

RHODA SARNAT
Interviewed in her home
by Frances Lomas Feldman
on October 20, 1998

ABSTRACT:

This interview, conducted on 10/20/98 by Frances Lomas Feldman in Mrs. Sarnat's home, describes her family background, how she entered the field of social work, and her career in Chicago, St. Louis, and Los Angeles. She received her MSW from the University of Chicago, then worked as a caseworker and field work instructor at the Jewish Family Service in that city. In Los Angeles, she was part of a private group practice until she began to work half-time as a field work advisor for the USC School of Social Work in 1962. This became a full-time career when she became Field Work Director in the School, where she remained until her retirement in 1981. Mrs. Sarnat then became a volunteer in various agencies, continuing some of this activity even at the time of this interview. Mrs. Sarnat and her husband, Dr. Bernard Sarnat, have made considerable financial contributions both to the School of Social Work and to other agencies for the purpose of advancing learning in the field through scholarships, research, and workshops.

FELDMAN: Rhoda, tell me a little about your background: where you were born, and something about your family.

SARNAT: I was born in Chicago in 1915, caesarian section, to a mother who was in her early 40s, and a father who was about 45 and already a grandfather.

FELDMAN: He'd been married before?

SARNAT: He'd been married before. My mother was his second wife: his first wife had died. His oldest child, Helen Rubin, was married and had a child at the time I was born. I had two other half siblings: Elsie, who was 12 years older, and Ralph Waldo Girard, who was 15 years older. I was born into a highly intellectualized family. My father was - and I use the word carefully - ingenious. He not only spoke five languages, he went through the entire seminary, preparing to become a rabbi, as was traditional for the oldest boy in their families to do, but when he completed the work, discovered that he was really not a suitable man for a rabbi. He was an agnostic, if not

an atheist. So he quit it and went into mathematics. He taught at the University of Birmingham, in England. He taught mathematics. Then when he came to this country a few years before I was born, with his first wife.....

FELDMAN: Where had he been born?

SARNAT: He was born in Poland, Warsaw. As a matter of fact, his grandfather was the great grand rabbi of Warsaw.

FELDMAN: Then as an adult, he went to England?

SARNAT: Yes, he went to England with his first wife. There he studied mathematics and became a math professor. He was a whiz at math. After she died, he moved to this country, and my mother, who was his first wife's best friend, became his second wife.

FELDMAN: She had not been married before?

SARNAT: No, she had not been. She had been proposed to by many suitors, including the president of Wahl and Co., but she was determined to marry for love and not for money. So she waited until she was about 40 until she got married, which in those days was quite a risk. She was a high school teacher of home economics, and excellent in all those areas. This is why I tended to go in the opposite direction.

FELDMAN: You grew up with three half siblings?

SARNAT: Yes. Now, my brother, Ralph, of course, was an internationally famous person in the field of neuro-physiology, has written many textbooks which are read all over the world, and he too went his way. He was a very brilliant man, if irascible, which I might say, my dad was, too. They both had the same set of genes: British and irascibility.

FELDMAN: Quite a combination.

SARNAT: Not easy to live with. Ralph married Margaret Girard, who was an outstanding

psychoanalyst and one of the charter members of the Chicago Institute. She was also hell to live with. She was wonderful as a therapist, they say, but as a relative? Forget it! She was miserable to her mother and to us.

My sister married Ralph Colton, whose father was a rabbi in Omaha for many years, and he was a lovely, charming, devoted husband. They never had any children.

FELDMAN: You, yourself, were born in Chicago?

SARNAT: I was born in Chicago, and at the age of seven, we moved to New York City. The reason given to me, as a seven-year-old being torn from the arms of my friends, my school, and everything familiar, was the stock market. My dad was invested with Benjamin Graham, who was well known to this day in financial circles. He was the mentor and teacher of Warren Buffet. He was my first cousin, and my dad lent him the money to get started in the investment business. So that's why we moved to New York. We first moved to the Bronx, and we were in Manhattan, then we were in Brooklyn, then, in their wisdom, my dad being retired in his early fifties, decided to spend two years in Europe. They took me along; again, another wrench, and plunked me in a German-speaking, Swiss boarding school called Professor Buser's Tochter Institute, in Teufen, which was in the Alps about two hours away from Zurich, where only German was spoken.

FELDMAN: Did you know German when you went there?

