College**. While my mother was there, she received a very, very unique offer to teach Polish in a counterintelligence training program at **Indiana University** in **Bloomington, Indiana**. Now needless to say, my mother, I am sure, did not know much, perhaps just a little, little bit, but not know much at all about what **Indiana**

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

was or even perhaps where it was. But the offer included the opportunity to both teach and to finish her undergraduate education, at I -- I -- I'm certain a -- a financially acceptable situation for her, given the fact that she was basically on her own. So off she went to **Indiana**. And she always told us as children how fondly she looked back on her experiences in **Indiana**. The point of what I'm saying is specifically that she always told us how important it was in her upbringing, to be exposed to a different cultural and intellectual milieu, while she was in **Indiana**, from the one she would have been exposed to had she stayed here and attended **Brooklyn** College and finish her education there. And -- although of course, immediately after graduating from **Indiana** University, she did indeed move back to **New York City**, she always told us and still does to this day, how highly she valued the years that she spent there. Both the fact that she ha -- got a wonderful education, but also because she met so many different types of people from so many different backgrounds. The kinds of folks that came from all over **America**, particularly in **Indiana**, middle **America**, that she would never have seen here in **New York** during those years. And I suppose that that in large part informed the way she counseled me and **Paul** about the -- maybe not advisability but about the weight we should give in -- in thinking of out of town schools. And you'll notice that both **Paul** and I went off to out of town schools. And the end of my four years at



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

**Hamilton**, I did move back to **New York City**, but I moved back here at that point largely because the law school that had selected me, which was **New York University** was a fine institution. If one, for example, in **Boston**, had accepted me that I wanted to attend, I would have gone to **Boston**, and perhaps eventually relocated to **New York**. As a matter of fact, now that I think back on it, I probably would have. But it wa -- the selection of venue for graduate school was not made with the same considerations that my selection of college was.

Q: Why law school? Why law? In what direction did you want to go into?

A: I always felt as a child that my interests, or that my -- I shouldn't say that my interests, that my intellectual proclivities and leanings were more in the humanities than in the sciences or mathematics. And although to be honest -- an-and I don't -- I don't say this to brag, it's just a statement of fact, I did exceptionally well in both the sciences and re -- and almost as well in mathematics. Better than most, actually. I never found that I had much interest in anything other than the biology of medicine, in particular, but I was -- had really very little interest in physics, or chemistry, or pure mathematics or computers, or whatever other sorts of sciences, so to speak, were available to me a-as a -- intellectual or academic endeavors. On the other hand, I -- I was always, always, always drawn to history and literature and language. And to this day, even while in the practice of law, I'm a voracious reader

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

and alternate reading books of nonfiction and reading books largely of classical literature. Incessantly, I read every day on the subways and before I go to sleep, in order to continue my self-education, even while practicing a very narrow area of the law.

Q: Before we continue, you had -- you -- wh-which direction in law did you choose? What -- what did you want to become and what did you become?

A: I am reasonably unique among the -- my fellow graduates from **NYU** law school and the class of 1980, in my having gone into what's called public interest or public service law. Technically I'm in public service law, meaning I'm a government employee. But even while in law school, I was not drawn at all to the rather lucrative world of corporate or business law. Coming out of **NYU** law school, the doors are largely open to those wishing to practice those areas, and many, many, many of my friends went into those areas, and are doing financially quite well, I -- i-intellectually, we don't discuss. It's just the job, it's the same as running any other business. I always felt socially impelled to find something that I could do that would be of some good or service to others, and -- and I felt a natural affinity for government service. I eventually dis -- sub -- I -- now I-I mean it's sub - sub - sub-specialty of the law, but I started when I -- I -- well, actually, when I was -- let me f -- let me restart that. When I was in law school, I clerked at a litigation firm. It was

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

a union labor law litigation firm, but I found that I enjoyed litigation, it matches my personality type very much. And when I graduated from law school, I worked in -- in an **admiralty** insurance and personal injury litigation firm again, while still looking, all of the -- this time for a public service job that would suit my own personal, social and intellectual needs. I eventually was made a job offer by then the human resources administration of the city of **New York**, which was then the parent organization for the agency that I still work for, which is the **New York City** administration for Children's Services. And since New Year's of 1983, I've worked exclusively in child neglect, child abuse and termination of parental rights litigation. I also have a -- a side specialty of immigration law as it pertains to children who are aliens, who find themselves in **New York City** foster care. That's sort of a sidelight of my own, but it's all within the same job.

Q: I don't want to ask this as an oversimplified question, but I noticed that some children of survivors who decided to become lawyers, became defense lawyers, because they kind of identified with the victim. Now you became the prosecutor, but of -- of -- of people who abuse children.

A: Yes.

Q: Is there any vague connection to your mother's experience in some ways, or is that reaching?

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: I -- I think that might be reaching a bit. I think that even were my mother not a survivor, given the values that were imparted to me and **Paul** as children, an area of law that is somewhat related to social work, as mine is, would be the type of thing that I might have enjoyed doing. On the other hand, I -- I -- I -- well, actually it's not on the other hand, I really don't see much of a connection with -- with defense lawyers as well. I think that you -- you -- one might find some degree of social concern in children of the Holocaust, but for example, my roommate from law school, from my first year there, who i-is the child of a survivor is now a partner in a very large corporate law firm, and he has been with them exclusively since we graduated from law school in 19 -- in 1980. Actually, and sadly, his firm was one of the firms that was blown out of the **World Trade Center**, number one **World Trade Center** on September 11<sup>th</sup>. And fortunately, all but one of his co-workers made it out of the building safely. And th-th-that's a wonderful thing. But a -- I -- I actually should tell you, it's a very interesting story involving this young man. The summer before I attended **NYU** law school, I -- I had subscribed to live in their dormitory at **NYU** so I wouldn't have to commute from **Washington Heights**. I received a -- a note in the mail that -- you know, one of those, your roommate will be -- you know, **John Smith**, and his address and phone number are, if you want to contact him, go ahead. Well, I open the envelope and there's this letter, and it says,

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

your roommate will be **Lawrence A. Bauer, 98 Park Terrace East, New York, New --** and I said, what? I can't believe this, it's **Larry Bauer**. It turns out that **Larry Bauer --** first of all, I-I -- my earliest memory of him i-is coincident, both he and I, although he lives about a mile from my parents, his family belonged to the same synagogue and at the high holy days, their pew, it was the same -- we shared the sa -- the two families, the **Bauers** and the **Gelbs** were assigned seats in the same pew for years and years. Also, **Larry** and I, although he's a year older than me, attended day camp together for years and rode the same camp bus, although we weren't close, because we lived about a mile apart and traveled in different circles of friends and went to different schools, we knew each other reasonably well from those two contacts. So I was very, very pleased, I called him, he received the same letter on the same day. And it was -- i-it was a really, really strange coincidence that we lived together, and while together we got to know -- obviously we're sharing a room for a year, we got to know each other much, much better. His -- to answer a question about him that you had asked me earlier, **Larry's** father came to **America**, a German Jew in the 1930's. **Larry's** mother, also a German Jew was incarcerated in **Theresienstadt**, a -- a survivor, e-e-eventually in **Auschwitz**, and -- but she, like m-my mother, survived the war. What makes them very, very different, meaning the two mothers, is the degree to which they were willing to go in discussing their

