

FREDA MOHR  
Interviewed at her home  
on November 25, 1969  
By Ben Cohen

COHEN: I just wanted to really talk very informally with you about your own ideas. We have talked before, but I really want to do it again on tape and focus on history. You said that you arrived here forty years ago, which would be 1928. Could you tell me what the Jewish Community was like at the time that you came.

MOHR: Why don't I tell you about what the Jewish Family Service was and go from there.

COHEN: Okay.

MOHR: I came there as the third student-in-training that they ever had from the School of Social Work at the University of Southern California. The Agency was located in an office building downtown; the Insurance Exchange Building. There were about a half a dozen caseworkers. None of them had any training. I believe one guy there was a college graduate. The Director was Mrs. Levin, who is one of the people I think you should see. She was the Executive Director of the Agency at that time. She was married at that time, and Mr. Irving Lipsitch was the Director of the Jewish Federation. I think that it was one of the most confusing places I had ever been in. I had been in the business world, and continued as an older student. There was a period of nine years between the time I was graduated from high school and college. I went into social work with high hopes of social work as a profession and a service to people, and I was, of course, very disappointed at what I found. There seemed no relationship at all between anything the School of Social Work taught and the practice of the Agency.

COHEN: Students still say that.

MOHR: It's still true, and that's why the students are rebelling now. However, the difference was much greater then, than it is now, because you can't go through a social agency now without finding trained people. Then, there was not one person who had any training in the field of social work. The secretaries had as much to say about what went on as the professional workers. I think that they liked me, personally, and that's why I got along. Otherwise, I don't think I could have tolerated it, or I don't think they could have tolerated me.

What happened was, that while I was at the University of Southern California, Dr. Earl Young was my advisor. He, at that time, was writing the first manual for the Bureau of Public Assistance, then, the County Welfare Department. I'd had a lot of experience with manuals, because I had worked in an insurance office. Everything was written down. I came from an atmosphere of order, management, excellent equipment. It was the first insurance company that had Walter Hill Scott for an insurance man. I had been through their training in Hartford, Connecticut. I had come from an office where every year the typewriters were changed; where they had a complete, modern library and the latest equipment. I had myself equipped the office after my trip to Hartford. Well, you walk into the social agency. There weren't two chairs that matched. There was a tremendous amount of disorder everywhere. There was no management. As part of one of my school assignments I wrote, I helped Dr. Young write the manual. I go into the Bureau of Public Assistance, then County Welfare, interviewing people, finding out what they did, and this manual was then produced.

Later, when I came as a student to the Jewish Family Service organization, then the Jewish Aid Society, I worked in the Boyle Heights District Office. When my student training was over,

I went to the downtown office in the Insurance Exchange building. The first thing that I was asked to do was to write a manual for the Jewish Family Service. And this started the organization of the agency. It was the first time that any attempt was made to relate to other agencies in terms of what they did and what their relationship was to the Jewish Aid Society. There was a lot of conflict between the agency and the community.

COHEN: There always is.

MOHR: There still is, but it was different then. People didn't speak to each other very much. One of the agencies that the Jewish Aid Society worked with most closely was the then Cedars of Lebanon Hospital.

COHEN: Yes, Kasper Cohen.

MOHR: Yes, Kasper Cohen Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. So I had a pretty free reign about writing this manual, and I went out to Kasper, which was then on Whittier Blvd., and they were at that time, making a plan for Cedars of Lebanon. I talked with Mrs. Mexler, who was the superintendent there and spent the whole day, telephoning a couple of times to the office. She invited me to stay for lunch and meet with the doctors, and she went over the plans with me and said she had to go over them again and again. About four o'clock, I appeared at the office, and they were quite horrified to think that I had gone to the Cedars, or to the Kasper. They would never have allowed me to go there. If they'd known that that's where I was going, they would have told me not to go.

MOHR: While I was at the Kasper Cohen Hospital, I procured all the information about how the hospital operated, about their rates, about how they felt about the agencies and all the difficulties they had working with the agencies. This was then written up. So I went to every

agency in the whole Jewish group and got the same kind of information - it was down. You will find in the office, that very first manual, and I think I'd look at it.