SARNAT: I knew no German. I didn't know "yah" from "nein" or "nein" from "yah." For three weeks I was not allowed to join my classmates in their classes because I didn't know German. So the first three weeks when I was so homesick, I could have died - would like to have died - I was all alone. I would go into the little cubby holes where they kept the piano, shut the door, and cry my heart out. I couldn't communicate.

FELDMAN: How old were you then?

SARNAT: Ten. And why? Because my dad wanted to be in Europe - he knew all the languages. He was very comfortable. They spent three months in Lake Lugano, three months in Lake Como, three months here, three months there. Every once in a while, they'd come back to Zurich. One of the teachers would accompany me there, and I would spend a couple of hours. I'll never forget one lunch: I was crying, my dad was crying, my mother was crying, but back I went. They felt I needed my education and that was the most important thing.

By the time the year was up, I had made such good friends. My two best friends were Hilda Sommer from Frankfurt, Germany, and Yolanda Freuoli from Milan, Italy, which was ironic since we were headed into the Second World War and both countries were our enemies. I always hoped in my heart of hearts that it would help them to have known me, to be a little softer on our country. I never saw either one of them again, although we corresponded for some time in German. And then as those things will, we lost touch.

When we got back to New York, I went to a public grammar school, Number 161, and then to a public high school. But my parents got very irked with the school. They were enormous schools with an enormous impersonality to them. The final tip-off, the final straw was when, after a Labor Day holiday, I was terribly sunburned to the point of blistering all over and pain all over. I got off to school a little late, because my mother had to help me dress. It was almost unendurable to have somebody touch my skin. So I got there about 30 minutes late and was sent to the principal's office and punished. As far as my dad was concerned, that was it.

FELDMAN: How were you punished?

SARNAT: I wasn't allowed privileges and I was scolded. Actually, I should have been patted gently on the back for even showing up, I was in such bad shape. Well my father was absolutely furious, and they decided to shift me to a private high school in Manhattan: Horace Mann. I don't

know if you've ever heard of it.

FELDMAN: I have.

SARNAT: It was a very fine school. The girls were in the Manhattan campus, across the street from Columbia; 160th and Broadway. The boys were up in Van Courtland Park. Never the twain did meet. So all of us - here we were in our teens - we would cut out pictures of handsome boys and put them on our walls.

FELDMAN: Look back to the European schools. Was that for girls only?

SARNAT: Yes. Girls from the ages of 6 to 18.

FELDMAN: So in both schools, you were in a segregated.....

SARNAT: That's right, which was most unfortunate. I was very uneasy with boys at that time, but at the same time, wanting their company very much. I was afraid and shy. I was shy anyway, from birth.

I graduated from Horace Mann in 1930, I believe. Of course, the big Depression occurred in 1929. When my dad lost \$100,000, which was a great deal of money, we had been living in a lovely high-rise apartment at 86th and Westend Avenue and could no longer afford it. That's when we moved to California, where the cost of living was infinitesimal, comparatively. That's what caused us to move here.

FELDMAN: That was 1930.

SARNAT: That was 1930. I was only 15-1/2, and my folks, rightly, thought I was too young for college. So they sent me to Hollywood Secretarial School for a year, where I learned typing, which has certainly come in handy. I could steno and all the other things you learn in a business college. After a year and having attained the wise old age of 16-1/2, I entered UCLA, where I graduated four years later with a psychology major, because I had made up my mind early

that I wanted to go into social work.

FELDMAN: What caused you to decide that?

SARNAT: I really wanted to be a psychiatrist, because from my earliest years, I always tried to figure out why people acted as they did, behaved as they did, felt as they did. It was a burning curiosity. So I wanted to go into a profession that would give me the answers. My folks were not able to support me through medical school and all of that training. I heard about social work through Helen Gruenberg, who was the first social worker in private practice in Los Angeles. She and her family were living out here.

FELDMAN: And she was your first cousin.

SARNAT: My first cousin. As she told me, I thought that's it for me. And that's how I got into social work.

FELDMAN: I didn't realize that Helen had influenced you. I did an oral history interview with her not too long ago, so we have that on file.

SARNAT: I'd be interested to hear it. She didn't realize it at the time: I didn't say it to her, but she opened the door. I must say, I've never regretted it. It's been one of the blessings of my life.

