Joan Lipsky

INTERVIEW TOPICS
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

4. --When were you born? Where?
4. --How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
4. --What are your parents' names?
4. --Where did you go to school?
4. --Are you married or single?
4-5. --Did you raise a family? How big?
5,24,25. --What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

1,6-7. --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
2. --Trolleys (the Interurban)
--Horses and First Automobiles
--Mud roads and the seedling mile
6,7. --Hunter Airport and the first planes
7. --Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

--Newspapers
--Radios
--Advertising
--Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

--Motion Pictures
--Cedar Rapids Parks
--Dances
--Carnival Week
--Chautauqua
--Community Theater
--Little Gallery
--Symphony Orchestra
--Circus
--Greene's Opera House
--Amusement Parks (Alamo)
--Camps
--Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
25. --Cedar Rapids Art Association

2. Famous Characters

--Cherry Sisters
--Grant Wood
--Carl Van Vechten (<u>The Tattooed Countess</u>)
--Marvin Cone

3. Lifestyle
   --Life before air conditioning
   --Winter Activities
   --Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
   --Clothing
   --Toys
   --Saloons/Taverns
   --Farm Life

4. Family Life
   --Household Help
   --Women's Roles
16. --Childrens' Activities/Behavior
   --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
17-24. --Jewish Heritage

5. Ethnic/Minority Life
9-13. --Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
   --Indians
   --Segregation of Blacks
   --Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education
3. --Cedar Rapids Schools
   --Coe College
   --Mount Mercy College
   --Cornell College
30. --Finishing School-Gulf Park By the Sea
28,30. --Law School, University of Iowa

2. Government
   --City Services
   --Streets/Roads
   --Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

3. Medical
   --Hospitals
   --Patient-Doctor Relationship
   --Broken Bones
   --Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
   --House Calls
   --Home Delivery of Babies

4. Business and Economy
   --Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
   --Local Brewing Companies
   --Retail Businesses /Department Stores
   --Professions
   --Banking and Finance
   --Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
   --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
   --Farmers Market
   --Mills on Cedar River
   --Buildings Erected
   --Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
   --Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

8,9,13-14,15,16. --Smulekoffs

5. Attitudes/Values
   --Children/Discipline
   --Sex/Petting
   --Charity
   --Divorce
   --Work
   --Working women, Voting Rights for Women
   --Patriotism (World War I)

D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community

1. Catastrophic Events
   --Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
   --Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
   --Bank Closings (1933)
   --Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
   --Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events
   --Womens' Suffrage
   --World War I
   --Roaring 20's
   --Prohibition
   --Great Depression

Joan Miller Lipsky was born on April 9, 1919, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the daughter of Ruth Smulekoff Miller and John Miller. She attended Johnson Elementary, Buchanan Elementary and McKinley Junior High. After one year at Washington High School, she finished high school at Gulf Park by the Sea in Gulf Port, Mississippi. She graduated from Northwestern University in 1940. In 1941, she married Abbott Lipsky and they raised three children, a daughter and two sons. Mrs. Lipsky worked as a psychologist in Chicago and Virginia during WW II. In 1966, she ran for the Iowa legislature and served in the House of Representatives for twelve years. During that time, she determined that she would like to become a lawyer, and completed her law degree at the University of Iowa in 1980. She has been practicing law in Cedar Rapids ever since. Her memories include floods, transportation, growing up Jewish, the Smulekoff family immigrant background, and women in politics.

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

LB: This is Linda Burdt on Wednesday, January 23, 1985 with Joan Lipsky. Mrs. Lipsky, the first question that I'd like to ask you has to do with transportation, back probably when you were a child, whatever you can remember. What can you recall of railway travel?

Lipsky: Well, of course, we had any travel between cities was either by automobile or by bus or by railroad. Railroad was far and away the most popular form of travel because the highways weren't that wonderful. The vehicles weren't that good either. Mostly you went by train. We had very good train service in Cedar Rapids. In fact, the development of the railroads, I believe, had to do with the rapid growth of Cedar Rapids as the county seat instead of Marion, which was originally the county seat. Cedar Rapids was a rail center, and so business and industry developed around it and, of course, people wanted to live close to their jobs. Cedar Rapids grew, while Marion did not because of the railroads. We had lots of great trains.

LB: You mentioned a bus. Was this like a city-operated bus?

Lipsky: I think we had inner-city busses, as I recall from when I was a child. You could always ride on a bus, but they were considered rather disagreeable transportation--very slow and stopped at every little town. Originally, when I was a child,

as far as transportation within the city is concerned, we had streetcars. I can remember one of my earliest memories as a tiny little child--probably one or two years old or three years old, was sitting outside and watching the streetcars go by. They didn't go by very often, but it was an event and something worth seeing. I lived on Grande Avenue, and the streetcars went out Grande Avenue, and then turned and went down Blake. That's at the boulevard part of Blake Boulevard; that is the grassy plot which now is planted with trees was really a place where the trolley tracks were. Some of our streets were developed in that way, and others just had tracks in the center. Grande Avenue had tracks that went all the way up, and then the car went around and came down on that boulevard.