COHEN: I'd love to find it. I've been looking for it.

MOHR: Oh, it's there. Now every time the manual was re-written, one volume was kept unchanged, so that you should have, from 1928 on, every revision. If you look at those, you're going to see just how the agency moved from year to year.

COHEN: I've been asking for that, but so far, they haven't found them.

MOHR: Well, I'm sure they must be there.

COHEN: Are they likely in the basement?

MOHR: No.

COHEN: In the office somewhere?

MOHR: I'll tell you the last time I knew about them, they were in that little library where the mimeograph is. You should find them. There will be a study of the various manuals. They will give you all the changes.....

COHEN: I'm anxious to find that. I'll look in the library.

MOHR: They weren't in the library. I think they were in the room where the mimeograph is on a bookcase in the corner. Well, you'll find them. Nobody would have destroyed those.

Now that manual has been the backbone of Jewish Family Service. From that time on, there always was a Manual Committee, and that manual is up-to-date today. Always. They never stopped working on it. Now that was the beginning of staff participation in the agency's program, because every page in that manual - the very first one was written in cooperation with staff. They did a good deal of commenting and revising, and a committee of the staff worked on

it from the beginning.

COHEN: With a committee of the Board?

MOHR: No. It was the Board and the Administration.

COHEN: Oh, it was the Board?

MOHR: No, not the Board. It was the staff.

COHEN: And the Board was not involved?

MOHR: Not in the manual. It wouldn't be, because it was the administrative procedures that were just being developed. The Board was very much interested that it was being done, and they felt that it was commencing to pull things together in the Agency. But they did not participate in the making of the manual. Later on - and there's another thing that you need to get. There should be in the office, a copy of a special manual we made for board members. One copy was always kept, so that when you revised it every year or two or three, you should find every one of them there.

COHEN: Marvelous.

MOHR: That will tell you a great deal about the Board structure and the change of committee functions and the importance of committees. In those minutes of the various committees, you will also get - and the staff meetings are always there. Have you seen the staff minutes?

COHEN: I haven't looked at those yet. Right now I'm looking at Board minutes, going back to 1902.

MOHR: Oh my goodness.

COHEN: And I'm looking at case committees. I'll get to the staff minutes.

MOHR: Those are all there. They'll be a big help to you. I suggest that you - for at least ten

years, Alice Wolfson has been very much involved in the Manuals Committee, and I would suggest that you talk to her. She's Director of the San Fernando Valley Office.

COHEN: You said that there were problems with other agencies when you first arrived.

MOHR: There was not much communication with them. The agencies who were there were the Big Brothers, the Jewish Federation Hospital; the Jewish Aid Society started the first of the community centers. At that time there was the Boyle Heights District Office, and the agency out of Jewish Aid Society established the first little center. Then it developed, and later, it was separated. There was also an employment services, which was part of Jewish Family Service. Later on it separated into a separate organization. At that time, family agencies were sort of catch-alls. All these other supplementary services were part of the Jewish Family Service, the Jewish Aid Society. The Family Service also did the background work for the whole Community Welfare Federation/Community Chest for admission. That came at a little later time, but it was a long, long time.

COHEN: I've seen references to that. What about the Jewish Welfare Federation? What was the function of the Federation?

MOHR: It was the same as it is now, except that it's - - oh, no. The function at that time was that the Federation was just for Jewish agencies. It was separate from the Jewish Federation Council. And a not too good relationship existed for many years between them. The Council really was a community organization in that it raised the money. The Federation got its money primarily from the Community Chest. The Council came much later. The Council came many, many years later. Then there was a period of time, and you can get that from their history, where the Federation and the Council amalgamated and then separated again and then came back again.

COHEN: Oh, really. I didn't know that.

MOHR: Oh, yes. That was a very stormy period. While that's not part of the Jewish Aid Society history, it had impact.

COHEN: I'm sure it did.