We had to move back - we didn't have to - but we moved back to Chicago. My dad had died when I was a sophomore at UCLA, and my mother - we had a home in Beverly Hills at that time; 301 North Oakhurst Drive. I would get to go to the graduate school in Chicago, which was one of the finest in the country.

FELDMAN: Was going to school your primary reason for returning to Chicago?

SARNAT: Yes. There was only one school, I'd been told, at UCLA. I'd been told that 'SC had a school of social work, but that they didn't have much by way of field work at that time. You probably know about that better than I. That's what I'd been told. I was interested in the field

work; it was an important part of it. And anyway, my mother was just delighted to move back, because her whole family was back there.

FELDMAN: That's what I expected.

SARNAT: She was one of nine children; the oldest girl. Most of her siblings and their families were still in Chicago at that time. So she was very happy. She stayed here so that I could graduate, and then we moved back. The University of Chicago, SSA (School of Social Service Administration), at that time, had a pantheon of a faculty: Edith Abbott, Grace Abbott, Charlotte Toll - these are the gods, and they were all my teachers. I was determined to become a psychiatric social worker, because that's where my interests lay. That's what I hued to and that's what I graduated as. For my first job, I decided in my wisdom, I needed a general background, a generic kind of background. Instead of applying for a job in a psychiatric clinic, I went to a family service agency; the Jewish Social Service Bureau in Chicago, which has a very high standard and gave me the opportunity to work with all age groups, all sexes, families, groups, and individuals.

FELDMAN: Do you remember who was directing the agency then?

SARNAT: Virginia Frank.

FELDMAN: Virginia Frank?

SARNAT: Yes. Virginia Frank. I had an interview with her, and it went swimmingly. At the very end she said, "I'm going to hire you, and it isn't because your sister-in-law is Dr. Margaret Girard at the Institute." I've never forgiven her for that, (laughing) because I suspected it had a lot to do with it.

FELDMAN: Well in 1950, she hired me.

SARNAT: In 1950 she hired you?

FELDMAN: And the only reason, as I understood it then, was because Eileen Johnson sent her a

glowing record of my past achievements, and she wanted to not disappoint Eileen. She was not interested in me.

SARNAT: It was the same with me.

FELDMAN: It's the same kind of thing.

SARNAT: But then, of course, I had a number of supervisors. In my third year, I was given students to supervise from the University of Chicago. It's all in there (her curriculum vitae).

Also, I had the wonderful good fortune to have Esther Shouer as my supervisor. She not only taught me what casework was about in a depth and degree to which I had never been exposed to before, but she enabled me to emphasize with the least loveable segment of the caseload such as the old, orthodox Jews, who were stubborn and narrow, in my view. I had an awful time working with them until one day she said, "Rhoda, think of them as poor devils." I'll never forget that phrase. Then she began to give me some idea of what had made them into what they were. From then on, I had no problem at all. It was amazing how she could do that. She could enable you to emphasize, and truly so. Not just on the surface.

I had my first experience with students. Then, I think it was - I can't remember if we went to St. Louis then or if I had gone to the American Red Cross. I went to the Red Cross because of the War, and I felt I ought to do my bit. I was head of a unit; I had about eight or ten workers under me, and I stayed there for a year or two, and then went down to St. Louis, because Bernie (husband, Dr. Bernard Sarnat) was pursuing his plastic and reconstructive surgery training there.

FELDMAN: You left out one important thing: you met Bernie along the way.

SARNAT: Oh, yes! I met him, of course, through the Shouers. Esther, who was my supervisor, was married to Isaac Shouer, who in his field was every bit as eminent, if not the most eminent; he was Bernie's teacher, friend, collaborator, and mentor. One day, Esther was driving

