Interview with Selig Adler, SUNY Buffalo State Oral History Project, 1975-1995

Interviewer: Sister Martin Joseph Jones

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Transcript

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: This is June the 23rd, 1982. I have with me Dr. Selig Adler, distinguished service professor emeritus at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Good morning Dr. Adler.

Dr. Selig Adler [00:12]: Good morning.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Now we’re going to get into these questions and believe me I think we have enough here to keep us busy for about four hours, usually I have about eight and now I have about eighteen. So, let’s start. How far back does your memory go?

Dr. Selig Adler [00:28]: I think the first thing that I clearly remember, at least I think I remember, it was the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And what was the impression, how horrible it was or?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:02]: Yes, how horrible it was.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And even as young as you were you knew that something was going to come from that, just listening.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:10]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Because of the adults around you.
Dr. Selig Adler [01:13]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did it come over the…it was the extras I suppose. How did you get that?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:18]: Yes in those days the newsboys hawked extras every hour and I remember then hawked extras on our street in which we lived.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Now that brings up to mind your early childhood. I know your records show that you were born in Baltimore.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:40]: Correct.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Your memories…I know your books say, you have a younger brother.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:49]: A younger brother, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you lived with your mother and your father. What are some of your memories of your childhood? Did you have a happy childhood? What about your family, your education, your impressions of life, your religion?

Dr. Selig Adler [02:06]: Well we came from an extremely religious household. My childhood was marred by two things: one was my father had his first heart attack at the age of forty-seven and then he continued to work and died when he was fifty-two. But those five years were very tense years. I was extremely devoted to him. And the second thing, my childhood was marred by a good deal of poverty except for the World War I years, my father didn’t make much of a living and we had to [unintelligible word] and scrapes. And I think it was made all the worse by the fact that we had all the rich relatives.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you still had a good education. You mentioned the other day that your father had a tutor come in for you.

Dr. Selig Adler [03:18]: A tutor yes [unintelligible word, Hebraic?] studies. As little as he made, he found the $9 a month that he paid this elderly gentlemen to come in a tutor my brother and myself in Hebrew and Bible and Talmud.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you go to public school?

Dr. Selig Adler [03:41]: I went to a public school, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You mentioned one time to me too that you lived near or across the street from Cardinal Gibbons?

Dr. Selig Adler [03:49]: No.
Dr. Selig Adler [03:50]: I think what I mentioned was this: when I was in junior high school and I think that was in the beginning of 1920 and Cardinal Gibbons last years, the cathedral was very near this junior high school. And during recess I also saw him walking with a cane, a high hat above his red skull cap and he always stopped to talk to the children.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And did they enjoy talking to him too? They didn’t mind?

Dr. Selig Adler [04:29]: Oh it wasn’t an awful lot of detailed conservation about involved theological, fortunately it was just small talk. A very friendly man.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You were a good student I’m sure.

Dr. Selig Adler [04:43]: I was not in public school or high school. I had my start when I was motivated by a good teacher, my work would go up but my high school record was rather dismal because I spent so much time with my father to whom I was extremely devoted and I knew he was very sick and he had heavy sample cases and I would carry them for him. I missed a great deal of time whereas my college work was all good and my high school work was not.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see. Would you like to comment on your father’s personality? What kind of man…how would you sum him?

Dr. Selig Adler [05:38]: Well, he was a very small thin man and I don’t think he ever weighed more than 120 pounds. Although he was a traveling salesman traveling throughout the south. He had a good German education and he was extremely intellectually curious. He spent so much time on the trains and the lonely nights in the hotels and small southern towns. He was an [unintelligible word] reader of history and current periodicals and newspapers and he was extremely well-informed. He also had a marvelously good Jewish education. In Germany, he had attended a seminary in Hirschberg, Bavaria, and he knew a great deal of Hebrew and Talmud.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And what did he sell?

Dr. Selig Adler [06:45]: Shirts, men’s shirts.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh for goodness sakes. Then he, according to your own opinion of what you said, he could have been a teacher himself couldn’t he? Or he could have gone…

Dr. Selig Adler [06:55]: Yes, I think he would have been a good one, but he was after all a German immigrant and he travelled on the road because that was a way of observing the Sabbath, he didn’t have to work on Saturday.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh thank goodness, so he chose that to be…that’s how devoted he was.
Dr. Selig Adler [07:19]: Yes, about all of his brothers that he had, he had five brothers and they were mostly traveling salesmen for the same reason. He was away from home a good deal of time and in the trump summer I would travel with him, especially in later years when it became difficult for him to carry his sample cases and I would go along and help him.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you didn’t consider that a chore at all, you thought it was privilege.