MOHR: It is important, of course, to get it into your history, which will be part of the community. At the time, in 1928, the Agency had no real relationship with the non-Jewish agency. I was the first one that really moved into relationships with non-Jewish agencies.

COHEN: Through the Community Chest?

MOHR: Through the Welfare Planning Council and the Community Chest, which came first, in 1924, to be the fund-raising arm of the Community Welfare Federation. The Welfare Planning Council started later, as the Council of Social Agencies - the planning branch of the Community Welfare Federation.

COHEN: In other voice we hear that of Mrs. Maurice Tahada.

TAHADA : Yes.

MOHR: Well, going back to the manual, that was the beginning of establishing formal relationships in the community between the agencies. It was the beginning of growing up. Then little by little, the agencies commenced to employ qualified people. At that time, I worked in the Boyle Heights District Office as a caseworker, and had written this first manual while I was a caseworker. Then, Mrs. Levin, who had been the Executive Director, she employed the first Casework Supervisor who was a Mrs. Shencuff. She was not there very long; about a year or a year and a half. Mrs. Levin went East, and Mrs. Shencuff took her place, and I became the Casework Supervisor. That lasted about a year, and then Mrs. Shencuff left, and I became the

Executive Director and moved the Boyle Heights office downtown to the main office, which by that time had moved into the building where the Union Bank is now. It was on 8<sup>th</sup> and Hill, and there were offices there. There was a District Office in Boyle Heights and a small District Office on Central Avenue, and a very small District Office in Temple Street.

COHEN: Bunker Hill.

MOHR: Yes, Temple Street. That was before the 6<sup>th</sup> and Temple building was built. Now somewhere in the files is a map that I made - a spot map that I made. At that time, we were trying to find out where the Jewish community was. Originally, Temple Street was the center, and the Jews moved to Central Avenue and to Boyle Heights. Then they moved to Central Avenue South. Then they went to West Adams. Then they went to Beverly and Fairfax, and then out to Beverly Hills.

Now the way I traced that was by getting the addresses of all the Kosher meat markets from the slaughter houses. I got the addresses and spotted them by years - and the Temples, too.

Where the Temples were. You can see the circles as they move south and west. Now if you found that down at the office, then you'd really have an early, very interesting piece that could be part of a thesis. I hope you can find it.

COHEN: I hope so too. That would be really helpful.

MOHR: It really would.

TAHADA: If you could reproduce that, possibly, it could be really graphic.

MOHR: Very graphic.

COHEN: It was very ingenious to be looking for Kosher meat markets

MOHR: Well, you see, Jewish people always moved out to.....



TAHADA: And it was interesting to see how the first one got out to West Adams.

MOHR: Now one of the first centers that was built, which was the little one in Boyle Heights, was done by renting a house in the Central Avenue district where the office was, and having a client live there, take care of the place. Pretty soon people started dropping in. When you talk to Mrs. Levin - she's away now, but she'll be back - she can tell you more about that, because it was her idea. So I would suggest that you see her. She only lives a few blocks away from here. She'll come over one day, and you'll come back and talk to her and get a tape recording of her. She was the first professional person, executive, that they had. She did not have training. Later, when she went back to Chicago, she went back to school and got her master's degree. She spent her whole career in social work.

COHEN: Did she come back here after?

MOHR: She came back here years later and retired. But she worked for the California State Department of Social Services.

Well, coming back then, gradually, when I became the director, we started to employ professional people. Little by little, the older people left and the agency commenced to build up its professional program, and in the minutes of the Case Committee, which are over there, you will see how things gradually moved up. In the beginning, the records will show that they didn't spend a dime that the Board didn't approve.

COHEN: Literally a dime, in the very early days.

MOHR: There's one very interesting little piece in the minutes that is something to be quoted. I remember I took before the Board that a new system was coming in whereby a typewriter company, for twenty-five cents a typewriter, would clean the typewriter and put in a ribbon, a

new ribbon, once a month. We had four typewriters, so it was for approval for that amount. One of the Board members said, "Well, let the girls put on their own ribbon," and that was not approved. It's in the minutes. You might find it in there.