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

wartime experiences. And all through law school -- at the time, **Larry**, of course knew what his mother's background was, but his mother would tell him that basically -- she basically had -- had given up on religion, although his father wa-wa-was quite committed, because she -- and this is **Larry's** -- I'm paraphrasing **Larry's** words, she felt that -- that God must have given up on the Jews in order for such a thing to have happened to her and to her entire family, which was lost. It was in more recent years, since the death of **Larry's** father that he started to talk in depth with his mother about these issues. And he asked her why it was that she didn't talk much about these things. And she s -- and she laughed and turned and said, what do you mean? She said, I'm willing to talk about them, you just didn't ask me enough. In -- in the last few years, I-I'm sure that his discoveries about his mother's background have grown geometrically, and that this is -- this is a -- a most in -- most intelligent and forthcoming woman, and I -- I just found it interesting that for whatever reason, **Larry** and I grew up in -- in basically parallel lives in **Washington Heights**, and **Inwood**, during our formative years, our knowledge base may have been the same, but the amount that Holocaust issues was discussed in the house was quite different. The result is the same. I think we have about the same consciousness, and about the same regard for our parents a-a-as each other,

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

but I-I just think that i-it was a very interesting thing to share th-this reflection on our upbringing with -- with a roommate over the course of an entire year.

Q: Is there another example that you have that whi -- that you had a chance to see how other children of survivors lived, and how that -- it turned out, sort of to compare to your own? Okay, let's get to your wife, then.

A: Yes, well --

Q: You've pointed at your ring, your wedding ring.

A: Yes, in -- indeed, my wife a -- is a child of a survivor as well. Interestingly enough, I did not meet her because of that in any way, shape or form. Quite simply my brother, while attending **Bronx** Science, didn't know th-this person who would eventually become my wife, but overheard he -- this person telling a teacher that she would be attending **Hamilton** College that coming fall. And I was at **Hamilton** at the time, and my brother said, wow, maybe **Harry** should meet her. So he called me and said, I saw this girl, and I saw that she was talking to such and such people and I'm going to try to find out who she is. And when I came back at the end of my junior year from college, my brother had me introduced to **Cheryl**. And then, of course, we started dating and met her family and I found as follows. **Cheryl's** father grew up in a suburb just west, just outside of **Lódz** in **Poland**, a little town called **Aleksandrów**. His parents owned a sock factory, a very small one, but they

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

manufactured socks, and he came from a very, very large **Hassidic** family. The family was very different from my mother's family, but basically his family was not atypical in any way. During the war his family was broken up very, very rapidly, and he, being almost exactly the same age as my mother, it was a very, very young, but obvi -- what turned out to be very resilient little guy. Ver -- must have had tremendous inner strengths because unlike my mother, he was separated at the most early stages of the war from all of his siblings and relatives. My mother, fortunately, went through all of the war with her two older sisters, and most of the war with their father, before he was lost in **Auschwitz**. So **Cheryl's** -- **Cheryl's** father lost all of his family. One of his brothers apparently is -- so we hear, maybe an apocryphal story, may not, starved himself to death for lack of kosher food, when he -- when he reached the death camp. Whether this is so or not, I don't know. Other -- other ru -- unverifiable rumors are that his parents were gassed in the experimental gas trucks, the carbon monoxide poisoning trucks, earlier on, during the Holocaust. But with such a large family, it's hard to say who went where. Th-The bottom line is that with the exception of his oldest sister, who had moved to then **Palestine** before the war, every other member of his family was lost. And this was a huge extended family. **Cheryl** -- also I should say, **Cheryl's** father was one of the earlier inmates of **Auschwitz**. You could tell this by his tattoo. He had a sloppily drawn, scrawled



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

tattoo across much of his forearm, much closer to the wrist. The -- it was just a series of numbers with no letters. This denotes a person who entered **Auschwitz** earlier on in **Auschwitz's** operation. Later in the war, when my mother got there with her sisters, the numbers were done much more neatly, inside the ar -- I -- I think the word is the crook or crick of the elbow. And because they had basically run out of numbers in the first series, they started adding a letter. So right away you could see that -- that -- that **Max**, that's **Cheryl's** father, had been at **Auschwitz** earlier. Very interesting what a tough little guy this man was. Not only did he survive from having been in **Auschwitz** from the earliest days, but he was sent to be a slave laborer, all though **Germany** during much of the war. He worked on everything from road crews to aircraft factories, to chemical plants. He used to refer to **Igay**, you know, I -- meaning **I.G. Farben** all the time. He worked in one of their plants, somewhere in **Germany**, I don't know exactly which one, but he was shunted from one facility to another as a slave laborer. Of course, he was lucky enough at the end of all these trials and tribulations to be sent back to **Auschwitz** for a little vacation. He ris -- he was sent to **Auschwitz** for the second time at approximately the same time that my mother was arriving there for the first time. And, of course, bo -- it's obvious he had to survive, because he gave birth to my wife. But both he and my mother, separately, survived the death marches after the

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

evacuation of **Auschwitz** in January and then February and then March of 1945. But this **Max, Cheryl's** father, went through many, many, many, many hardships. He was a very, very small man physically, meaning in stature. And he credits other Jews who looked kindly upon him as sort of the little guy, to make him into a mascot and take him under their wing, to protect him, as time went on. I think he perhaps gave them too much credit and he should have complimented himself more on his amazing tenacity. He died, unfortunately, of lung cancer, in 1981, about a year -- a year after we got married -- meaning **Cheryl** and I got married. But I was able to share during the four or five years that I knew him, much of his background with him. And as **Cheryl's** older sister is also tremendously interested in their -- their father's background and history, as was **Cheryl**. So between each of the two daughters, they really know quite a bit a-about his history. He -- after the war, he moved to **Frankfurt** in **Germany** just as my mother moved to **Berlin** with her sister **Kryisia**. My mother's sister **Hania**, by the way, moved to **Munich**. Anyway, **Max**, in **Frankfurt** met a very, very nice person of Polish descent, meaning non-Jewish Polish descent, and this is my mother-in-law. They -- they fell in love, and she converted to Judaism in **Frankfurt**, they were still dating for years, and filed their separate papers, one as -- as a refugee, one as an immigrant to come to **America** and arrive, I think, within about a year or two of each other, and w-

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

whereupon they were married, and they raised -- first they lived in -- in a -- basically a Holocaust survivor's enclave, in the area of **106<sup>th</sup>** to **110<sup>th</sup>** Street and **Broadway**. This is where both of their daughters were born, but my wife's older sister is five years older. I believe they li -- they lived with the children there for about six years and subsequently relocated to **Riverdale**. The chil -- both of their children attended -- I suppose the loose term is parochial school. What I should say is a progressive Jewish Day school, whereas I went to public school. Yet, each of the two girls ended up at the **Bronx** High School of Science for their secondary education.