me from the Westside office, which she headed, to the loop for a case conference with Jenny Zent about a difficult case. On the way - I already had all sorts of secret fondnesses for Esther, but it was all very professional - anyway, on the way, I blurted out, "I've just broken up with my boyfriend." This was a cousin of Bernie Simon, who was a brilliant guy. He was in the same freshman class as Bernie, and got the top grade of anybody ever, but he was also impossible. He had dated me, and I had terminated our relationship. I couldn't stand him. I said to Esther, "I've just broken up with my boyfriend." I'll never forget it. She gave me a quick look, driving, and said, "Do you want to meet someone else?" And I said, "Sure." She said, "I'll give it some thought." I knew then and there, she'd find the right guy. She went home and talked to Isaac, who had a whole stable full of young, professional, Jewish men. They went over them one by one, and they made a list, and Bernie was at the top. There were others that I came to know later. And boy, did they pick right. Shortly after that, the Histology Department at the Dental School - the Histology Department that Isaac was head of, had their annual picnic, and Esther always went to those affairs, and also entertained them at home. She went up to Bernie and she said, "Are you interested in meeting a nice girl?" And he said, "Sure." So she said, "Well, if you are, give me a call. I'll give you her number." And then she told him about me. Well, nobody can write a reference like Esther could (laughing). He did call her, and I'll never forget, by this time she was head of the Northwest Office, and we were separated, but we were friends; we'd meet for lunch. She said, "Rhoda, what are you doing tomorrow night? What are you doing tonight?" And I said, "Nothing." She said, "Well, you stay home. You're getting a phone call." I stayed home, the phone call came - no, I got it wrong. She gave him the number, and a year later, he called her for my telephone number. A year later! That's when she gave me the call and said, "You'd better stay home. He's going to call you tonight." She didn't do things by halves; she followed

up! FELDMAN: He was pretty slow.

SARNAT: Well, he was involved in his work. That came first; it always did. He was very, very busy with research and teaching and writing and all the rest of it. He liked girls, but he didn't have much time for them. He called and told me who he was, and I was very pleasant about it. He said, "Will you go out with me tomorrow night?" At this point, he was a resident in plastic surgery for Cook County Hospital, and it was his night off. I said, "I'm awfully sorry. I'd love to, but I can't. I have a date with a girlfriend," which I did, and I never believed in breaking a date with one person for another. Then he said, "How about the next night?" I said, "You're on." Five months later, we were married. From that moment - and incidentally, the Shouers were away on vacation: they didn't know anything about this - not a day passed when I wouldn't see him. If nothing else, he would drive to my office on the Westside, which is where the Cook County Hospital was, take me home, go back to the hospital. If he had more time, we'd spend the evening together.

FELDMAN: And this marriage only lasted 57 years? (Laughter)

SARNAT: There actually wasn't one day when we didn't see each other, somehow. Betty Bosworth and Berneice Simon and I were inseparable triplets. Inseparable to the point where we all had fieldwork together. In our second year, in Psychiatric Clinic in Michael Reese Hospital, there was a winding staircase that went to the ladies' room. One day, Johnny Alan Guinness, who was our supervisor, whom we worshiped, saw the three of us coming down the steps and she said, "Can't you three even go to the bathroom alone?" (Laughing) I'll never forget that.

Bernie and I hit it off right from the word "go." We got married on Christmas Day, 1941. This Christmas it will be 57 years that we're together.

FELDMAN: That's a very good record. That's a very good record especially for a man who

waited a full year before calling.

SARNAT: That's right. I attribute that he called me at all to Esther. She told him about me. I still can't live up to what she said, I'm sure. Anyway, they were wonderful, they were a very important part of our lives from then on. I think of her all the time, I really do. I miss her.

So, we married. We were in St. Louis for three years while Bernie was getting his plastic surgery training with the number one outfit in this country: Dr. Blair and his group. I was working at the Psychiatric Clinic, where I was lucky enough to have as one of my psychiatrists that I worked very closely with, Dr. Zaslo - George Zaslo. We shared as marital couples, we shared as families, and he taught me a tremendous amount. By the end of that time, I had to quit because we decided to have a family. Jerry was born in St. Louis. When Bernie's three years were over, we moved back to Chicago, where he opened a private practice and started teaching at the medical school and dental school at Illinois. I took time out from work. I worked half time, I think, until we decided to have a second child. Joan came along about two and three quarters years later. By then we had Emma, who was our housekeeper, and one of the other blessings of my life.

FELDMAN: Oh, you got her in Chicago?

SARNAT: Yes. I got her through an ad. It was like a miracle. She was everything you'd want. She was my alter ego, like nobody else I've ever known in my life. She had the same exact philosophy on child-rearing that I did. She was neither too permissive nor too restrictive: she was just perfect. She was wonderful. Jerry adored her. He stoutly maintains there's no connection, but his third child is named Emma. I'm delighted because she contributed a tremendous amount. Jerry was a very tough kid; very difficult. Not bad, but willful and stubborn, and she knew exactly how to handle him. She taught me. She'd sit down next to the open toy box and she'd say, "Come on, Jerry, let's play "put away the toys," and they'd throw

them in. He'd do it with her. He didn't know that he was cleaning up. (Laughter) That was wonderful.