COHEN: I'd find all kinds of fabulous things in there.

MOHR: We moved up from there to a professional group and also casework teachers. The Board gradually came to relate in a different way. I don't even have to tell you about it: you'll see it's written down. And we moved on into the Depression. I don't have to tell you about what happened.

Then, of course, there was the whole business of relationships with public agencies. This too you'll find in the minutes: how the Jewish Community finally came to realize that they were part of the community too, and that Jewish people, too, could be referred to the Bureau of Public Assistance. It was a long, hard struggle. It's in those minutes, and if, later on, you need more specific information about the details of that, we can talk about it.

COHEN: But you were involved in that whole struggle.

MOHR: The whole struggle: the Twenties, the referral to public agencies, and the public funds.

One of the interesting little things that Mrs. Levin said, and I used a long time was, she had commenced to work on these things and had a very difficult time. Then she left, but one of her little things was, "Well, if there's a fire in a Jewish Home, should we call a Jewish fire department?" This was a very telling thing, and it had a very good effect. There was great resistance on the part of the community for the referral of Jewish People. The whole community felt anti-Jewish hostility, and at the time that I came there, there were dozens and dozens of the old-time heirs who were on relief, and it was my job to visit them and see what I could do. Many

of them, in light of their relationship with the community, I felt the Agency should continue to assist financially as long as they lived. It's the same way today in respect to hospital care. There are some Jewish People who have to go to a Jewish Hospital, where they can get Kosher food, even gefilte fish. There's still some of that going on, where people who contribute, contributors to the welfare fund today, will say that the Jewish Family Service wouldn't help this person and sent him to the public agency. It takes a great deal of constant interpretation, even though the situation was much different.

Then, following the War, there were many Jewish refugees to be helped. We did so gradually, and so did others. In other parts of the United States, some agencies started to develop Immigration Departments in their agencies. New York was the place where they had the largest separate immigration/refugee consultation center, because of the fact that social work, itself, seemed to be more and more professional. We came to the conclusion that it shouldn't be separate, that it should be part of the agency. And a little later, a couple of years later, we commenced to charge fees. That whole development is also in the minutes. There's one book on the Consultation Center and another book on fees: the whole development on fee scales, and how we did it. Now, of course, all agencies charge fees, and all the professional development that came as a result of charging fees, you'll find in the minutes. I just hope that nobody has destroyed any of this material. It was all there when I left three years ago.

TAHADA: That was a joint staff and Board activity.

MOHR: Oh, yes, it's all there.

COHEN: I've seen some minutes of annual meetings. There was a period when you were having separate annual meetings.

MOHR: Yes.

COHEN: There were a couple of sketches by the staff in which they tried to tell.....

MOHR: This is a whole history of the Agency's involvement in the emigre program. Now I'm doing that. I'm doing a piece on that, which is a long, slow, laborious process. I have here all the minutes of the emigre program, both Federation and Jewish Family Service. It follows the agency for many years, from 1930 on, when it first became active with emigres. Now those are all separate minutes, but there's also a good deal about that in Jewish Family Service. You'll find it there.

COHEN: You're writing a history of the development of the immigration program?

MOHR: Yes. It's a long, slow, laborious process.

TAHADA: You are trying to get a true picture of how Los Angeles fit into the whole national program?.

MOHR: What I'm listing, and I'm afraid you might have some trouble finding some records, because there are some cards I'm searching for and unless we can find them, it will change the whole nature of what I'm trying to do. They haven't found them yet. I don't know how much of the stuff you're going to find. I just hope you can get it all.

COHEN: Well, so far, it looks as if I'll find enough, certainly, to get a picture of the history of the Agency. It's pretty remarkable that there are minutes going back to 1902, and they are still there.

MOHR: You know, it's very interesting how those were found. There was a little - you know, one of those corrugated sheds out in the back of the office on 6<sup>th</sup> and Temple that the construction people use? Stuff was just put in there. One day I heard that they were going to

burn it all. I got very upset about that and went at once to the Federation and said, "Before you burn it, I want to go through it." I went through it and pulled out everything that had to do with the Jewish Family Service.