Q: Did you exper -- did she have a different kind of upbringing in some ways? Di -- was -- was -- wa -- the difference between the households, anything that was interesting in that context? Similar --

A: I suppose one could say that **Cheryl's** father was more observant than my mother, but I don't know if that is reflected so much as a matter of factual practice, as a reflection of the way they were brought up in **Poland** as children. **Cheryl's** father was brought up in a **Hassidic** family, and although he, when here, practiced - - I suppose in -- in his mind a more ortho -- Orthodox view of -- of Judaism, I can't really see in practice, even now as an adult looking back, how much or -- or in what ways that differed from the way that our parents -- and specifically you're asking

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

about my mother's experiences, ho-how ma -- our parents raised **Paul** and me. I suppose we went to synagogue with about the same frequency. My wife had a **Bat Mitzvah**, I had a **Bar Mitzvah**, etcetera, etcetera. Maybe the prayers, the types of songs that we used were different. Maybe the practices or the outlook of the synagogues that we attended were different, but by and large I think that our consciousness of being Jews, and of practicing Judaism, and of having basically a -- a strong Jewish and Holocaust survivor's identity is probably just about the same.

Q: I just want to get back to something. I -- I just got the impression that you really did a lot of homework on reading up about the Holocaust. Speak a little bit more about that, because some children didn't do that. So you consciously -- I don't want to lead you, but --

A: No, no, I absolutely -- I consciously did look out to educate myself about Holocaust history. First, I suppose I ex -- my -- am -- and in this my father was always willing to help me, expose myself to the history of world -- of World War II, and the World War II era in general. My father is a Korean war era veteran, having been too young to have served during World War II, cause he was born in December of 1928. However, he was drafted u-upon his college graduation and served in the **U.S.** Army during the Korean war. But he was always willing to share the American view o-of the war with me, both the -- in the European and **Pacific**

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

theaters. My mother, as I said, was always willing to share with me as a child a bit about her background, and not in a way that would horrify or scare her children, but in a way that was factually appropriate for what -- even now when I look back on it I would say that it was factually appropriate for a child to learn. For example, you don't say that people are gasping, they're choking, and they -- that sort of thing, you'd say that -- that they died. That's what you would tell a small child.

Well, that's the way she would have talked. However, around the years that I got into junior high school, I developed an -- sort of an independent and some might view strange craving for information on the Holocaust. And -- and this is true, I -- I would, with frequency, stop by the public library branch near my junior high school, all the way down on **178th** Street and **Saint Nicholas** Avenue, quite a bit out of our neighborhood, to look at Holocaust and World War II history books. For example, I remember right now that the call numbers for all those books are in the 940's for nonfiction. I know it's a strange thing to remember, what can I tell you, I remember these things. I -- I remember distinctly, looking through the transcripts of the **Nuremberg** Trials, which this -- this would have been in 1968 - 1969, it would have been reasonably new volumes to that library, this sort of a [**indecipherable**] and how fascinated I was with -- with the justice that was being done, and I'm sure I also had some lurid fascination with the -- the factual details of the horrors of extermination. I -- I can't see how any human being wouldn't be interested in some way in those aspects as well. But as a child of a

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

survivor perhaps I was a little bit more interested in what happened to all of -- of my mother's family.

Q: Since we are in the 60's, let me ask you a follow up question that I meant to ask you earlier, but I didn't want to interrupt. Your mother did not like the 60's very much because they seemed to pose a threat to the order that she needed very much, and she was worried a little bit, that you go s -- astray somewhere. Speak a little bit about that from your perspective.

A: I think that it's very unusual that you bring that up and the statement you made is quite correct, even from -- from my viewpoint and I am her son. I think my mother, and actually all of the Holocaust survivor parents that I know are tremendously patriotic for **America**, a-and truly love the opportunities and freedoms that this country afforded them after they came here and became citizens. I can't overemphasize that enough. And I think that that patriotism in many ways, I wouldn't say blinds, but at least colors or informs the judgments that my -- or expectations that my mother had for the way society would evolve in this country. I think that my -- i-in particular my cousins from **Vineland** were -- I wouldn't think that they were exposed, it -- it's not that they were exposed to a -- a more liberal or progressive political point of view. It may be just that they evolved that way, for whatever reason. But my brother and I are more main line, as -- politically, as far as children who grew up in our general circumstances or milieu, whereas my cousins **David** and **Jeanette** might perhaps be s-said to be more liberal or more progressive. I think that in many ways growing up in **New York City** during a period when there were -- were

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

desegregation issues, race riots, etcetera, may have influenced the way **Paul** and I looked at the development of society. This is not to say that -- that we agree with our mother's outlook. I will say that I distinctly recall my mother's reactions to the -- the cultural changes of the late 60's, and I often look back on the year of 1968 as a sort of -- I wouldn't say a high water mark, cause in my mother's estimation it was certainly not a -- a high water mark, but a salient date in the cultural changes of **New York**, of **America** and perhaps of the world. It was in that year, for example, that **Martin Luther King** and **Robert Kennedy** were assassinated. There were riots, there was a school strike here. There was -- the **Vietnam** protests were at their height. The era -- the era of hippy-ness in **America** was reaching its height in tandem with the anti-**Vietnam** war movement. This was a period of tremendous change in this country, and the same sorts of things happened, you had the cultural revolution in **China**, you had the student riots in **Paris**, I mean, I remember these very well. We -- you also had the war that had occurred in **Israel** the year before. There -- there were lots of -- of changes, there was a lot of violence and turmoil in the war, and I -- i-in the world, excuse me, and I'm sure that these things, given my mother's background, these -- these changes, it must -- must have in some way influenced her -- how -- how may we say it?

Q: Think about it for just one second because I think it's a good way to -- to say that this is the end of tape one, side **B**. I can flip the cassette now.

**End of Tape One, Side B**

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

**Beginning Tape Two, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Harry Gelb**. This is tape number two, side **A**, and you remember where we've been.