We moved out here again in 1955, really because of the hay fever. Bernie is very allergic and summers were just miserable. I was all for it. I was for anything that would move us back to California. I wanted to so badly. So we came. Emma had to stay because she was married to the doorman at the Palmer House. That was his job. But as it happens, about six years later, they both moved out here, and she resumed working for me until she died.

FELDMAN: Yes, I remember her.

SARNAT: We lent her husband the money for her burial, and he paid every cent back. What else? You don't have to ask me many questions.

FELDMAN: No, because you're on the right track. You're telling me about what you've done and about why you did it, and now you're back in California in 1955.

SARNAT: Yes, and I joined a private practice group - how did I happen to do that?

FELDMAN: It was established by NASW?

SARNAT: No, we ran our own. They were psychologists and social workers, six or seven of us and - oh, I know - one of the members of that group used to be at USC somehow, so it must have been later, and he asked me if I'd like to join. I did; it was very good. I did all the intake, and I carried a caseload. And then I was home with the kids.

FELDMAN: How did that work, being part of that group? Did you have common quarters?

SARNAT: Yes. We all had offices in one building. It was at Beverly and Robertson.

FELDMAN: How did the clients come to you?

SARNAT: Word of mouth.

FELDMAN: Did they come to the group, or were they referred to individuals?

SARNAT: We had a sign, incidentally, in the window. It was called The Psychological Service Center of Los Angeles. People would see that sign, and they would come in, or by word of mouth. Somehow, there was a steady stream. This is where this girl I told you about (on different occasions) that I spent a good part of my life chasing after: she saw the sign.

FELDMAN: Oh, that was that a fortuitous thing.

SARNAT: Absolutely fortuitous. She decided, "I have to get some help, somehow. Let's see what they can do for me." She hit gold, if I do say it myself.

FELDMAN: Then, did you bill separately? I'm trying to see how this group operated. Or were you all independent? You shared the same facilities.

SARNAT: Yes, we all shared the same facilities, we each had our own office. I would do the intake. Then I would present it at staff meeting. Each one would decide, "I would like to work with that person." They were self-selections. There was no superior that made the assignments.

FELDMAN: So you worked on a collegial basis, and you were collaborating with each other in a variety of ways?

SARNAT: Yes. We had a psychiatrist, whose name I can't remember anymore, who we'd go to if we had a problem with understanding or any problem on the case or needed drugs. He would always see the person, have an interview, and then decide if he could be helpful with drugs. I worked there for a number of years, until I - I think it was one of these people who told me about USC. I can't remember his name, anymore, but he was the advisor. He said, "You know, you'd like it there. They're all nice people." So I went and applied. The Dean was Malcolm Simpson.

FELDMAN: Malcolm Stinson.

SARNAT: Yes, Malcolm Stinson. I applied to him. He snapped me up. I was an advisor of

students there until Morrie Hamovitch made me field director for many years. I was there half time, most of the time, while the kids were little. It worked out beautifully.

FELDMAN: And what did you do in that half time?

SARNAT: Half the student body were my advisees. I would, when I first came, ask permission of every faculty member - I must have done it with you, too - if I could sit in on their classes, so that I would have some idea of what the students were talking about when they would come in when they were having problems of any sort in the classes. Then I'd have some objective way of evaluating it. I would call conferences with all the classroom teachers - oh, this was before I was director of field work - Jo di Paolo, of course, was my boss, and I did advising: everything from helping students relate better to their classes, to working out problems with their instructors.

FELDMAN: Did you work with the agencies where they were placed?

SARNAT: I was liaison for a bunch of agencies, as were many other people.

FELDMAN: The faculty still had assigned agencies for which they were responsible?

SARNAT: Yes, and I had them too. Then when I became Director of Field Work, I had this whole group of liaison people. When there were any problems, I called meetings: faculty people, the advisor, the student; all would sit in. At first I thought, "Gee, how are we going to work with the student right there?" It turned out it was invaluable, because it brought together in a cooperative relationship the beginning of working things out.