COHEN: Thank you. (Laughter)

MOHR: But there was loads of other stuff from the Federation. Later on, Julius Bisno, who knows an awful lot about the Jewish Community, and is the kind of person who saves things and is interested in history, must have gone through and pulled out all the Federation stuff. He did a lot of work on it. But I had everything that had to do with the Jewish Family Service. Later, some of the stuff that the Jewish Family Service had, did go over to the Federation for their archives. But you'll find it there. It's all documented.

COHEN: I called Martin Ruderman and asked him if he had any minutes of Federation Board meetings. He said that he had nothing that precedes the time when he became the Director of the Jewish Welfare Federation and Council.

MOHR: Well, Julius Bisno will know more. He had emigre minutes back to 1930. I have those, and they were fine. I'd talk to him about what kind of things he has.

COHEN: Yes, I plan to do that, but I just thought that Julius had nothing to do with Federation in those days.

MOHR: Yes, that's right, but later on he did.

COHEN: Yet he's the one who saved all that.

MOHR: Later on, he's the one who collected all that material and had them bound and had them put in pretty good shape. You'll find it.

What other kinds of things would you like me to say?

COHEN: I'd be interested in your ideas in what kinds of changes you have seen in the approach of the agencies from the time you came. You mentioned the changing ideas in the use of the Community Chest and County charities, the BPA (Bureau of Public Assistance). Any other changes in philosophy?

MOHR: Well the changes in the agencies followed the development of family agencies throughout the country. We became members of the Family Services Association of America. We were the first agency in Los Angeles that became a member of the Family Services Association of America. I think you will need to look into the work of the Family Services Association of America. Also, you'll find in the agency, or you should find that periodically, studies were made of the Agency by the Family Services Association of America so that they were re-certified each time. One was done since I left the agency, and Mr. Eisenstadt will have it. Also in the files were all the others.

Now there was a long period of time when they didn't study the Jewish Family Service at all because there were so many other agencies developing throughout the country and throughout the West. They studied the little agencies but not the older ones. But the whole agency development - now, some things we skipped in Jewish Family Service. You know that we were not in a hurry to adopt some things like the "Whole Philadelphia School" and the "Vienna Approach." We thought we'd wait about them. A lot of the things that we never went into were things that were tried by other agencies and dropped. Ours was always a volunteer-oriented agency. We would have workers come with their volunteer background and we'd say, "We're interested in what you have to offer, and we would like to see you practice some of your theories here with the understanding that you do not come here to re-orient our

agency. We're basically Freudian, but we're interested in what you read; we're interested in the intellectual approach, and we can learn from you, but you can learn from us." So we were not in the forefront of taking on every new fad that came along. Jewish Family Services adopted some of the new things that were being done. But we were not ones to make a break like some of the other agencies did. I'm reading a book now, it's *Three Hundred Thousand New Americans*, which is about the emigre program. In there it tells a lot about the different approaches to the emigre. It's a very interesting case history as well as whole feature about what they call their application process, which took a month. That was part of the whole Rankian thing before. We never used that. They did, and they used it with the emigres. But in the end, the authors says, "Not all agencies used this approach, and later they changed it." It didn't really work with the emigres because it had in it inherently the idea that immigrants got to be too secure in the idea that they were going to continue to get help, then they wouldn't do enough for themselves. Some of them needed a lot of security after their Concentration Camp experiences. Even in the whole emigre program - it's interesting: the development here followed the development of the National program that did very much the same kinds of things related to here. When you look at the development of the whole family field, you'll get the special development of our Agency. Since I've left for the past three years, you'll bring your story completely up to date. Read Mr. Eisenstadt's monthly letters to the Board and staff, and in there, you'll see what's happened in the last three years.

A lot of new things happened that are in line with what's happening today. Mrs. Freda Burnside was one of the former field persons of the Family Service of America, and I talked to her over the phone. She's in Washington, D.C., and she mentioned that in the Family Service

Association of America, many changes are being made. Now the suggestion is being made that there be client representation on the Board, just in the same way that there is student representation on Boards of Trustees and Curriculum Committees. So you'll find a more rampant change in the last three years than you'll find in the years before, and Mr. Eisenstadt's letters will tell you that, because it's what happened in the Agency.

