

Interviewee: Rebecca Freedman
Interviewer: Judy Freedman Fask
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Abstract: Rebecca Freedman was born on December 13, 1922 and grew up in Worcester, MA. Her parents were Jewish and she had three sisters including a twin sister. Her father was a butcher and her mother was a homemaker. She is married and has eight children and sixteen grandchildren. In this interview Rebecca discusses her nursing career, her time in the service in the Army Nurse Corps, and how being raised in a close-knit family inspired her to raise her children with the same values.

Judy Freedman: What is your full maiden name, and also what's your married name?

Rebecca Freedman: My full maiden is Rebecca Gertrude Schwartzberg.

JF: And your married name.

RF: My married name is Rebecca Freedman

JF: Okay, and when where you born?

RF: I was born December 13, 1922.

JF: And do you have children?

RF: I have eight children.

JF: And how many grandchildren?

RF: And sixteen grandchildren.

JF: Tell me about your parents. Tell me about my Bubbie and my Zaydie.

RF: My parents were middle classed, hard-working individuals. Hebrew or Jewish I don't know whether they use that as their background. My father was a butcher. And my mother was homemaker, who also helped her husband in his business. They were very loving, kind-hearted, and generous people; brought up my three sisters and myself, one of who was the oldest, my twin sister. They taught us honesty. They taught us always to pay our debts.

JF: Did you want to add something about your Mum and your Dad. You started to say something about them teaching you all about all people

RF: Yeah. How life is full of loving the immediate family, with cousins and aunts. My parents had a very close-knit family. My father had many siblings.

JF: Can you remember them?

RF: Yes, I'm trying to remember how many. Because we were the youngest of all of them so they gave us special attention.

JF: So where did you live during your life?

RF: I lived in Worcester. First, where we were born; and we moved to... I don't remember the name of the streets -- does that make a difference.

JF: You can add whatever you would like. Whatever you think is important. Growing up in Worcester, What neighborhood did you live in?

RF: Mostly in my youth, I lived in the neighborhood around Water St., Harrison, and Gold St. But in my teens that's where we lived. In the Providence St area, I played tennis with my younger sister.

JF: When did you move to the west side?

RF: I was in the eighth grade, because we went to Grafton Street Junior High.

JF: Do you any of your other family members live in Worcester now?

RF: It wasn't the Westside it was Eastside. The Westside is where we live now.

JF: Right, when did you move to this side of town, to the Westside of town?

RF: Not until I got married. We lived on Columbia Street, we lived on Loxwood St. That's when we came to the Westside.

JF: Do other family members live in this area? Do you have other family members living in Worcester?

RF: Oh my I have to start going backwards, Yes, I had aunts, uncles and cousins.

JF: What about now?

RF: Now? Most of my family is dead.

JF: What changes have you seen occur over in Worcester? From growing up, to what you see now. What changes do you notice most?

RF: Well the whole world has changed. In my days, growing up there was, in my life very little favoring. I remember murders. Is this going as we talk?

JF: What do you think distinguishes Worcester as a city, from other places. What characteristics?

RF: Well having lived basically only in Worcester, except Brooklyn, NY during my training as a nurse, I would say Worcester has always seemed small townish compared to the other places that I lived and it still seems to be the same way. There doesn't seem to be much of a change.

JF: What do you think women's experiences in Worcester are, in comparison to men? Do you think it is different or is different? As far opportunities.

RF: You know actually, because my life was so sheltered, in truth, I did see and changes. Except that I see women are much more progressive. I see them going out to the world mature, during my growing up in the world, it was not too usual for the mother to work. I grew where very few women worked, most of them stayed home and took care of their children. There were some who through necessity, earned a living to make things easier for the family, they did work. I knew very little.

JF: During your education where did you go to school, again?

RF: I went to grammar schools. I went to public schools. To Ledge Street school. I went Grafton Street Junior High. And then I went to Classical High School for a year, but switched to Commerce High and finished there.

JF: And then did you go on for any other education?

RF: I went into nursing, where I finished my training in a Jewish hospital in Brooklyn, NY. The war came and my twin sister and I had just finished our training, so we volunteered to join the Army Nurse Corps. My twin sister at that time, stayed in America; but I had the opportunity to go to Italy. My group of nurses replaced the nurses that had gone from Africa, up through Italy, and into Germany. I was very fortunate when I went to Italy; I was stationed in Rome, which was the only area that was never bombed out. My service was enjoyable, because the area I was station had many different people.

JF: When you were in nursing school or a nursing court do you remember anyone who may have been a mentor to you? Someone you felt had affected your life. Another role model that made a difference in gearing towards your future.

RF: No, not really. A role model, I think basically because of my upbringing I didn't need a mentor. I had the basic tools and skills I needed. On my days off, one of my dear friends and I would go to the movies. I was very lucky that I was in New York area. I had a chance to a bit around the area, go to Staten Island on the ferries. Simple things were my life.

JF: Do you remember how much the movies cost? I am just curious.

RF: I don't remember. Isn't that funny things like money never came in to mind?

JF: When did you start working outside the home? I know raised your children.

RF: After my duty in Italy, I made it through the army. I was very fortunate. I got married. And in my fifty-nine years of marriage, I raised eight children. I think I gave them some of the simple things that I learned, about honesty and caring for people. I am a very lucky woman. It's hard there is so much there that's personal about your life that you don't know if it relates to the situation that I am being interviewed for.

JF: I can find out. And we can always interview you again. We can find out more specifically, and you can always add to this. So when did you start working outside the home? When your kids were little or older?