LB: How many streetcars were there?

Lipsky: I don't know. I don't remember. I lived in that area and there was a streetcar there. There was a streetcar on Bever, I believe. There was a streetcar on Fifth Avenue that turned and came over to Blake and Grande. It turned and went along Eighteenth Street, as I recall. It came up Fifth as far as Eighteenth. I know there were streetcars on First Avenue, but I suppose they went out other parts of the town, but I don't really remember.

LB: In addition to watching them, did you also ride them?

Lipsky: Oh, certainly. As I grew up, I took the streetcar to school if the weather was inclement and I couldn't ride my bike when I got older. We didn't think--our parents didn't drive us to school, you know. That was really unheard of. We walked, or

as we got older, we rode bikes. We came home for lunch every noon. We went two ways, and we lived a fair distance from some of those schools.

LB: That was going to be my next question. How far did you live?

Lipsky: I lived close to my elementary school, but we lived a long ways from junior high and certainly from high school. I didn't finish high school here, but I did go one year to Washington High School, which was right downtown, and I lived way out in Vernon Heights at that time, and got back and forth somehow--walked, occasionally ice skated. When Cedar Rapids streets got very icy, we used to put on our skates and just skate to school.

LB: You had mentioned that you usually came home for lunch. One interview that I had last week, he said that he and his friends always went out to lunch. They would go to (like) the Second and Third Avenue Virginias for lunch, or Bishops.

Lipsky: When he was in high school?

LB: When he was in high school.

Lipsky: I think a lot of people did go to restaurants and wherever it was available. I always went home--always.

LB: I forgot to ask you a few questions that are kind of important. When were you born?

Lipsky: I was born April 9, 1919.

LB: How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?

Lipsky: All my life. I was born here.

LB: What are your parents' names?

Lipsky: My mother was Ruth Smulekoff Miller and my father was John Miller.

LB: Where did you go to school?

Lipsky: I went to school here in Cedar Rapids. I started at Johnson, and then we moved to Vernon Heights and I went to Buchanan... now Ambrose Recreation Center, but it was a school then. I went to McKinley Junior High and one year to Washington Senior High. Then I finished my high school at Gulf Park by the Sea. It was also closed--no longer in existence, but that was a girls' school in Gulf Port, Mississippi. I attended Northwestern University, graduated from Northwestern. Then did some graduate study at the University of Iowa and went back thirty-five years later and went to law school at the University of Iowa, graduated in 1980.

LB: I'll address some questions to those a little later in our talk. Have you raised a family?

Lipsky: Yes. I have three children.

LB: And how old are they?

Lipsky: They are all grown. My daughter is forty-one, and I have two sons--one is thirty-seven (almost thirty-eight) and the

other is thirty-five.

LB: For the most part, what have been your occupation and career during your adult years?

Lipsky: I studied psychology when I was an undergraduate and took graduate work in psychology at the University of Iowa. Then following that, served as an intern in psychology at the University of Chicago Hospitals, when I was first married. Subsequently, I became a staff member as a psychologist in the Children's Hospital in the University of Chicago--two children's hospitals actually, within the hospital complex. We moved to Arlington, Virginia, during World War II. My husband was involved working with the Signal Corps. I was in private practice as a psychologist then. I continued a small practice when we returned to Cedar Rapids after the war, but my family was born and I really retired from professional life and did a lot of so-called club work, community service, and so on, until my children were grown, at which time I ran for the legislature and served in the Iowa House of Representatives for twelve years. During that time, I determined that I would like to become a lawyer, and started law school while I was serving in the legislature, and retired from the legislature to finish my law degree. I've been practicing law ever since I graduated.

LB: Did you ever get to go to Hunter Airport?

Lipsky: Yes, certainly.

LB: What was it like?

Lipsky: Well, it was just very small by comparison to present air fields. It seemed big to me as a little girl. My father was always interested in aviation. I think he owned a part interest in an early plane. I don't think we had regularly-scheduled flights. We had a lot of barnstormers, people who would come by and give you a ride in a plane. Obviously, there were a lot of people who were interested in aviation. Mr. Hunter would take in a charter trip. I don't remember when we had our first scheduled air flights, but I know that the first time that I went on a commercial flight, I had to go to Chicago to get the plane. I went by train, overnight sleeper to Chicago, and then got a plane and flew to Cleveland, Ohio, which was a major stop for United Airlines. I had both relatives and friends there, and that was my first flight.