I was at a brunch yesterday at which a number of the resident staff were present. In the talk that went around, I could see a lot of things that were different. There was that long period of time when you just didn't employ anybody who didn't have a master's degree from the School of Social Work. Nobody. Now we have volunteers who have nothing to do with special training. Now Jewish Family Service has the best volunteers in the State, and they do have aides, and there are changes.

COHEN: I'm very much interested in that. I want to take a look at that.

MOHR: It's a perfectly marvelous thing and should play a very important part in the history in the development of the agency, and now there's a half-time supervisor for them.

TAHADA: Did you mention the fact that the group therapy was designed for the older members who sat on the Board?

MOHR: Yes. It's all there. All that got developed. But at the beginning, we were really up against it. There's minutes there: the resistance against fees by both the board and staff. Then, you'll find we finally got some money and had a dietician from the State of California come in who went over the budget which was used as a basis for charging fees, and we met: board and staff. It was always a matter of both board and staff. I'll never forget at the end of one of those meetings, one of the Board members said, "Well, we don't have to worry about the budget on



which you based the fees. And everybody, Board - were you at those meetings? Do you remember it? Board and staff felt that they were learning an awful lot about money through these marvelous meeting on how you can set up or stretch the budget through referrals. All the way, from the very beginning when we weren't referring cases to Public Assistance or the County - the rate wasn't good enough - and then the whole business of supplementing came up. That's a long, long story. It took many years. There were two budgets: one for those who were Kosher, and one for those who were not Kosher. That's what was happening, and the Agency moved along. It took a long time for the Agency to realize that we had a responsibility beyond the Jewish Community. What about those people at the County who were getting so much less money than we thought a person or a family could live on?

I must tell you one little story, because it was part of my own development then. You won't remember, because you're too young.

COHEN: Oh, I'm not that young.

MOHR: When the milk used to be delivered in these little white milk wagons, driven by a horse - do you remember that? Well, I had read that if malnutrition did not set in during the first five years of life, it could be cured. Now, we're in the Depression: people are out of work. It said "a quart of milk for every child." I decided that we had to have a quart of milk for every child, and the Board went along with that. The Arden Creamery - Mrs. Birch was one of the leading volunteers - the Birch Family owned the Arden Creamery. We got a special rate. We were distributing in Boyle Heights during the Depression a quart of milk for every family - for every child. The milkman was there to help us. He would report if a family sold a quart of milk or if the right number was left. Well, we knew anyway, because every child was examined every

month in the clinic. If a child did not gain weight, then we knew there was something wrong. Even the Board members would come out: we had "milk checks." At the first of the month, they were rolled in rolls like the bank does, with every member of the family. We were spending an awful lot of money. Finally, some of the people from the Federation who were involved with this too, appointed a commission. We were spending a lot of money. The Federation was giving us this money, so they sent a committee out to look into the matter of milk. We had a card - this is the kind of thing we used to do - we had an index card on every family, how many children they had, and how many quarts of milk they had, and so forth. The Federation decided that was good. The whole Agency gave a quart of milk for every child. Then one day the milkman said, "Miss Mohr, do you have a little time?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I want you to go with me." I got into his milk wagon, and he said to me, "You are giving a quart of milk to every Jewish child. What about the Mexican children? What about the Catholic children? What about the Protestant children?" There wasn't a Protestant agency: there was the Salvation Army; there was Volunteers of America. He took me over in Boyle Heights to a place - we called it "the gully," - where Mexican and Negro people lived. The County wasn't even giving them enough money to pay for gas. They were cooking out in the open air fires. They didn't get any milk. That's when I left the office and went to the Catholic Welfare Bureau. I went on a "milk campaign" in the community, which was really my first step out in the community. For years and years, we got milk from Fresno where they were having a milk war. For years after that, they used to call me "milk person." Any problem that came up about milk - in fact, five years ago, someone called me and said, "We understand that you know about milk."