A: Right. A moment ago you had asked me about my mother's outlook on the social changes during the 1960's and how that in -- might or might not have impacted upon **Paul** and my u-upbringing. And I was just saying that I -- that I look back on the year of 1968 in -- in many ways as -- as -- as a sort of a s -- very significant date i-in -- in cultural and societal history in **America**, and I know that my mother would say the same, at least in that regard. My mother was -- and continues to be very dedicated to social justice, and I think that the -- that -- that she viewed the changes of the late 1960's not only as being disrespectful to -- to societal or cultural norms, but as being disruptive to a -- to a o-ongoing development of justice for all people. And i-in many ways I think she's right, I mean, I don't agree entirely with her, but I-I think that she -- she might have failed to take into account that **America** then, and now even more so is -- is -- is an in-increasingly diverse nation with -- with a cultural and -- and intellectual forces driving and pulling it in many directions, none of which can be controlled. And c-come -- coming from the background that she did, I can see why she might have expectations o-of society that are different from my own. But I -- I do agree with her i-insofar as saying that things were radically and rapidly changing at that period of time.



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Q: What's the difference, where do you differ? Be a little bit -- more about that, because this -- if you can, just one or two examples, maybe.

A: I think -- I think that in many ways I -- I am more a-accepting of -- how can I say? It isn't people's viewpoints, my mother's very willing to hear people's viewpoints, but -- but o-of aberrational or -- or eccentric behaviors, and -- and I'm more tolerant of that. I think -- I -- I didn't used to be this way, I think I was more in line with -- with my mother's expectations of -- of a more ordered society, but given what I do for a living and seeing the tremendous variety of -- of family behaviors, and the -- the treatment that people visit upon one another and upon their children, I've become much more tolerant and -- and accepting of the variations in those behaviors. It doesn't mean I approve of all of them, I just think I'm more willing to accept them.

Q: And to finish that up and then we should probably move onto your wife and speak a little bit more about --

A: Of course.

Q: -- how you got your own family. But it would be interesting for me to know, which of the kind of cultural movements, or political events at that time, in the 60's and 70's were of particular importance to you? Any kind of particular impact?

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: Wait. Outside of my -- my knowledge of the Holocaust, which of course is something that one -- one couldn't escape, living with a -- a -- a survivor, whether it was my mother, who was always ready to talk about things, or with someone who is more reticent. If you're asking about the historical developments that I was exposed to as a child, as a general matter, I would be happy to answer your question. I think that the desegregation movement of the 1960's, which was in large part sparked by educational desegregation decision by the Supreme Court in **Brown** versus Board of Ed., in 1954, I believe, just before I was born, but not implemented until the re -- tru -- not implemented it really in fact and in detail until al -- the great society, **Lyndon Johnston** administration, really, really affected me strongly as to my sense of -- of equality, for opportunity for all people. I was highly, highly upset at the -- at **Martin Luther King's** death, much more so than at **Robert Kennedy's** death, which we -- they were both in the same season, I mean, I remember them both well. I think the reason for this was th-that I, even as a child, and I would have just been 12 years old then, viewed **Martin Luther King** as -- as a champion of -- well, obviously he was a champion of civil rights, but I mean a -- a champion of rights without being a revolutionary. And in a way that was more inclusive and less divisive than many other people would have been in seeking the same overall goals. What I think was interesting in my outlook at -- at least wh-when I look back as --

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

as a sort of revisionist, now, is that the desegregation movement of -- of the 60's, in -- in particular **Martin Luther King's** work, begat a lot of equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity and other e-equal housing opportunity, equal health opportunity, equal educational opportunity movements in the 60's. The desegregation of schools I agreed with and I still do to this day, wholeheartedly. But I think that in affirmative action on the job, and in -- and in recruitment for -- for higher education, I think -- I thought then that it was perhaps a necessary thing, but I'm coming to think now, after it's been a good 40 years of such programs, that perhaps the time has come as a matter of -- of social justice and to be more inclusive of all other types of peoples who've come here in the years since the 60's and have re-colored, both literally and figuratively the face of -- of **America** and **New York** in particular, that opportunity be based on merit and achievement, rather than on a blind consideration of a person's color or ethnic or religious background. And I say this even as a person who is the child of a survivor who was offered opportunities when she came here. I think what is different is that even children of survivors -- I shouldn't say children, even -- even we children of survivors who have parents who came here, saw that these parents, many of whom came over without education, without any bul -- physical belongings, without any money. Literally with just a carry-on bag in their hands, and a -- as they say, a hope in their

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

hearts, were able to educate themselves, make careers, make families and raise those families and support themselves, while there are many others in **America**, who -- nowadays, who one can say have equal opportunity, but it is my view, independently choose, and willingly in -- choose to not exercise those opportunities in -- wi-with even one-tenth the drive or ambition that the Holocaust survivors did a mere 50 years ago. I think that's a -- a very, very important comparison and in some ways drives my changing outlook on affirmative action. Because I feel that there are just so many immigrants who come to **America** now who are willing to work hard for themselves, as did our parents, that they all have the equal opportunity to do the same sorts of things that our parents did for themselves and their families. And I -- I really don't feel at this point, that the government should be requiring as a matter of law, or -- or monetarily subsidizing those who a-are not willing to exercise the rights and opportunities available to them.

Q: I don't have a connection to your wife yet, so we are just jumping.

A: Sure, no problem. There doesn't have to be a connection.

Q: I was [indecipherable] I wanted to --

A: I am connected to my wife.

Q: Yeah, that's good. I just wanted to have a little break in there too, because as a public speaker, you -- you need a break now and then --

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: Sure.

Q: -- but this is good. No, that was a very powerful statement, too. Let me think.

What was the attr -- so we are moving back to your wife. What was the attraction?

What did you like about her?

A: Oh, just as a person, she -- I mean, physically she was very, very cute, but that -- that of course is -- is at first blush, I'm saying that's only when you s -- when you would see her from a distance. But intellectually we found that there were many areas where we overlapped, i -- particularly with our love of classical literature. I really like the outdoors, and outdoor activities, something with the boy scouts, and that th-the -- then my great sports hobby of alpine skiing brought to me, and I continue to this day. **Cheryl** loved the performing arts, and was always in love with participating in and viewing the performing arts, dance and theater in particular, dance even in more particular. But I really have grown to love the performing arts. I liked them, as many of us do, but through her I -- I gained a unique appreciation o- of the performing arts in the insider's perspective, as have our children, by the way. And it -- through me, I suppose she has gotten to like a bit more, if she didn't freeze so much outdoor, many of the o-outdoors things that I brought to our relationship. Of course, we shared the commonality o-of being Jewish and being the children of survivors, but we've discussed that a -- a bit before. Both -- both of us really do

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

love -- or I should say did then, and now do love literature, though, and it -- it's something that it drives our family to this day.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the Second Generation movement or events there? Did you feel drawn to that, n -- know about it?