LB: How old were you then?

Lipsky: I suppose I was about nineteen years old.

LB: You had mentioned an overnight sleeper. Was that--could you tell me a little more about what you meant by that?

Lipsky: In Cedar Rapids, we had this marvelous service. You could--we had a car that was parked at the Union Station, which the old station existed between--stood right adjacent to the tracks on what is now Fourth Avenue, between Fifth and Third. There was a sleeper car that was parked there. You could board that car at any time after dinnertime, and get in your berth and go to sleep. At some time during the night, it would be picked

by a train. When you woke up, if you woke up in time, you could go in and have a lovely breakfast in the diner and then get off in Chicago in time to attend to your business or do whatever you were going to do there.

LB: Was this a popular thing?

Lipsky: Oh, yes. It was something people did regularly. It was a very convenient and easy way to get to Chicago. You went while you were asleep.

LB: Back to Hunter Airport and the first airplanes, can you remember what people's reaction was, or perhaps your first reaction when you saw an airplane in flight?

Lipsky: I really can't. You know, the thrill of, I think, an advent of airplanes came during World War I, and, of course, I was born just after World War I. I suppose, to a certain extent, just like kids are now who were born to television (you know, they can't imagine what life would be like without it), I can never remember that planes weren't in existence. Now, the idea of getting into them and being so easily transported, I suppose grew on one, but I don't ever remember when there weren't airplanes flying. It didn't seem so magic to me.

LB: Can you recall any floods on the Cedar River?

Lipsky: Yes, I certainly can. I can recall there was a flood in the Twenties, late Twenties--it must have been Twenty-eight or Twenty-nine, Twenty-seven--right around there. I don't remember the date. I was, of course, a little girl. My family's

business was Smulekoff's Furniture Company, which is still in existence. It's been here about ninety-six years. At that time, the store was on the westside. It was adjacent to the People's Bank. It was in a building that has since been torn down. The three-story structure that People's Bank has is on that site. That flood was so great that it flooded the basement of the store and the water came up almost to the ground floor. I can remember looking down the stairwell as a little girl and seeing that water there--very scary, really. You had to go by boat to the store because the streets were so flooded. Obviously, it did a great deal of damage. It was a real catastrophe. Obviously, people who lived in low places and lived along the river had to be evacuated. As I say, the businesses such as ours suffered enormous damage. There were mattresses floating around in that water. It was just incredible. I don't remember that we have ever had that severe of a flood again. Of course, as you know, Smulekoff's is still on the river bank. It is now on the eastside, at the corner of First Street and Third Avenue, but whenever there's high water, the pumps get going. I can remember a flood that occurred, I suppose it was right around 1960, maybe '59, '60, '61, some place around there, and we had a flood. People, including my kids, went down and helped build up sand-bags to stop the water. We had pumps pumping water out of the basement. They moved a great deal--they moved all the furniture out because there was sufficient warning that time. There was water in that basement, but, of course, it didn't come up nearly

as high. It was always very exciting. People get very nervous about a flood. It can be very devastating.

LB: How long was it that you still had the water in the earlier flood?

Lipsky: I don't really remember. I was a very little girl, of course. I suppose I wasn't even ten years old. I just remember the impressions I had of the flood, rather than any real statistical information that I could give you.

LB: What about the boats? What kind of boats did they use?

Lipsky: They used regular canoes and row boats--mostly row boats, with a little outboard on them.

LB: Now that you mentioned Smulekoff's, there are some questions that I had about that. How did it get started and approximately when?

Lipsky: My grandfather established the store, as I say, I think it's about 96 years ago. He had come as an immigrant, alone, a young boy, sixteen years old, who left Europe and came to the United States without any money and without knowing the language. It's just really fantastic when you think that people could do such a thing. He got a job on a farm in New Jersey until he earned enough money for railroad passage to Cedar Rapids. He came to Cedar Rapids because he had a relative here, living here. Of course, Cedar Rapids was a very raw town in those days, very small, little frontier town, and the story is that he had purchased a ticket and came to the station to get the train to come west. There had been Indian raids on the trains, obviously not in Iowa, but in New York where he was boarding the train, they knew that it was west of the Mississippi. In their minds, they didn't know the difference between Iowa and the Western Plains states where Indian raids were actually taking place. They said there were just no trains going west of Chicago at that time, and