Dr. Selig Adler [07:49]: No, I did it very happily.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Was your brother close to him?

Dr. Selig Adler [07:52]: No, my brother was not. My brother who died in 1981, a younger brother, he was what you would call a rather wild boy. [He] ran away from home. But he settled down eventually. He was a sixth-grade dropout, but he was successful here in Buffalo until 1958 and then he moved to Miami and then received many prizes for being the most successful furniture salesman in Florida. The last time I was in his house shortly before he died, he had one room filled with trophies, he had ones for salesmen and gold trophies and my mother always said if you could mix my brother and myself up and divide into two you would get two human beings. I was not athletic, he was very athletic, much more outgoing than I am, but late in life he made a tremendous success.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: For goodness sakes, were you ever close to your brother? Did you have the opportunity?

Dr. Selig Adler [09:18]: In later years, but he was so different in younger years and I was not particularly close to him but after our mother died in 1975 at the age of 99, he lived six more years, we were very close.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see. And you had mentioned you had gone to Florida and that was the reason why you went down to Florida to see your brother. Now your mother, what did she look like? Was she small or was she tall?

Dr. Selig Adler [09:57]: She was small and rather stout. In her earlier years, she weighed over 200 pounds but then when she was fifty-three she had cancer of the intestines from which she completely recovered after an operation and she lost a good deal of weight and never regained it. But the cancer never returned and she died of old age. She was redheaded.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh for goodness sake.

Dr. Selig Adler [10:32]: Fairly.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Very fair then.

Dr. Selig Adler [10:35]: Fairly, sharp temper.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you’re rather tall, where do you get your height?

Dr. Selig Adler [10:43]: I think my father had some very tall brothers and my mother’s brothers were all tall.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see, so on both sides you have…

Dr. Selig Adler [10:54]: But my father’s mother was both short people.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I’m not going to ask you about your lineage because it’s written down, you know that, and there’s no sense in repeating that because that can be given. I know in those earlier years with your parents, am I correct in saying that you were probably a little bit closer to your father than your mother?

Dr. Selig Adler [11:17]: Yes, I was, but after my father died I became extremely close to my mother.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I think, and perhaps you will confirm this that you were so aware of your father’s short life expectancy you wanted to get as much as you could from your father while he was still living.

Dr. Selig Adler [11:36]: Yes, I think that’s a fair evaluation.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Wow, that’s beautiful. You don’t regret one moment of those years that you were…

Dr. Selig Adler [11:45]: Well I only regret that unlike like myself…gone to doctors, gone to every legitimate and perhaps some illegitimate occasions, my father had a [unintelligible word] doctor and he never saw a doctor about this heart condition. In those days, coronary heart disease was not well-known. They called it acute indigestion and I always regretted that I didn’t force him to see a doctor. I tried many times, but without success.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, that is something that you can’t undo. You’re hind-sighted is always better of course or he would be here. Let me see…when you said that you travelled with your father, could you comment on those experiences? What did you…I know that you mentioned that you stopped and you stopped at places and visited historical places.

Dr. Selig Adler [12:45]: Yes, after the days, work was done we would very often visit Civil War battle fields. My father was very well read in history, even American history.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, he had to read up on that didn’t he?

Dr. Selig Adler [13:03]: Yes and you see there was no air travel at that time and there were long train rides and he read and read all of the time. He was extremely well-informed.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And he was interested in the country in which he lived and he wanted to know the whole background of it and he wanted to give back to you too.

Dr. Selig Adler [13:23]: He was well-versed in European history too.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh I’m sure! Do you recall any outstanding places that you visited or are they just all one collage?

Dr. Selig Adler [13:35]: Well there were places like Charleston where the Civil War began at Fort Sumpter. I remember visiting the famous battlefield at Petersburg, Virginia. I remember the train and the Pullman porter [?] would say on the right if you looked out the window you’ll see the place where Stonewall Jackson was killed in 1863. There was so much of that I could go on and on for.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: It was a collage. But you can that it was there that you got your love for history?