A: We knew about it, and at one point, just after I got out of law school in 1980 or '81, we attended a -- a survivor -- children of survivor's conference, it was held down at **NYU**. But basically, and I -- I would assume in large part because of -- of my Uncle **Miles's** involvement with Holocaust a -- research, education, memorial activities, and because a-all of our family are survivors or children thereof, I haven't really felt compelled to join in with others. It's -- it's just sort of come to us naturally, and we haven't had to make any specific moves to get more involved.

Q: Okay, I'd like to have a few facts now. When did you get married, what year?

A: We got married on September seventh of 1980, right here in **New York City**.

Q: Was it important to you to have children?

A: Yes, it was, I -- I really like working with children a lot, and I've been involved in the scouting movement since I -- I was a little, little boy. However, my wife really wanted to foster her career first. So we sort of comprised, and our first son **Max** was born in 1989, his birthday is January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1989 and he's currently in the

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

seventh grade, and our second child was born nine years thereafter. So **Joseph** was born on December 20<sup>th</sup> of 1997, and he is currently in pre-school.

Q: You're always giving me these neat little links. So how about education? How -- how did you want to bring your children up? You in this case both, **Cheryl** and you, or the differences. Did you have sort of similar ideas of what the values were, or what the aspirations you had for your children?

A: Yes, in-indeed, I-I think our greatest hope is -- is that our children would grow up to be both literate and concerned beings. Aside from formal education, which I'll discuss in a minute, I think a very unique portion of -- of **Max's** upbringing, meaning our older son's upbringing was the fact that during his formative years, **Cheryl** was a senior staff member at **New York City** ballet. And at that time we lived directly across the street, literally a 15 second commute from her office in the **New York State Theater at Lincoln Center**. **Max** grew up basically as the **New York City** Ballet Company mascot. He and I were there every day because my wife worked evenings and we would go to say hello to her, but not only to her, to all of her staff members and to the many members of the orchestra, and the dance company, with whom we became friends over the years. And she was there from 1985 to '95, and **Max** was born, as I said, in January of '89. So he had his first six years at the ballet, backstage, in the orchestra pit, in the flies, playing hockey in the

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

back hallways. Hanging out at the dance bar and making believe he was -- he was a little nutcracker prince with some of the world famous prima ballerinas. It was a most unusual thing for a child to be exposed to this quantity of the performing arts on a day to day basis. The funny thing is that nowadays he enjoys going to these things very much, and is even actually -- last night he said to me, hey Dad, we've gotta go see **The Nutcracker**. Because that's -- that's a performance that he adored as a child. But he is not willing to perform. He doesn't feel that he has any talents either in music or in dance. However, on the other hand, he's a phenomenal athlete and he's discovered in himself talents which I know I never had, and perhaps he inherited somehow from his Uncle **Paul**. But my -- my older son is physically gifted, and he plays league sports i-in -- in many different areas and is particularly good in the hockey sports. And he plays league ice hockey, league roller hockey, he's just a -- a phenomenal athlete. And he's -- he's very proud of himself and he'll never fail to tell you, I'm -- you know, proud papas tal -- talk this way all the time. But he -- he'll remind you of that as well.

Q: What about the formal education? He is --

A: Okay, formal education. When he was in nursery school, I suppose you call it, pre-K at the Westside **Montessori** school, it was -- it was somewhat apparent to us that he might be a gifted child, and we had him tested, and were fortunate enough to



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

find that he's a superlative gif -- superlatively gifted child. And he was accepted to a **New York City** public school program for -- for truly a-advanced children, and I'm no-not -- I'm n-not saying this in -- in any way to make him sound better than other children, it's just a fact that that's -- that's the whole definition of -- of the program he was in, it's called the **Anderson** program, and it -- and there are two programs like it in **New York**, **Anderson** program on the west side and **Hunter** College high school has its own program which goes all the way down to kindergarten on the east side. And so **Max** went to and attended the **Anderson** program and he graduated from there after the fifth grade and took an exam to get into another gifted program for junior high school level, that's called the **Delta** program. And it's -- it's -- basically it's the same kids and others who have joined them in a slightly larger program that he had gone to grade school with. And he's now in the seventh grade. He is getting a -- a regular, although accelerated and perhaps a bit more in depth junior high school education. He's doing very, very well, he -- this particular child, it's within his personality to be most competitive. He is -- I think if I had to descri -- use one word to describe my own -- this particular child, I would say it's competitive. He has to be a medalist, meaning he has to get the gold, or the silver or the bronze, and he's very happy to get any one of them, although everyone wants the gold, but he's happy to get them. But no matter

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

whether it's in sports, or in school, he has to be a winner, he has to be a medalist. And that's the way he does in school, and that's also the way he does in sports. So I think it's very interesting that this child has grown to be so highly competitive in personality.

Q: The other little guy is about four now?

A: Yes, he's going to turn four next Thursday.

Q: Is -- is -- is th -- is he different from the first child **[indecipherable]**

A: He's very different in personality. He, unfortunately for him was not raised in **New York City** ballet, but I don't think that that changed his personality in any way, but I just think it's a significant difference. **Joseph** is not as comp -- a-as competitive or driven a child as **Max**. He has a very sweet and -- and jovial personality. He's always smiling and singing little songs to himself. He's not as -- although he's coordinated about the same as any other child, average child of his age group, he's not as overtly physically active with such -- such unbelievable both gross and athletic motor skills that -- that his brother has and had even at age four. This is a child who really -- this one really loves stories and loves being read to, and loves imagining and loves creating play spaces and games and environments, as you can see from our living room, it's -- we're surrounded her by -- by **Legos** and -- and little -- little **scenaria** o-of villages and construction sites and -- and letters and he

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

does these things every single day. Actually **Max** at that age, although interested in things -- he loved cars, he loved model cars and he loved trains that went around, as **Joe** does, but he wasn't as interested in building these little communities and environments that you see here, as **Joe** is, and he's -- this is the way **Joe** is, this is the kind of child he is.

Q: How do they relate to your mother?

A: Oh wonderfully. They relate -- they relate very, very well to her. Th-They -- I-I can't say in any way that there'd be anything negative, she's their grandmother. She's very grandmotherly to them, and they're very **grandchildly** to her.

Q: Well, let me rephrase this, I didn't mean how did they relate, I just say, what's the relationship between, how do they like each other, do they -- do they talk -- does she -- does she talk to the oldest one about parts of her past already?