that probably was true. So, they wouldn't let him get on the train. He went three different times until they finally opened up the railroad and allowed him to come. He came out here and started out just as a peddler, with a pack on his back. Soon he was able to save enough money to buy a horse and a wagon. Then he began peddling and going around to the various farms, bringing the things that they needed because they produced most of what they could, but they bought needles and thread. He perceived a real need for furniture. He very shortly, as soon as he was able, established a furniture store here in Cedar Rapids. It's interesting that when I was growing up, and even until maybe twenty years ago, people used to come in and say that they remembered him when he used to come to their farm homes to bring merchandise. He would, of course in those days, there was no place to stay--no motels, or hotels, or any other services. He would be a guest of the families that he sold goods to. He would stay with them. Of course, he was also their radio and TV and newspaper. He brought the news of what was going on in the state, going on in the community--just word of mouth. They welcomed him because he was pleasant and brought news and was a source of communication with the outside world. Our farm families lived in a very isolated way. In those days, there were few, if any, roads. Frequently he was just going on a little wagon trail that they had made by their own wagon. He did establish the store then, settled down, was married here in Cedar Rapids and raised my mother and her sister and her brothers were all born here--and established himself as

a community member.

LB: Did the furniture that he began selling...did he make it himself?

Lipsky: No.

LB: Where did he get it?

Lipsky: I don't really know where he got it. He probably bought it from factories here. There used to be furniture factories in Cedar Rapids. I don't think there are any anymore in Iowa. There may be one mattress factory remaining in another city. It used to be common to have furniture made. He had a work-shop...I don't think when he began, but as the store grew, they've always had a shop and still do. The shop doesn't build custom furniture, but it does refinishing, reupholstering, and repairs and so on. I think there's always been a shop in the store that could do that kind of thing.

LB: Why did your grandfather leave to come to the United States, do you know?

Lipsky: Yes. He was Jewish and lived in Russia. Of course, the treatment of Jews in Russia has varied, but in general, it was very, very bad, as it is today. In those days, Jews were not citizens, just as today in Russia--a practicing Jew is not given citizenship. As a result, there was great persecution. It was very difficult to earn a living. There was a tax on Jews that was called "pograms" which was just

a mass attack, where innocent people--men, women and children--were simply killed by marauding mobs at certain times. When he became sixteen, he was subject to military service, in spite of the fact that Jews were not citizens. The military service was of the lowest kind. The Jewish recruits were made to clean latrines and do the most menial kind of work. His family didn't want that for him. He was the oldest of a number of children and so, they got together what money they could and purchased his passage to this country. This was the land of opportunity, and it certainly was for him. He came here, and subsequently, brought his whole family to the United States. Most of them lived in Chicago, rather than Cedar Rapids, although one of his brothers did come to Cedar Rapids. He really appreciated the opportunity that he received here. One of the reasons that I and my children, my parents, my uncles, all of my family (my husband, as well) are very, very strong in public service...we all believe in giving community service, because he taught us all. I can remember as a little girl hearing him say this. One of the things that you had to do was pay your civic rent. He was very grateful to Cedar Rapids in particular. He served on boards and gave contributions and did everything he possibly could in appreciation for the freedoms and the wonderful life that he enjoyed here.

LB: You said that he married. Was the person from Cedar Rapids that he married?

Lipsky: His wife was brought here similarly as--her parents had come and she came with them. I don't think she was born in Cedar Rapids, but I think she was about one or two years old when she came to Cedar Rapids, to Iowa, at least, with her parents.

LB: Where was she from?

Lipsky: Also from Eastern Europe. I'm not certain what area she came from. Those things have been blurred. She had a sister and a brother. The sister married and lived in Coggon, which is a little town near here. She had a brother who became a university professor, went to Texas and taught at the University there, and died young and never married. It was a small, little branch of the family. The father died early and her mother made her way here in Cedar Rapids. That was my great grandmother, who always lived with my grandfather and his wife.

LB: Was she also Jewish, then?

Lipsky: Yes.

LB: How has the business eventually trickled down to your father, then? Is that correct?

Lipsky: No.

LB: It would have been your mother? How did that work?

Lipsky: My grandfather formed the business. When my mother married, my father came from Cleveland, Ohio, and he was a traveling man. That is how he had met my mother, because this was part

of the territory in which he traveled. She traveled with him at the beginning of their marriage, and did not like that very well. She wanted to return to live here in Cedar Rapids. At her urging, he came here and my grandfather offered him a position in the store. My mother's two brothers were, at that time, in high school. My grandfather needed help in the store. It was a rapidly growing business. My father became an employee of the store. My two uncles, my mother's brothers, subsequently finished college--graduated from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania--and returned to Cedar Rapids to become part of the Smulekoff Furniture operation. My grandfather retired at approximately that time, just shortly after his two sons joined my father in the store. When he did that, he removed himself from the business and it was reconstituted as a partnership, with my father and my two uncles being partners. It continued as a partnership until shortly before my father's death. My husband did the same thing after I married. He came back. We lived first in Chicago, which is his home and where he was a banker. Our life was disrupted by World War II. He resigned his position at the bank to become a civilian employee of the United States Army Signal Corps. We moved to Virginia, where he worked with the Army until the end of World War II. During that period--that was a period of several years...it was a very long war and a very tragic one...we made the determination that we would return to Cedar Rapids, rather than to Chicago. I felt like my mother did. I liked Cedar Rapids better. My