COHEN: That's very interesting.

MOHR: Then we moved out into the community, and we did things about the County budget. I'll never forget the day that Monsignor O'Dwyer, of the Catholic Welfare - long dead now - finally got involved. Finally the State Relief Administration came down (from Sacramento), and the County said they would help those people. Early one morning, Father O'Dwyer called me and said, "There's a meeting of the Board of Supervisors, and we have to go there." Before that, when the State dropped the Jewish families, we picked them all up, and they went right on our budget, because it was going to be a struggle to get the County to take it over. But the Jewish families were receiving full relief, and the Catholic families were too. (The State Relief Administration used federal money to aid the unemployed. The unemployable were aided by the County.)

So, Monsignor called me early in the morning and he said, "There's a meeting at 9:00. Can you get Rabbi Magnin?" I called Rabbi Magnin - he was at breakfast, and said, "You better come: we have to go to the Board of Supervisors." I will never forget that as long as I live, because there were hundreds of clients that packed the meeting, and in walked Monsignor O'Dwyer (we met at our office) and I quickly told Rabbi Magnin the situation. The three of us walked in there, we passed among all the clients, up to the rostrum, and I never will forget Rabbi Magnin's speech, at the end of which time, the County took all the State Family Relief Administration clients.

This was part of moving out into the community. From then on, as the Community Chest developed and the Jewish Welfare Federation and the Family Service Agency moved into the Community Chest, the Jewish community always played a very important part in the development of the social services in the community. I spent as much time in the community then as I did at

Jewish Family Services. Others of the Jewish community did too, although in the beginning, they referred to me as “The White Jew.” (Laughter)

COHEN: The last time I talked with you, we talked a little bit about Dr. Coles and your differences in services. What happened?

MOHR: Oh, you’re talking about Jewish content.

COHEN: Yes, Jewish content. Let’s talk a little bit about that.

MOHR: Well, Dr. Coles always felt that Jewish social workers did not have enough Jewish content. They weren’t Jewish enough. You see, they really were not trained in a Jewish school.

Dr. Coles was the head of a Jewish School in New York that closed. What you really had were Jewish social workers going to schools of social work, but not in Jewish schools of social work.

Of course, the Rabbis felt keenly that we were not Orthodox enough. The Federation would always prefer the Jewish-German.....

COHEN: Yes.

MOHR: Up to this very day, relationships with the Rabbis have always been uneven. First of all, Rabbis don’t like to deal with women, and second, because they don’t think they’re Jewish enough. The Rabbis would feel that the responsibility was theirs to give Tzedikah (charity).

Now, you’ll need in your history to put something about Jewish content. There are two people that I think know the most - though one person who knows the most about it isn’t here, and that’s Charles Bell. He was a real student of it, and somehow, somewhere, for you to get orientation for the whole problem of Jewish content, I would suggest that you read Dr. Coles, and that you talk, sometime, to Charlie Bell. We’ve had many discussions about this. I always felt that Jewish Family Services, had Jewish content. Year after year after year, the Jewish people

came. Now not all our caseworkers are Jewish. I would say that one of the most knowledgeable caseworkers we ever had was not Jewish in terms of the use of Jewish customs and understanding. You know, in Boyle Heights, we were dealing entirely with the Orthodox Jewish community. We don't get very many Orthodox people among our Jewish population. Not everybody speaks Yiddish. A comparatively small percent of these people keep Kosher houses. We're down to our fourth generation of American Jews. Now I do think that there is a difference. A Jewish caseworker - if she came from an Orthodox background like I did - it wouldn't be true about some of those who did not come from an Orthodox background - when a Jewish mother weeps because her son became a robber instead of a Rabbi, I think there's something about - in my generation of Jewish social workers that understands that.

I would say that you will not find a great deal of Jewish content in case records of Jewish Family Service or the Jewish Big Brothers or the Jewish Community Social Service or the Tzedikah. There's more of it in the East than there is here.