FELDMAN: Let me back up a little. I know that you were a volunteer with the Mental Health Survey of Los Angeles County..

SARNAT: This was before I got to USC.

FELDMAN: Yes, when was that? Was that while you were still in private practice?

SARNAT: Yes.

FELDMAN: That was concurrent?

SARNAT: Yes, yes. I remember, I would interview heads of agencies to try and find out what they were doing, what their goals were - I forgot what all was involved. You would know through Al (Albert Feldman, the Director of Health and Mental Health for the Welfare Planning Council).

FELDMAN: The purpose of the Survey was to find out what resources we had in the arena of mental health; what we needed. Do you think this experience was helpful when you came into the School of Social Work?

SARNAT: Sure it was; very much so, because I already had my fingertips on a whole bunch of agencies and the directors of the agencies and the field instructors. It was a perfect lead-up to that job. It really gave me an advantage.

I can't remember any bad times. I really can't. Some agencies and faculty were more cooperative and some were more giving than others. I remember Helen Northen was never very giving, but I understood that she was limited in that way, so I did what I could with her. It was interesting, because students would come with complaints, and I would never get into the position of being a complainer, but rather, see what we could do about the problem. How do you see the problem? What can we do to work it out? And it worked out. It was good experience for me. It was wonderful background.

FELDMAN: How long were you part time?

SARNAT: I can't remember exactly. I think when both kids got into school, I went full time. Joan was born in '48, and six years later, in '52, she was in kindergarten. Jerry, of course, was already in full-time school, and we had Emma. I can't remember exactly. I tried to figure it out in that curriculum vitae there, but I can't.

FELDMAN: You came into the School, and you worked under the supervision of Josephine di

Paolo. She was Director of Field work at that time, and Malcolm Stinson was the Dean.

SARNAT: And Malcolm Stinson would come around almost every morning, "Let's have coffee." I used to think, "Dear God, don't let him come anymore. I've got work to do. How can I tell the Dean that?"

FELDMAN: His mode of working was really to have conferences over coffee and get to know people that way.

SARNAT: I could never turn him down unless there was an emergency of some sort.

FELDMAN: When did you come full time to the School? In your biographical statement, your C.V., you said 1962. Is that right?

SARNAT: Yes. That's when I came to the School as an advisor.

FELDMAN: Oh, I see. It says here '62 that you were hired by USC and then from '61 to '75, you were in private practice in Beverly Hills while you were working in the School.

SARNAT: Right. So I must have been part time.

FELDMAN: Yes. Then in 1975, you went full time to the School of Social Work.

SARNAT: That's when I became Director of Field Work. I think I was full time before that, but I can't remember exactly.

FELDMAN: So you became Director of Field Work. How did your job change as Director of Field Work?

SARNAT: All the liaison people to agencies reported to me. The one new thing was that I conducted weekly training seminars for field instructors, which gave me a teaching opportunity. I had regular conferences with all of the liaison people. I'd be involved - I would have the last word in approving or disapproving new field instructors. The agency would recommend somebody; I would interview them, look at their background and decide yes or nay. I would visit

all new agencies, all new applicant agencies, and study them to decide whether we would use them or not.

FELDMAN: By this time were faculty still assigned certain agencies to work with, or was it all being done by the field work divisions?

SARNAT: I think the faculty still was doing some liaison work. They weren't too happy about it, a lot of them. They thought they had many other important things to do. It did shift over time, but I can't remember exactly when.

FELDMAN: When did Carl Shafer come into the picture? Wasn't he involved?

SARNAT: He was Field Work Director before me.

FELDMAN: He followed Josephine di Paolo?

SARNAT: Yes. That wasn't a roaring success.

FELDMAN: No, he didn't like that.

SARNAT: No, he didn't enjoy it, and I think he got out of it as soon as he could.

FELDMAN: So, you really followed him?

SARNAT: Yes, and I think Maurie was seeing it, and he.....

FELDMAN: Maurie Hamovitch?

SARNAT: Yes, and I've never gotten over that he had enough confidence in me to give me that job.

FELDMAN: What did you do after retiring from USC?

SARNAT: I went to the Senior Health and Peer Counseling in Santa Monica. It was headed by Monika White. They had a group of lay people who visited the frail and elderly in their homes and took them to the doctor and helped them with their life. I met with them once a week and supervised them until, once again, I got to the point where my defective hearing was just in my

way, much to their sadness. I had a wonderful relationship with all of them: they just would glow. I loved them, every one. I quit.