father offered him the position in the store. He came to work there. Now, my two uncles are still alive. They're both in their eighties. I'm sure that they'll be questioned for this living history. They're both semi-active in the business. They take six months off to go to Florida, where it's warmer and more agreeable. When they're home, however, they come to the store and have responsibilities. My husband is now the president of Smulekoff Furniture Company. It was changed. The corporate structure changed, so that it is no longer a partnership, since the partners are no longer all present.

LB: Going back a little in time, when you were a little girl, do you have any memories of the store other than the flood memory?

Lipsky: Oh, yes, certainly. I used to go to the store with my father all the time. In fact, my father was the buyer, initially, and he would (this was when my grandfather was still active in the store)...as I say, my father came there some years before my uncles were ready to return to work. He used to go on buying trips to Grand Rapids, Michigan, which was the center of fine furniture making at that time, and to Chicago, where there was a huge furniture market. He always took my mother and me along. It was a little vacation, as well as a trip, I suppose, although he worked very, very hard. He used to take me with him at least one day to the market. At the age of four, I was a registered buyer at the Grand Rapids market. I really grew up in the business, as it were. I accompanied him all the time. In those days, he took inventory

all by himself. He spent practically the whole summer, all his spare time--mostly nights, taking inventory. That means he went around and counted and accounted for every single piece of merchandise that was in the store. I frequently used to accompany him and help him with that, calling out the numbers while he wrote them down.

LB: Did yourmother often get involved in the business then?

Lipsky: When she was a girl, she worked in the store, prior to her marriage. She was a bookkeeper there. After that she never did anything active, once she was married. In my mother's day, that was not something a married woman did. If you were married, you stayed home and kept house and raised your children.

LB: It sounds like your father spent a lot of time in the store. Did that seem to have any adverse affect on your family life?

Lipsky: He didn't ever sacrifice family life. We were a very close family. As I say, he had me along, so that I had a lot of contact with him. Being in the store never made any difference. He included me in so much of what he did.

LB: Were you the only child then?

Lipsky: Yes.

LB: The next topic that I'd like to suggest, since you brought it up that your grandfather was a Jewish immigrant--I have

a lot of questions about that. What was it like to grow up Jewish in a Christian community?

Lipsky: Well, as a little girl, it really didn't have a lot of impact on me. I didn't feel any--I suppose what I should tell you is that I didn't have any understanding that there was any difference. I knew that people went to different Sunday schools or different churches. It didn't have any meaning to me that one was Christian and that one was Non-Christian. For example, when I was really quite young (about five or six years old), my best friend was a little girl, the same age who lived two doors down. We used to go--her father happened to be a minister, a lay minister in the Methodist Church. She was very active in pre-school activities at St. Paul's Methodist Church. I used to just accompany her to those pre-school activities and be included. Her family included me in holiday activities that I didn't have in my home, and I included her in holidays activities that she didn't have in her home. That's just an example of the absence of feelings of any difference. The older you get, it's the grown-ups who teach you what it's all about. As I got older, and especially as I got to dating age, I became aware of the fact that there was a great deal of religious prejudice present in this community. I think there's much less today than there was at that time. I think that World War II and the horrors that occured in Germany under the Hitler regime of persecution--the inhuman persecution of the Jews, which was just, I suppose, one of the most shocking

things that's happened in modern days. People began to see religious bias and prejudice for what it really was when they sorted it all out and thought about what had happened. As I say, when I got to the dating age, there was a sharp line--a social line that was drawn and I began to be much more aware of it. Now, obviously my parents were aware of it, but they never had given me any feelings about it. They had always avoided discussing it with me, I suppose.

LB: Were there very many Jewish people in the community?

Lipsky: No, there's never been a very large Jewish community in Cedar Rapids. As a matter of fact, we've had about the same number of Jews here constantly. We have about a hundred Jewish families now, and there were probably about a hundred Jewish families when I was growing up or perhaps fewer. I would say numerically we're fewer than we were then because Cedar Rapids was smaller. We've probably declined, but we've never--there's never been much of a group. Just to show you how little I was aware of what was going on...I went to college rather young; I guess I was sixteen or seventeen, something like that. I went to Northwestern where they had sororities. Sororities were a big part of the campus life. They had an orientation first. You came and all the freshman women were together, lived in one dormitory. You had to live there your first year. We just sort of made friends just like you do at college. I didn't pay any attention to what the religion was. I just was drawn naturally. You know best the girls you're living with--they live on your hall.