A: She does, but he -- it isn't something that they talk with any frequency about. He is quite aware, prob -- in more so and in more detail about my mother's background than I was about her background at his age. The reason is that **Cheryl** and I have always in -- been believers in -- in being very upfront with **Max**, we're much more open and less protective of him, and -- and eventually of **Joseph** than my mother was of me and **Paul**. My mother was very careful, I'm -- I'm certain, not to traumatize me or **Paul** with things that she viewed as inappropriate for a given age.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

And a-as -- as you've interviewed her, I'm sure you can agree that -- that sh-she may have said that to you, or you may have read it into what she said, but I-I'm sure you'd agree with the statement I just made. On the other hand, perhaps to his detriment, perhaps to his benefit, I don't know, I have been very, very upfront with **Max**, not only about my mother's background, but about everything that I do at work, about everything in the world, both the good, a -- things and the horrors of living in **New York**. The sufferings of people, crime, death, disease. I -- I -- we really don't hide anything from him. That may or may not be good for him in the long run, I don't know. I've tried to encourage him to be independent. He was the first of all of his friends to travel on his own through the city. I have entrusted him since th-the fourth grade, basically, with being on his own and shifting for himself. I expect him to lead his friends. I -- I've always tried to foster in him the ability to lead not only himself, but his friends. To be responsible for himself and his friends, to keep a lookout for himself and his friends, to protect them, but to achieve. And the funny thing is that things i-in many ways have gone that way, and among his friends, whether by dint of his upbringing here, or the fact that he is among the older of the children in his age group, or a combination of those factors, he is looked upon by the other children as a sort of a social hub, a leadership figure. And perhaps it's because he's so involved in sports and the boys follow him in that way.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Perhaps it's because he actually is very talented in school. That he's getting homework help calls all the time, and his guidance is sought as to what is expected of them in school. It's just that he -- he's grown up to be a very unusual child in that regard. The downside of this is that his tolerance for others and his patience with them sometimes wears a little bit thin. So I think that these might be the sorts of responsibilities that a 12 or 13 year old boy shouldn't have thrust upon him. But he handles it pretty well overall, and -- and -- and his friends love him. He has a whole crowd of -- of friends that are hanging out here all the time. One, we've always tried to make the other kids feel welcome around our house so that they -- they -- they should always feel they have a place to come, if they want to sleep over, or they want to hang here, have dinner. Whatever they want, they're welcome to stay, it's fine by me. And it's always -- it's fine by **Cheryl**, too, it's -- it's fine by all of us, but we -- we always want our children to have their friends welcome.

Q: That seemed to be the same way that your mother handled your friends, if I s -- if I recall.

A: Oh, absolutely, she always encouraged u-us to -- to bring home other -- other -- you know, it's usually boys that -- but to bring home other children a-and to have relationships with them. In -- in -- she also encouraged us and my father did as well, i-in boy scouting, that -- I think that was a movement that was very much in

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

tandem, since it's a slightly more conservative movement, especially in the 60's, than the rest of -- of society at large. It was probably very much in line with her expectations about the way boys should be reared. And because of that she allowed and encouraged both me and **Paul** to continue in scouting. Both of us achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, and actually to this day I'm involved in boy scouting. I am now one of the directors of the same group that I was in as a child. And **Max** was involved in cub scouting and started in boy scouting, but since the last year in junior high, I think his interests have changed and his social group has changed, and I'm certainly not going to force his continuation in scouting upon him. I just think that this is an interest that has sort of fallen out with **Max**, perhaps for the good, perhaps not, but I'm certainly would -- I wouldn't force my children to do anything. So right now **Max** is not involved. But that's okay too, he's involved in so many other things, whether it be in sports, social affairs, or his **Bar Mitzvah** studies, that I don't even think he has room in his life for the boy scouts. That might be better for him right now.

Q: Okay, we'll take a small break here. Okay, we just had a little pa -- break here, a little pause, and we are moving on, and I would like to ask you about traveling. You said it in regard to your children. Let me ask you, sort of wholesale, what does your

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

relationship, and have you ever been to **Germany**, **Poland** or **Israel**, because it touches on your mother's life and on your parent's life in a lot of ways.

A: That's o -- I-I can answer that very directly and specifically. Personally, I have never been to **Israel**, and I've never had the good fortune to have the time to get there i-in a way that I would have liked. However, my wife has been to **Israel** several times, in large part because, as I said, her -- her father had an oldest sister who had -- who had immigrated to **Palestine** in the 1930's as part of a -- a -- a **Zionist [indecipherable]** movement. And because she had this one aunt there, **Cheryl** had gone there throughout her childhood to visit the aunt and uncle and cousins, along with her family. However, we have traveled, indeed, extensively, all through **Europe**. And in the summer of 1984, while **Poland** was still a Communist country, we went to visit **Poland**, to visit the few relatives that **Cheryl's** mother still has there, and also to tour where my mother and where **Cheryl's** father had grown up, and to visit **Auschwitz**. That's what we did there for a -- a week. I went with **Cheryl** and her sister. None of us had any children in those days. And -- and her mother -- her mother went as well, but did not tour with us, she just stayed with her relatives while **Cheryl**, **Marilyn** and I traveled about and -- and saw the various venues that I had mentioned.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Q: Your mother loves Polish culture very deeply. Lar -- literature, music and so on.

Did some of that rub up on you on some --

A: Yes, certainly, I -- I think an appreciation for it has. I know i-in particular my mother i-is most proud o-of -- of **Frederick Chopin** a-a-and his work, but i -- I love classical music in general and have always loved **Chopin**. I just mention that because I -- I -- I -- I -- among the many, many, many types o-of classical music and performing arts that my mother enjoys, that is one person from **Poland** of whom she is particularly proud. But I -- I do appreciate Polish culture very much. With -- with some degree of frequency we -- we sh -- meaning -- our immediate family here tried to visit Polish neighborhood, we have hired a -- a nanny for our little **Joe**, hi-his daycare provider when he is not in preschool, who happens to be from **Poland**. And **Cheryl's** -- **Cheryl's** mother also unfortunately now is suffering from **Alzheimer's**, but we have hired for her a caretaker from **Poland**. We -- so we -- we have many Polish influences around us all of the time. It's -- it's just -- it's just part of the way I -- I grew up, I mean, we -- we enjoy Polish food, Polish music, but I -- I don't think that we are involved in any way with what -- what are classical Polish American activities, but rather we have a definite consciousness of the background o-of three out of our four parents.



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

Q: Do you feel -- and I'm kind of jumping a little bit now because we have done, chronologically, everything pretty much, I think, so now I just have a few follow up questions. Do you feel that children of survivors have a special obligation or a special role to play, from your perspective?