FELDMAN: After how long?

SARNAT: Three years. Then, somehow, I forget why I went back, and I'll never forget their faces when saw me back. I stayed for a few sessions, but again, I simply couldn't hear. I explained to them that it was not a rejection of them at all. I even had a sign with a megaphone saying, "Speak Louder!" I put it down. But what happens inevitably is when you got involved with what you're saying, you forget about the hearing. Like maybe I am with you now. But it just didn't hold up. So once again, I was through. The only volunteer work I'm doing now has nothing to do with speaking or with listening. I do all the talking. I present travelogs to OPICA. I've been doing this.....

FELDMAN: To whom?

SARNAT: OPICA. It's the Older Persons in a Caring Atmosphere, and what it is is a large group of very old, decrepit - almost as decrepit as I am - people - it's a day-care center for the frail elderly, is what it is.

FELDMAN: Where is it located?

SARNAT: At Missouri and Barrington.

FELDMAN: In West Los Angeles.

SARNAT: Yes, West of Barrington on Missouri. I went there and began presenting travelogues once a month, and I've been doing that since '83.

FELDMAN: Those are your own travels?

SARNAT: Yes. My own travels, yes. Some of the people are sleeping, some of them are pacing, some of them are in another world, but I go happily on. I do all the talking, so I don't have

to worry about hearing. When it comes to questions, Lynn, who's the one in charge - she's become a good friend - she's up there and she acts as intermediary. It's amazing, when I don't come because I'm on a trip or I'm sick, which is infrequent, they ask, "Where's the picture lady? Where's the picture lady?" And this from people who sleep through it. (Laughing)

FELDMAN: It probably helps them sleep more soundly.

SARNAT: Yes. So I'm still doing that. That's about all I am doing. No, I'll tell you something else. You know Ann Golenturnik?

FELDMAN: Yes.

SARNAT: I happened to sit next to her at an affair for the Hebrew University, a fund raiser, and she asked me what I was doing. I told her I'm not doing much. And she said, "Why don't you come to the Beverly Hills Library from ten to noon on Mondays where we go through books - shelving books - and you don't have to hear. There's nothing involved in hearing. We'd love to have you. So a week ago Monday, I showed up. I was never so exhausted in my life. It means, lift, put up or down, walking back and forth a million times with the books. I came home, and I've had a sore leg ever since. (Laughing)

FELDMAN: Well, it's not funny, but.....

SARNAT: Anyway, I called her. I didn't go last Monday. Frankly I forgot all about it, and I called her today to apologize. I said to her, "I cannot do that." She said, "We don't intend for you to do that. We're going to sit you at a desk and teach you how to price books." They sell a lot of the books. "You don't have to move, just come." So that's what

FELDMAN: Are you going to do that?

SARNAT: Yes.

FELDMAN: There's one phase of your volunteer activities that you haven't mentioned, and that

is the Los Angeles Zoo and the animals.

SARNAT: Oh, yes.

FELDMAN: You have a comment on that in your C.V. Tell us, because the person who hears you or sees your interview, will be interested.

SARNAT: Yes. I was a docent for ten years, loved every single minute of it, made a friend who's a lifetime friend through it, because she and I happened to sit next to each other at the teaching sessions. They gave us a course that lasted quite a few weeks; about 26 weeks, I think. We happened to sit together and hit it off. She lives in the same part of town I do, so we'd have lunch together, and we became best friends. In '92, I decided that the faces of the animals were beginning to look too much like my family (laughing), so I discontinued it. But we're continuing our relationship. For example, we were down there not too long ago to study a South American tapir, a \$5,000 contribution was needed. We still support it. I want to continue to be active there.

FELDMAN: What kind of work did you do as a volunteer at the Zoo?

SARNAT: I guided school children around the Zoo. They would come with their teachers. My way of doing it was to first ask them what kind of animals they were particularly interested in knowing about. I'd try to figure out a path that would include all the animals that they were interested in. It was impossible! I would tell them that we'd have to cut some of them out. Usually, the elephants, the tigers and the lions, these were the ones. We would tell them about these animals. We had studied them. I had books full of notes on them, big notebooks, and depending upon how interested the visitors were, we'd tell them more or less. Some were, some weren't. Mostly it was school children on field trips.