Some girls seem more your type, and you're drawn to those people you like just because of their personality or their interest. By the time I got to rushing, which was about two weeks into orientation, I had some friends. Some of the friends were Jewish and some of them were non-Jewish. We all went together when the rushing began to the Panhellenic office where you got invitations to the sororities. There were many sororities there. The girls that I went with got a huge stack of invitations, and I got only two. I went up to the desk and said to this woman, "There must be some mistake. I only got two invitations." She said, "Well, just a minute. I'll look and see." She looked through her file, and she looked up at me and said, "Oh, well, you're Jewish." And I said, "So!" She said, "The non-Jewish sororities are not going to invite you to come." I said, "You're kidding!" I said, "You mean that there are a whole lot of girls here who know that they don't like me without ever seeing me or meeting me, because they just know what my religion is?" She turned all kinds of colors, but I was so unaware of the kinds of discrimination that existed, that, in my innocence I just blurted this out. The other girls around kept saying, "Oh, shh! Come on. You're embarrassing us." I was just floored. At the beginning, I said, "Well, I don't know if I even want to belong to a sorority if it's segregated this way. I've never chosen my friends for what their religion was." I said, "I don't even know if I want to go to a university that tolerates this." It took me a long time to adjust to it. So, I really grew up pretty innocent. That's what the world was like then.

LB: Just out of curiosity, did you end up going through rush then?

Lipsky: Oh, sure. I ended up being president of my sorority.

LB: What was the name of your sorority?

Lipsky: Alpha Epsilon Phi.

LB: And was it all Jewish?

Lipsky: All Jewish girls, yes.

LB: Is it a national sorority?

Lipsky: Yes.

LB: Do you know what it's like today? Is it still Jewish?

Lipsky: I have not stayed active. I got a communication from them not long ago. I doubt very much if it's still all Jewish, because I think that most schools have eliminated that. I think most colleges actually--my stupid, innocent question has been answered. Most colleges don't tolerate religious prejudice on their campuses. I would very much doubt if it was all Jewish today. I really don't know. I've had too many other things to do.

LB: When I was in Des Moines at Drake, there were a lot of Jewish students there. I know that they have a problem with their sororities in that respect.

Lipsky: As I say, I really don't know what it's like today.

LB: What was your Temple experience like? Did you go to Temple?

Lipsky: Yes, regularly.

LB: How often is regularly?

Lipsky: Well, of course, I went every Sunday to Sunday school. I was confirmed in the Temple. I attended services on a, I suppose, pretty often. I don't know how--not every week, but very frequently, until I went away to school. Once you go away to school, you know, you sort of drop some of those things. I've always been a member of this congregation, except when I didn't live here--Temple Judah. My parents were founders. My grandfather was a founder of the congregation. Not my parents, but my parents were active in getting our first building established. My mother was active in forming the religious school. I attended it. My children all attended it. I've been active in the various organizations.

LB: You might not have been aware of this, since it sounded as if you weren't really aware of the discrimination when you were younger, but did it seem as though--was the Jewish community at all kind of close together? Did they stick together, do you think?

Lipsky: Yes, I think that there's a strong tendency of Jewish people to stick together. Not of the kids so much, because you just don't have the opportunity. For example, you'd be in a religious class where there would be--this happened to my own children--only three kids the same age. Well, obviously

you can't confine your interests and your social relationships to three children. That's where it breaks down. With adults it's easier to club together because a year or two or five or ten is no real handicap. With children, there's such a small, little group that you don't grow up in a Jewish community at all.

LB: Do you think that this affected you in later life at all? Being raised in the Jewish community, did it have any adverse affects?

Lipsky: I think it had positive affects, not adverse affects. I think it makes you more sensitive to other people's concerns. You're more sensitive to minority point of view because you've had the experience of being in a minority. Especially, the kind of discrimination that I've felt, such as the little incident that I told you about--obviously, getting invited to a sorority is not a life-shaking event, but when you're a young girl going through that (sixteen or seventeen years old), and everybody around you is completely involved in the rushing process, it does seem like a big event to you. You don't have the perspective that you're going to have when you're a little older. It does affect you and you have--I think it's been a very positive experience for me to have suffered some kinds of discrimination because of something like a religious preference. It makes you much more sensitive, much more thoughtful, and it gives you an opportunity to think through what you're doing and why you're

doing it, too, which a lot of people probably don't do in regard to their religion. A lot of people are just accepting of what they're taught, without really thinking about it. Until you really think about it for yourself, it doesn't really belong to you. I think it's been a good experience for me.

LB: One last question along these lines would be...I'd like to ask you about the Jewish holidays. Are they celebrated in the same way today as they were when you were a little girl? Can you think of any differences?