A: Well I -- I -- I most certainly ascribe to -- to my uncle's declared intention of -- of educating others about what happened in the Holocaust so that -- so that people are, for all of the rest of history, aware that such -- such intense and organized evil could be perpetrated on -- on a -- a discrete population in so short a time. I also have tried in my professional career, to spend as much of my time as possible, helping refugees. Since I started at this -- at this agency -- when I say at the administration for children's services, then known as **HRA**, whatever, but it doesn't matter, at this same agency, which is the foster care agency for **New York City**, I started there in January 1983, I have been the sole attorney assigned to deal with refugee and immigration issues for children who find themselves in **New York City** foster care. This began because in 1983, the city -- this city, **New York City** [indecipherable] was a part of the official **U.S.** government refugee assistance program that was -- started to resettle people from southeast **Asia** in the wake of the **Vietnam** conflict, and they were taking both families and unaccompanied refugee minors from refugee camps in southeast **Asia** and resettling them either in the

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

community or in various foster care agencies throughout the **United States**. This -- they were joined shortly thereafter by a large influx of people from the Cuban and Haitian boatlifts in the very early 1980's. So already by the mid-1980's, our population and our program was -- was largely made up of children from southeast **Asia**, from **Vietnam**, **Cambodia** and **Laos**, and also from **Haiti** or **Cuba**.

Q: I think we have to stop here and flip over. This is the end of tape one, interview with **Harry Gelb**, and this is the end of side **A**.

**End of Tape Two, Side A**

**Beginning Tape Two, Side B**

Q: This is a continuation of a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Harry Gelb**. This is tape number one, side **B**, and we continue with activities.

A: As I was telling you a -- a moment ago, the city's refugee program had largely a southeast Asian and then some Haitian and Cuban children in it. We eventually placed about 1400 children through federal referrals into that program. However, as I worked during the 1980's, it became readily apparent that this being **New York City** and all, there were children in the foster care system due to abuse and neglect, here in **New York City**, who hailed from other countries. Some of these children were entitled and continue to be entitled to immigration law relief, and there are

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

special federal laws that --that assist children who find themselves in the foster care situation without having parents willing to help them to realize i-immigration benefits. So even though the federally funded refugee program has basically petered out, and out of about the 1400 children, all of them have aged out, meaning have gone over the age of 21, except for three children who came over when they were very, very small, we now have hundreds of children that I have been able to identify, out of the 30,000 children in the foster care system now, who have immigration law needs that I am able to service. And I have found overall, i-it -- through my very fortunate participation with all of these children, that refugee children tend to be very, very driven, very, very self-reliant and very, very motivated to make something of themselves and to utilize the opportunities that are offered them by placement in **New York City's** foster care system. Basically, in lay terms one can say they've got free room, board and education through their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. As long as they continue to make something of themselves, to attend school, to get an after-school job, and to basically just grow and become good human beings, they can stay with us until they're 21 years old. And i-i-it's much to their credit and much to my constant amazement and joy that these children continue to flourish despite the fact that many other children in our foster care system never seem to achieve much in their lives and unfortunately end up many

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

times in the same sort of conditions that their parents had when the children ended up in foster care. So it's -- it's very, very much of a pleasure for me to be involved with this refugee population.

Q: You're involved in a lot of things. You are also a good cook? Tell -- what -- what --

A: That's --

Q: -- what -- what -- what are little hobbies? I mean, I don't know how you take the time to do anything, but what do you do for fun?

A: Quite frankly, I -- I do very, very little for -- for fun, myself. I don't get to see my friends very often. Most of my activities are involved around providing care for, or joining in the activities of each of my two children. And it's becoming increasingly demanding as little **Joseph**, now being a-age four, is starting to have a broader circle of friends and different interests and activities. I am now challenged with keeping up with both **Max's** activities, whether that is his ice hockey or his soccer or his swimming or his basketball, and **Joe's** new circle of friends and activities. Is -- it's -- it's always -- always a challenge, always fun.

Q: Wh-What about their Jewish education? Is there anything particular?

A: Absolutely. **Max** has, I believe since either the first or second grade, been attending Hebrew school, and **Joseph**, who is in his last year of pre-school now,

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

just started Hebrew school two months ago. We belong to a neighborhood synagogue and **Max** is currently studying for his **Bar Mitzvah** which is going to be in February of the year 2002.

Q: Any particular holidays that you especially like, or any family rituals that happen for some reason?

A: If you're speaking about Jewish holidays, i-i-in particular it has always been my joy and distinct pleasure in celebrating Passover with the **Lerman** cousins, so to speak and aunt and uncle in **Vineland, New Jersey**. This is what we did as children, we meaning **Paul** and I. We always went to **Vineland** for **Pesach**, always, and it i-i-is perhaps my, and I -- I'm sure it is many other children's favorite holidays, but celebrating the -- the escape to freedom of the Jewish people from enslavement in **Egypt**. But just being with that family at that time of year has always meant something very special for me, and -- and I know it has for my brother **Paul** as well. And we continue to go there every year and I bring my children and my wife down to spend a **Lerman** Passover with them, an-and I'm glad to say that they enjoy it as well.

Q: How do you feel about quote, Holocaust education, unquote? In -- and special programs in school, and everything, but also at the Holocaust Museum. Do you

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

think it's moving in the right direction? There's done enough, there's too much done? How do you feel about that?

A: I don't think en-enough can ever be done. I-I-I'm also pleased to see that museums like the Holocaust Museum in **Washington** a-are conscious of other holocausts, such as those suffered by some of the Cambodian survivors that I worked with in the early 1980's who -- who ended up being shipped from refugee camps there to here. I mean, I think that the museum in **Washington** has a tremendous consciousness for the sufferings of others that a-are similar to or parallel to those that befell my mother and her family and my wife's father and his family. And it's a -- a very important thing to all of us in our family that there be Holocaust education and Holocaust awareness inculcated throughout the American educational system at all levels, fr-from grade school on.

Q: In gen -- sort of general terms, or particular, whatever, what do you feel has been the impact of the Holocaust on your mother and on you, as the son, as this -- the next generation?

A: That's a -- that's a very broad question, but I'm not criticizing you for it. I will try to answer it as succinctly as possible, so that should take three or four hours -- no seriously --

Q: Fine, go ahead.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: I'm sure, to use the lay word baggage, that my -- that my mother and every Holocaust survivor carries with them baggage, some of which they -- this psychological baggage, th -- damage, or benefits, whatever, that some of them may recognize and -- and others don't even recognize it, it -- that will always be in their subconscious. But I think my mother has made a distinct effort to -- as many others have, to rise above her experiences, to evaluate them, to see what -- what good she can identify in her experiences and what evil she can identify i-i-in her experiences. To identify the moral values of -- of what she -- what she learned through those experiences, and through seeing the loss of her family and the rebirth of an entire generation, and now s-succeeding generations o-of -- of Jews in the post-Holocaust world. I know my mother states all of the time, just straight out, that people shouldn't allow even the most negative events in their life, to drag them down. But on the other hand, I -- I -- I'm sure she recognized that one cannot but have that happen, even if you make every conscious effort to prevent it from being so. Yet, a -- I-I know that my mother has always tried to -- to look back on -- on that era with an objective -- as objective as possible, historical eye. And not to become too emotionally distraught when either e-evaluating or we -- those experiences, or relating them to others. And I -- I think that her sisters share with her those goals

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

about overcoming their experience and -- and have -- all three of them, I think, have tried to pass that on to the -- to my cousins, so to speak, to their children.

