

Chapter 20: The Sound(s) of Sustainable Stewardship: Composing Audio Essays with the JHFE

Jewish Kentucky Oral History Repository and Undergraduate Researchers

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The Interview Protocol

What follows below is the actual bank of questions we used to develop the questions for an interview in the JHFE collection to help ensure some consistency across the interviews.

Of course, what you've probably already noticed when listening is that not every question gets asked, and even when asked, not every question gets answered!

Some important things to remember about the interview situation and the creation of a protocol to elicit/prepare you to have a productive interview:

- **Do your homework.** Look up some background information (use finding guides in Special Collections, search LinkedIn and/or social media platforms, search the *Herald-Leader* archives), and talk to Dr. Jan to know/learn more. After you've made your initial contact, you might do a follow-up by phone or email to learn more so you can prepare better questions.
- When you contact the person initially and/or to schedule, be formal and polite in your query. You'll want to use a version of the template above if you're connecting via email.
- Keep the questions open-ended. Do not ask questions that elicit a yes/no response, as they will close rather than open your conversation. Instead, begin with general questions that allow the interviewee some space to shape their response and also allow plenty of room for follow-up questions.
- Be prepared with lots of follow-up questions. For example:
 - Student Question: Tell me about your educational background.
 - Response: I went to X high school.
 - Student Follow-up Questions: How many students were there? Oh, it was a big school? Small one? What was that like? Tell me about your most memorable experience from that period of your life. Why do you still remember this experience to this day? How did it impact your choices about college/career/family later in life? Looking back now, what do you wish you had known or experienced then? What would the "you" of today tell the "you" from back then?
- Be prepared to have to ask/revisit a question several times in slightly different ways to get a response. Remember all those tangents and repetitions from the interviews you indexed? They are likely to be part of your interviewing experience as well.
- You probably won't get to ask all the questions you prepare, and you'll need to work together during the interview itself to make sure you get enough information to be helpful for your project.
- To generate a 90–120-minute interview, you'll want to generate a minimum of 60–70 questions and at least 20 possible follow-up questions.

Sample Interview Protocol

Introduction Template: Hello, our names are X and X and X. As students in Dr. Fernheimer's WRD 112: Fall 2017: Writing Jewish Kentucky, we are conducting this interview as part of our work for that class and for the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence Jewish Kentucky Oral History Project. Today is X [insert full date Month, date, year] and it is our great honor and pleasure to interview X at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History Studio [or wherever you are conducting the interview] here in Lexington, KY. Thank you so much for joining us today!

Background and Family Origins

1. For the official record, please state and spell your name at birth.
2. When and where were you born?
3. Tell me a little about your family background.
4. What are/were your parents' names and occupations? When and where were they born? Where do they reside now?
5. When did your family arrive in the U.S., and where did your ancestors come from? What brought them here? Did your parents' and/or grandparents' names change when they came to the U.S.?
6. How many siblings do you have? What are their names and ages relative to you?
7. Now that we've talked a bit about your family background, let's shift gears and focus on your childhood.

For People Who Grew Up in Lexington, KY

1. Tell me about your experiences growing up in Lexington.
2. Please describe your childhood and growing up in Lexington, KY.
3. Where did you go to school (elementary, middle, high school) and when?
4. How many other Jewish students attended with you? What was it like to be one of only a few Jewish students attending a school of X? How did you feel around the winter holiday season? How did your peers and teachers treat you?

For People Who Grew Up Elsewhere

1. When did you move to Lexington, and what brought you here?
2. So tell me about your experiences growing up in. . . .
3. Please describe your childhood and growing up in. . . .
4. Where did you go to school (elementary, middle, high school) and when?
5. What was it like to move from X to Lexington, KY in XXXX? What was most surprising? What helped ease the transition?
6. How did you feel about moving to Lexington?
7. What was your reception here by the Jewish community?
8. What about in your professional community? How did that change over time?