RF: After I got married, my husband and I raised the children. And when my youngest child was in grammar school, I had a chance to get a part-time job as a school attendant, which I worked part-time. From that I became acquainted with a girl who was working in industrial nursing and she asked me if I would like to work part-time, and I agreed. And that turned into a full-time job, and that did not start until my youngest was in the sixth grade. The experience there gave me a chance to be independent. Even though my life there-- my life was with my family and my children --it still gave me an independence that I hadn't had. And I enjoyed the ten years of working in the company, which was part of a Cincinnati company. I met many acquaintances and friends.

JF: Do you remember what your wages were? Or how much you earned on the job?

RF: If I could remember it wasn't that much compared what you would get today.

JF: What did working mean to you? You said independence, anything else?

RF: It gave me self-esteem, but it was even more, the ability to work with people. During my lifetime I always had physical activity; like tennis. I also had a younger sister that enjoyed the sports. And in high school we both played on the field hockey team, basketball team, and the tennis team. And this tennis stayed with me for many years, I even taught my children to play tennis.

JF: Going back to when you were married and had children, when they were little, what were the responsibilities in terms of housework? Did you and dad divide it? Or did you have main responsibilities?

RF: No. My husband worked, but the housework was done by me, with help from my children. We set up a dishwashing schedule, so each child had a day. When it came to the youngest by that time... But I think even Barbara had a day.

JF: You got your first dishwasher at what age?

RF: I never got a dishwasher! I was the dishwasher. And I had eight dish wipers. In fact, I never got a dishwasher until I reached my eighty-second year.

JF: What about the housework, did you do most of it?

RF: I did have some help with the housework, for the basic heavy cleaning I had girls who helped me with that.

JF: Who did most of the cooking and all of that?

RF: My husband and the boys did most of the outside chores. I never did the outdoor work. We had a very happy family, who did many things together. We had a summer house on the lake, so it was quite easy to move out for the summer. So only a few my children went to other camps when they were young, maybe a few did when they got older. We skated together, we skied together, and we lived together.

JF: So over time has the balance of housework changed for you? Do you still do most of it? Or did that change?

RF: I think we still did most of the housework ourselves, between my husband and me. Occasionally we had outside help for heavy cleaning.

JF: But your balance of cooking and doing other things more equal now? Or do you still do most of it?

RF: Well I took care of most of it, but now that I am older my husband has taken on more, due to an unfortunate situation, my physical being is not as solid. That's only been this last year or so.

JF: At any point in your life were you politically active?

RF: No. I was never politically active. I don't know why.

JF: Were you ever active within your community?

RF: Well actually, I was active in my temple for years, but I had too much responsibility with my family, and that was focus of my life.

JF: How has health issues, yours or anyone in your family's, impacted your life?

RF: I think the death of my mother, at an early age, had a great impact on my life.

JF: What did she die of?

RF:Heart problems.

JF:And how old?

RF: I was overseas, and my mom had a severe heart attack, she survived. Unfortunately I didn't have to come home because she made it through and continued. At that time, she had stopped working. My sister grew and I up with family; we were the youngest nieces and nephews. And had special attention given to use by our cousins. This made our life very full. We were very close sisters. Our children grew up together. Our whole life was just family. And the basic theme of our life. And it is now. My husband is very political. When I say political, I mean he tries to see both sides of the question; Even though, he himself was never into politics.

JF: Going back to health, I am curious how the impact of your mother's death had on you or your father, and even your twin sister.

RF: Because I had family, after my mother's death, we all stayed close. I remember the day my husband and I, and our two children at that point, moved back to my father's house and took care of the him and the household.

JF: What about the loss of your twin sister?

RF:You know as we get older, nothing makes that much of an impact.You remember the wonderful times you had together, but your life goes on. I always had my other sisters too. They became involved with my husband's family. Do you want me to include my health?

JF:Yes

RF: Now I didn't have any problem with my health until I was in my seventies. That was ten years ago, I was almost seventy-four.

JF: What happened?

RF: I had a severe heart attack, which made a big impact on my family. I was lucky to survive it and go back to my normal life. Until now, I hadn't had any physical struggle. And now I have a little problem with my health but I am sure that I will go back to being me, a strong and independent person.

JF: How do you stay so independent, when everyone was so dependent on you as a wife and a mom? How do you think you were able to keep your healthy and peaceful mind?

RF: I think I have the nature. I guess I would say, letting life go on, and accepting each day. I mean there were harder times and difficult times; you survive it. And there are happy times; you enjoy it.

JF: Is there anything you would want to leave for this history project? For women who come along and listen to this, what would you want to tell others?

RF: I think you should enjoy your life. Not be envious of other people, in wealth or intelligence. Be proud of what they have done. And be extremely proud of the advancements in business and politics. Just their advancements in general and hopes there would be more honesty in both!

JF: Do you think raising eight children, you raised you women and sosn equally?

RF: Oh yeah. Definitely, you learn to accept each child for what they are and how they are and not compare them. That's what we never did. We also in raising our children, one of the biggest things when raising our children, my husband and I; even though, we didn't agree on a situation, when a child was reprimanded, we never discussed it in front of a child, maybe after. We also had a united front. We could not go from on to the other. And I think that helped the. I wish they did the same things now. But I think children are much harder to raise, then when I was a young mother. I was very fortunate, my children were healthy, they loved each other, and the still do. And that's what I think, is something that not only I did, but also my husband. It was a true party. I very lucky. I really enjoyed working. And when my children were away, and I had the time, I did enjoy the work and people. And something else that did broadened me even more, was the service. That's when I really grew up.

JF: Had you not been away home before then?

RF: No, I was away from home from the time I graduated high school. Because we went to nursing, and then I was away from home...

JF: Is there anything else you want to add Mom?

RF: No. I think that's about all I can say. Except I was so lucky to have such a wonderful husband and children. I also didn't mention what wonderful trips to Africa and South America we had seeing our families there, and also the trip through the United States that we took after my retirement.

JF: I love you. Thank you.