Lipsky: The major difference is that Chanukah was no big deal when I was a little girl, and its become a very big deal, mostly to compete with Christmas. In my mind, Christmas has become a secular rather than a religious holiday, as I view its celebration today. I don't think there's a whole lot of difference if a Jewish child would have a Santa Claus and all the things that go with it from a non-Jewish child in many instances, because in that home there is no guarantee whatever that there's any kind of any real religious meaning attached to the holiday. I'm sure there are people who don't go to church, who don't discuss the Christmas story from a religious point of view--the story of the Christ child's birth or any of the meaning of it or have any kind of relationship to the religious aspects of it. It's so intrusive in society, in our community, that most Jewish families say, "Well, it's not our religious holiday. Ours is Chanukah, which happens by accident to occur at the same time and so

its become a time to give gifts to children, to make the home very festive. It always has been the festival of lights. We lit candles when I was a little girl and played games, had special foods, and got a little money, but we never got any gifts.

LB: I'm going to move ahead to a later period in your life. I know that we're still trying to concentrate on the early decades of the Twentieth Century, but since you're a special case, I thought that I'd ask you a few more questions about later life. What was it that led you to the legislature?

Lipsky: Well, I had always been very interested in political life. I think that was my father's influence. Now, my father was not affiliated in any active way with any kind of political party. In fact, he always said, "Throw the rascals out." If the Democrats were in, he voted for Republicans.

END OF SIDE ONE: BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

I began to look around for something to do. That was just after the election of '64, when the Republicans had just gotten trounced--Goldwater-Johnson election. We were at somebody's house and just talking conversationally, and they said, "Oh, isn't it awful what is going to happen to the Republican party." I said, "Well, it's just like anything else. If you care about it, you just have to get in there and work yourself and not let these far right "kooks" take it over."

I said, "You know, that's the next thing I'm going to do." I had just been president of the Cedar Rapids Art Association and under my presidency we had obtained our first home--that's the present building, raised the money to purchase it and to remodel it and hired our first staff person, our first professional director of the museum. My term of office was almost over. I said, "I think that that's what I'm going to do next." Somebody reported that to the local chairman of the Republican party. He called me and said, "I understand that you're willing to work in the party." I said I was, so he asked me to come and meet him. We had lunch together. He said that he would get back to me, and he'd let me know what he thought I ought to do. He called me one day and asked if he could come to see my husband and myself. I said, "Sure." He came over and said, "I want you to run for the legislature." He wanted me to run for the Senate. I was just floored, and I said, "Oh, no, I can't run for the Senate. I'll run for the House." I didn't say it quite that fast. I did a lot of talking to people first because we had never elected a woman to anything except the school board here in Cedar Rapids. I don't believe there was another woman elected officer in any elective office here. I wanted to assess my chances before I put my neck out.

LB: Did you face any frustrations while you were campaigning for the position and then after you were elected to the fact that you were a woman?

Lipsky: Oh, sure. It worked for me and against me. I think a lot of people thought that a woman didn't have any business

in politics in those days. Some people thought, "Oh, well, if there's a woman with the guts to try, let's give her a chance." I worked at least three times harder than anybody else that was campaigning. I really almost knocked myself out that first time around. I had a primary as well as the general election. At that, I just barely made it. I got just enough votes to be elected--just a couple hundred plurality. After that, it was a lot easier. Once I got a reputation, it was easier.

LB: While you were a legislator....were you conscious of the fact that you were a woman in predominately male...?

Lipsky: Oh, heavens, yes. You were reminded of it almost every minute. In the beginning, I was very much put down by my colleagues, many of whom thought just because I was a woman, I couldn't do anything, couldn't think very well and couldn't handle anything. I was just astounded because my father, my uncles, my husband--all the men I knew well treated me as an intellectual equal. In college, I had competed against men very successfully, and in my profession I had dealt with men. It was not anything that floored me at all. In my community activities, I dealt with men frequently and was very much interested in women's rights before there was such a thing. At one point, when I was president of the AAUW, I was aware of the fact that we had all men on the school board, and they were systematically appointing just men to the various boards and commissions in the city. I called together a meeting of