Family Attitudes

1. How would you describe your parents' relationship to Judaism?
2. Describe Judaism in your family.
3. How often did your family attend religious services (only on the high holidays of Rhosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, every shabbat, some shabbats, other holidays)? Which synagogue did they attend? What holidays did you celebrate, with whom, and how? What food was consumed and who prepared? (e.g. for Rhosh Hashana, Yom Kippur break fast, Hannukah, Purim, Pesach/Passover, Shabbat, Shavuot, Sukkot)
4. What was the role of Jewish tradition in your childhood?
5. What did your parents teach you about Judaism?
6. What kind of Jewish education did you receive (i.e., did you attend Sunday school and Hebrew school, one or the other, both)?
7. What attitudes did you have toward religious school? What attitudes did your parents have toward religious school? How many other students were in your class/cohort? Did you become bar or bat mitvah at age 13? If so, what kind of training did you receive—did you read from the Torah, learn to chant, something else? What kind of celebration did you have?
8. How involved were you with Jewish youth group? Which one?
9. What kind of experiences did you have with Jewish summer camp (where, for how long, how far away from Lexington, what kind of orientation did the camp have—emphasizing Zionism, environmentalism, etc.)? How important was it to you and/or your parents to socialize with other Jewish peers? To date Jewishly?

10. What is your most vivid memory from childhood that you feel comfortable sharing?

University and Young Adult Life

Now that we've talked a little about what it was like to grow up Jewish in Lexington, KY in the XXXXs, we'd like to shift to learn more about your **adult** life. [This question will be personalized to specific individuals.]

1. Where did you attend university and what was your major? When did you attend/graduate? (Make sure to get dates here for when they started, completed, or left.)
2. What was important to you and your family in choosing this university? How important was it to you or them that there be a Jewish community at the schools you considered?
3. What motivated you to study _____ at _____ university?
4. What extracurriculars were you involved with while there? How important was it for you to be involved with Jewish groups—fraternities/sororities/ Hillel, Jewish Student Union—through the university you attended?
5. How big was the Jewish population on campus or in the local town, and how often did you interact with other Jewish people?
6. What was life like for you after college? Where did you land your first job and how?
7. [Tailor additional questions here to trace out their career path.]
8. How did your first job prepare you for....? How did your university studies prepare you for your first job?

Courting, Partnership and Building a Jewish Home of One's Own

We'd like to learn more about the ways Judaism has played a role in your adult life, including dating, marriage, children, and family life. We'll begin with a short series of questions about each of these topics, starting with dating.

1. How important was it to you to date other Jewish people?
2. How did you meet them?
3. When and how did you meet your partner/spouse?
4. What kind of Jewish background did s/he/they come from?
5. What was your courtship like? [first date, proposal?]
6. [If married] When did you two get married and how long were you two married for?
7. What kind of wedding did you have? Which Jewish traditions was it important for you to incorporate?
8. As you built your own household what practices were important for you two to maintain? How have those changed over time?
9. For example, how did you approach kashrut, Sabbath holiday observance, going to synagogue regularly/or at all?
10. [If they have children] When and how did you decide to have children?
11. How old are they? Where do they live now? What do they do?
12. What values did you hope to instill in them? What Jewish values were important to you to instill in them and how did you do that?
13. How did you handle their Jewish education? What kind of Jewish education did you provide for them?
14. How was your family, or you specifically, involved in the Jewish community when your children were growing up?
15. How did you balance childrearing with career and community responsibilities?
16. What kind of ritual observance/holiday celebration did you engage in as a family—which holidays, at whose houses, what kinds of food?

Experiences in Jewish Organizations/Institutional/Communal Life

1. We know from reading X that you've held a number of leadership roles in the Lexington community. We also know that you were very involved in X and Y organizations. Starting with the X, please share with us a little bit more. And for the record please state what institutional leadership roles you have held within the federation and when.
2. When did you get involved and in what role?
3. What was your experience like?
4. What were some of your daily or weekly duties that were required by your positions?
5. What motivated you to get involved? Why did you think it was/is important?
6. When and how did you get involved? What leadership roles did you hold, when, and why?
7. What are your attitudes towards Israel?
8. What are your attitudes about Zionism?

Concluding Reflections

1. How have things changed in the Jewish community during the period of time you've been here? More specifically, how have you seen the Jewish community change in Lexington?
2. How does your relationship to Jewish identity and practice compare to your parents' or children's?
3. How has where you grew up and have lived your adult life affected your relationship with Judaism?
4. What is your relationship to Judaism now?
5. Is there anything we have not asked you about that you would like to discuss?