FELDMAN: I see in your kitchen, where we're conducting this interview, that your wall is covered with pictures of animals.

SARNAT: These are mostly from the Zoo, but not all. But I've always loved animals, and this is my compensation. I can't have any animals any more, so this is the way I had my animals.

FELDMAN: Now when you traveled, which you did quite extensively, did you focus on animals in your travels, or.....?

SARNAT: Wherever there was a zoo, I would go to it. I also went on safaris in East Africa, South Africa, Kruger National Park. We went to South America, we took an Amazon cruise: there were a lot of animals. A number of our trips had an animal focus.

FELDMAN: And these are the pictures that you show now in your monthly sessions as the "picture lady."

SARNAT: Yes, yes. I have about 65 different trips and 60 or 70 slides of organized zoo animals by different species. I don't show them those, because I think that's too much for them. They're not really that interested. But if I show them Africa, then the animals are part of the trip.

I loved going to the Zoo, and we've made a connection with the new director when we were down there for the tapir. Took us in one of their little carts, took us all over and showed us their renovations.

FELDMAN: Rhoda, besides being a paid professional and being an unpaid volunteer, you have made considerable contributions, you and Bernie, in the broad field of social welfare. Can you tell me a little about those?

SARNAT: Well, there's a Rhoda Sarnat Prize for the mental health section of the Institute of National Academy of Sciences. Can I get Bernie? He's in the next room.

FELDMAN: Sure.

SARNAT: I think he's better at this than I am.

FELDMAN: We're being joined by Dr. Bernard Sarnat, who has come in to help us think about

the kinds of contribution the Sarnats have made to the broad field of health and welfare. Bernie?

DR. BERNARD SARNAT: Well, several years ago, we established the Rhoda and Bernard Sarnat Endowment in University of Southern California School of Social Work. That was some ten years ago, or so. There's a Rhoda Sarnat Lectureship, and also a professorship award as well as a student loan fund. This is recorded, I'm sure, in the School of Social Work, in case you need the specific information. A third place that Rhoda's contributed is the National Association of Social Workers, to improve the....

SARNAT: Image.

DR. BERNARD SARNAT:image of professional social work, nationally, and a prize is awarded each year for that. That's been going on for several years. More recently, a lectureship has been started at the Los Angeles Home for the Jewish Aged, and the first lectureship will be delivered next month, in November. Then, in addition, for many years, Rhoda has contributed to the University of Chicago School of Social Administration, to a student loan fund there. I think that summarizes up to 1998.

FELDMAN: I can think of two more things. You contributed to the Hamovitch Research Center....

DR. BERNARD SARNAT: That is correct.

FELDMAN: which was a substantial sum, and the Sarnat Lecture that's held every year, is now coming up.

DR. BERNARD SARNAT:which I did mention. I think there's a student scholarship fund which Rhoda established some years ago. That takes care of the social welfare areas, I think, pretty much.

FELDMAN: Well, that's pretty good, I think. It's nice to have contributions that continue in

various ways.

DR. BERNARD SARNAT: We've established the Sarnat Center at Brandeis University for the Study of Anti-Jewishness. This is in the endowed fund, which will run in perpetuity, because, I think that anti-Jewishness is going to be around for a while.

FELDMAN: There's a new institute started at USC on the study of Jews in the Los Angeles area in Southern California. These things do go together.

Rhoda, now that we have looked at your history, and your continuing contributions of various kinds, as you look back over the years, what do you think were the most gratifying things about being in social work, in or out of the School of Social Work?

SARNAT: As I said earlier, it enabled me to understand people, their motivation, why they acted as they did, good, bad or indifferent, which was a thirst that I had. Of course, the bonus along the way was the people that I met in this field. Certainly I did it for money, and I did it for glory, but I did it because I wanted to offer the world something to make it a little better. I made wonderful friendships. Like all professions, it has many aspects to it, so that you can find the corner that suits you no matter what it is in terms of human relationships. I don't know what else to say. I treasured it: I always think of it in terms of the five blessings that are wonderful. Bernie's another one, Emma's another one, the kids are another one, and social work's right in there.

FELDMAN: That's a very nice point on which to end. I thank you very much for this interview.

SARNAT: It's a pleasure.