all the women's organizations that had any interest in community at all--League of Women Voters, Business and Professional Women, etc., etc., all the women's groups. I said, "Are we going to tolerate this or are we going to complain?" What we did first was, there was a vacancy occuring on the school board. In those days, it was a habit of someone who did not intend to run for re-election would resign two or three months prior to the election. The board would appoint a successor. That person would run as an incumbent and have that advantage over anybody else. In essence, the board was picking their own people, and they were picking men. I went with the backing of these women. First of all, I approached a friend of mine, Georgia Nye, whom I considered a very brilliant and competent woman who had children in our schools. I asked her if she would be willing to run for the school board. She said she would. Armed with that, I went together with some other presidents of other organizations and called on the then chairman of the school board. I said to him, "I know that so-and-so is resigning and you will be appointing a successor. I want to tell you that we have a candidate for that position. I want you to appoint her. She's very well qualified, but if you don't appoint her, I want you to know that the next election, we will defeat whoever you appoint because she is going to be the next school board member." This man almost fell out of his chair. After due consideration, they did appoint her and she turned out to be one of most distinguished members of our school board ever. She

went on to serve as the president of the Iowa Association of School Boards and served as a representative of Iowa to the national association. We were really proud of Georgia Nye.

LB: How many women colleagues did you have in the legislature in the beginning?

Lipsky: There were five of us--myself and four others. That was the most there had ever been in history. Just think that women had been eligible to run for the legislature since 1919 when I was born and when they passed the Women's Suffrage Act. There had been great prejudice against electing women. I was the twenty-fourth woman to be elected. There had been many years when there were no women and frequently only one woman in the legislature. That there were five of us caused great stir. There were a lot of legislators then. We made the legislature smaller during my service there. At that time, there were 185 members. I think there were 65 in the House and 120 in the...pardon me, 65 in the Senate and 120, I think, in the House, something like that. We cut the size to 50 in the Senate and 100 in the House. That year there were just five of us. We were all in the House.

LB: Did your work in the legislature, was that what stimulated you to go to law school?

Lipsky: Yes, it did. I had never thought about going to law school before. You know, I grew up in a world where women just did certain things, and being a lawyer wasn't one of them.

As you know, the admission policies were such in both law and medicine, dentistry, all the professions--that women were very much discriminated against and not given an opportunity to become lawyers or doctors or dentists. They had to really work to get in. A few got in, but I'm sure that if there were one, two or three women in the class, they thought that was plenty. Now, it's approaching 50 percent. I think 30 to 40 percent is very common in most of the law schools in the country.

LB: Can you give me an approximate date when you started to go to law school?

Lipsky: I entered in '76. September.

LB: Were you treated as an equal at that time as far as--well, at this time you would have been a non-traditional student, also?

Lipsky: Right. I was a legislator, don't forget. I ran for office, for re-election at the same time that I entered law school. In fact, I was a week late getting to law school because I was a delegate to the Republican National Convention that year in Kansas City, and law school began too soon. I came a week late. My professors, some of them were intimidated. I was, of course, a lot older than some of them. I had to do with the appropriations that paid their salaries and wrote the laws that they were trying to teach. So, I had an easy time of it in law school, as far as the faculty was

concerned. As far as the students were concerned, those students had lived through the liberation, and they are liberated. I didn't know what they would think of me as an old woman, you know, coming back to school. I didn't know how they'd look at me as a legislator. They just treated me like another person. I was just whatever I was. They took me at face value and were marvelous. I just loved the students. They were wonderful.

LB: Let's go back for a second into an earlier school. You said that you had gone to prep school.

Lipsky: Yes. Finishing school in those days.

LB: Where was that?

Lipsky: In Gulf Port, Mississippi.

LB: What was the name of the school?

Lipsky: Gulf Park College by the Sea. It was high school and two-year junior college--a place where nice young southern ladies. They had made a real effort to get people from all over the United States...in fact, all over the world. We had a number of girls there from other countries. It was sort of an opportunity to broaden your prospective and turn out an educated, refined young lady.

LB: Was that your own choice, or did your parents?

Lipsky: No, it was my own choice. I think that what attracted me so much to it was the climate. I'd lived through some of these

cold Iowa winters and was very much attracted to the idea of going where it was nice and warm.

LB: Was there any reason why you chose that school other than the geographical location?

Lipsky: Oh, I suspect that one of the reasons that I chose it was they sent someone to personally interview me, and she seemed so nice and so eager that I come. It made me feel so wanted and welcome that it won out over a number of other schools.

LB: I'll just ask one final question. Is there anything certain that you miss from the earlier decades as compared to now, or is it just the opposite? How do you feel? Some kind of a brief comparison of the early decades of the Twentieth Century as opposed to the last couple decades.

Lipsky: The only thing that I miss are the people that are gone--my parents, my friends. I've lost a lot of them, but it's a wonderful world to live in today--such terrific opportunities, doors that are open that I never even knew were there, let alone the fact that they were closed to me. The opportunity for travel, for meeting people from all over the world, for career opportunities--it's just a wonderful, wonderful, rich life that we enjoy. As you can see, as old as I am, I'm still trying to take advantage of all the opportunities that are there to make up for lost time. I don't miss anything except the people.

LB: Thank you.