Q: What about you? I mean, I know it's not an easy question, but if you kind of, you know, thought about it for a minute, what do you think the impact of the Holocaust was on you, however directly or indirectly?

A: I think that in many ways, I mean, directly, and I -- I suppose it's easy to say that -- that it -- it -- it awakened a degree of social consciousness in me. But I think o-o-other people are motivated by other things and arrive at -- at the same place where I find myself, but perhaps -- for me this is -- this is what -- what does it. I think it uncanny that I met and then married someone who is the -- like me, a -- a -- a child of -- of survivors. Yeah, I don't know whether that is good or bad, I think it's a very unique bond. I -- I found in my office, and now I'm -- I'm a supervisor in -- in -- in our **Bronx** office, and through conversation after being there a year, I found out that one of my co-workers, who is significantly younger than me is also the child of a survivor who was a hidden child. And he was hidden as a very, very -- he's even younger -- he was born sometime in the 1930's and waited a while to have children after coming here and marrying, so this co-worker of mine i-is significantly younger. And yet, I know that -- that she and I feel an -- an -- sort of there's an unusual kinship or bond there, even though his -- his, meaning her father's



**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

experience, wartime experiences, and my mother's were -- were quite dissimilar. But i-i-it's an unusual bond. I am sure that other people who share similar traumatic experiences in their family histories probably feel a similar bond as well, but this is what our family feels, and this is what **Laura's** family feels. And I'm sure that -- you know, and my wife and her sister and all of my cousins, we all feel the same. It's just an unusual way to identify -- I think that there are many Jews who identify as being Jews in large part due to the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust somehow awakening a Jewish identity in them. I suppose religious motivation comes from many different things in one's upbringing. So in mine, obviously, it must come in large part due to the fact that my mother herself is a survivor. Never -- nevertheless, i-it ca -- her experiences cannot but have a-affected my outlook on the world, on religion, on my social values and morals, and by the way I raise my family. And the fact that my wife is also a survivor's child will only magnify the impact -- or whatever impact it does have on our children.

Q: I think I probably would have a couple of more questions, but at this point I think this was a pretty good ending, I think. Do you feel that something important has not been addressed? I mean, take a second to just think if there's something that you want to say, or something that I should have asked and didn't, that was kind of important to your life.

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

A: I don't think there's any particular thing that you -- you haven't asked about my background, or about my wife's background. I think it is important, however, that Holocaust information be memorialized in the coming years as the generation of survivors grows older and older, they obviously are going to pass away. And without them there is going to be no true firsthand source of evidence and of fact about what happened. And the Holocaust deniers and the present persecutors of Jews, and bigots and hate-mongers will only find fuel for -- for their intolerance should there not be amassed the -- the proper history and documentation of the Jewish people during the Holocaust years. So my overall wish would be that all of us, both the current living survivors and their descendants try now to somehow memorialize and record these historical facts so that subsequent generations can benefit from a true rendition of what happened during the 1930's and 40's.

Q: Why did you agree to do this int -- why do -- why did you agree to do this interview?

A: In many -- ob-obviously, the -- the fact that this is something that is important to my mother weighed on me, but even if it were not, e -- I would gladly -- even if my mother weren't a survivor, if I was just, let's just say a -- a child of American Jews, and you'd come to ask me about how the Holocaust bore on -- on my development a-and life today, I would have gladly participated because I think that the -- the

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

events of such a mass tragedy weigh so heavily on the development of -- o-of world culture that they -- they should be documented and interpreted. I think that what's going on today as we speak, in -- in the -- a-as **Bush** calls it, the war against terror, but i-it -- it's basically a -- a war against terrorists who hate **America** and hate Jews, is very much involved in -- in interpretation of facts of the Holocaust and how the state of **Israel** came into being as a result of the persecution of the Jews during the Holocaust. [indecipherable] talking about the political state of **Israel** as opposed to the Jewish settlement of the land of **Palestine**. These are very important things and have affected the Islamic world's view o-of Jews and **America** in the years since the end of World War II.

Q: What is your own position in regard to that -- to what is going on right now in terms of isga -- **Afghanistan** and war against terrorism?

A: Well obviously, I-I -- I have absolutely no tolerance for terrorists of any kind. That -- and that would go for -- for terrorists that are advocating or -- or bombing to convince people to believe in any particular area of thought. However, because so much o-o-of this current terror campaign is involved in a hatred of **America** and of th-the state of **Israel** and Jews, I do have very strong opinions. And it is my unfortunate belief that although -- and I say unfortunate because I -- I -- I'm sad to find myself feeling this way, although I ha -- I have tremendous fondness for many

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

people who are -- are Muslim, and who live here in **America** and in **New York**, like myself, I quite frankly, based on their religious beliefs, and the -- and their culture, do not believe that they will ever -- th-the Islamic world will ever be able to accept the existence of the state of **Israel**. They -- they -- I -- I think that much of their hatred is tantamount -- although it is worded differently than **Hitler's** hatred of the Jews, I think it's tantamount to **Hitler's** hatred of the Jews. And although the -- the current terrorists will never be able to perpetrate the mass execution o-of Jews, as -- as **Hitler** and the Nazis were, I still think that were that to be a thing within their grasp, many of these people would not hesitate to do that. I -- even -- even among Muslims of a -- a more gentle persuasion who are not violent like -- like the terrorists, I really -- I-I sincerely question whether even they, based upon their doctrine and their beliefs and their culture will ever able to be accept -- to be able to accept the fact of the existence of a Jewish state in the land of **Palestine**. And I think that these hatreds are so deep seated, and -- and so old, going back now thousands of years, that I don't -- I -- I -- I sa -- it's sad to say, I don't feel that they can ever be overcome. I don't know what to do about it, but you ask me how I feel about what's going on now, and this is actually how I feel. It -- it -- it -- it's very hurtful to me, it's very hurtful to my family, it's something that affects all Americans, not just Jews, a-as you could see from the tragedies on -- on September

**Interview with Harry Gelb**  
**December 13, 2001**

11<sup>th</sup>. So the fact that terrorists have identified **America** f -- e-either for its support of the state of int -- of **Israel**, or as a land of moral turpitude, or as a some sort o-o-of hated kingdom, for whatever reason I don't understand, it does affect every American, and i-i-it is an area th-that all people i-in **America** should consider each day of their life.

Q: I wanted to -- to end on the -- on another note, but let's just leave it at that.

That's the time we live in right now. This is the end of the interview with **Harry Gelb**, and this is the end of tape two, side **B**. Thank you very much.

A: You're very welcome.

**End of Tape Two, Side B**

**Conclusion of Interview**