Dr. Selig Adler [14:21]: I think so, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you didn’t realize it at the time is that right?

Dr. Selig Adler [14:25]: No I did not.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You just took it in. Did you have any idea at that time what you were going to do when you grew up or you [were] just going to let each day take care of itself?

Dr. Selig Adler [14:33]: Well, all of the Adler’s had been traveling salesmen and I didn’t have any idea beyond that. When he died I tried it for a couple of years and I hated it and I wasn’t very successful.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you leave school to do that?

Dr. Selig Adler [14:54]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh my goodness.

Dr. Selig Adler [14:56]: I left at the end of my junior year in high school and let’s see…the end of 1925 to the Fall of 1927 I travelled all over the South on my own but I was a failure at it.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You just were not a salesman.

Dr. Selig Adler [15:17]: I was not a salesman unlike my brother, he was another sharp contrast and he was said to be the best salesman in the State of Florida.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Goodness, that’s something. When your father died, that was a traumatic experience wasn’t it?
Dr. Selig Adler [15:37]: Extremely traumatic.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: He was alone when he died.

Dr. Selig Adler [15:40]: Yes, he was on a sleeping car from Charleston, South Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida. I can’t say that I was terribly surprised, but it as a shock anyway.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You weren’t with him.

Dr. Selig Adler [15:59]: No. It was during the school year, I wasn’t there.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And they had to notify your mother.

Dr. Selig Adler [16:06]: Yes. Well, his body was taken off in Savannah, Georgia and he had a sister who lived there.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: For goodness sake.

Dr. Selig Adler [16:17]: And they opened his suitcase and found a volume of the Talmud because he would study every night before he went to bed, so they knew he was Jewish and they informed the Rabbi there. Not knowing it was her brother, they informed my aunt who had taken of such things before and she identified the body.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: For goodness sakes, she didn’t know that was her brother until she got there.

Dr. Selig Adler [16:53]: No.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Well that must have been a shock for her too then.

Dr. Selig Adler [16:57]: I think it was.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Then he would return to Baltimore?

Dr. Selig Adler [17:02]: Baltimore.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And that’s where he is buried?

Dr. Selig Adler [17:04]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see. Then what happened to the families then after your father…you said you stopped school.

Dr. Selig Adler [17:12]: I stopped school and went on the road and my brother took a job at a wholesale dry goods firm in Baltimore.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That was when he quit school.
Dr. Selig Adler [17:24]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Then your mother was just at home?

Dr. Selig Adler [17:27]: Yes. She never worked.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did your brother live there with your mother in Baltimore?

Dr. Selig Adler [17:31]: Yes, he did.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But then you returned and it mentioned in your biography that you went to New York and finished your school in New York? Or did you finish in Baltimore?

Dr. Selig Adler [17:44]: No. After it was apparent that I would never make a salesman, and my family, some of whom on both sides were in comfortable circumstances. They saw that I also improved my Hebrew education and also finished high school, so they sent me to New York for a year, which I did both and then I came back after that year. In the Fall of 1928 I entered UB as a freshman.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Your mother in the meantime had moved to Buffalo.

Dr. Selig Adler [18:24]: Moved to Buffalo. A sister died and her mother who was elderly needed care so she did that without my knowledge, in other words she made a decision without consulting me and my brother I suppose. And she just moved up here with her mother and one remaining stable [?] sister.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you brother move with her?

Dr. Selig Adler [18:56]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see. Were you staying with relatives in New York?

Dr. Selig Adler [19:00]: No. I had an apartment with two other fellas.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You did? That was unusual back in those days, wasn’t it?

Dr. Selig Adler [19:10]: Well it was probably because [unintelligible word] person, we didn’t live in great luxury.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you all…did you live with two other Jewish boys?

Dr. Selig Adler [19:18]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see. So, it was a common bond there too. You lived near the synagogue I guess and did you go to public school?

Dr. Selig Adler [19:23]: Not near one, near fifty.
**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** [Laughter] I see. Did you enjoy your high school days there or did you find it difficult?

**Dr. Selig Adler [19:34]:** Well, as I said there I had a very mediocre high school record and I went to the [unintelligible word] High School, well I guess it would Bensonhurst and at that time they were very, very strict. It was a high school that prided itself on its performance and it was a tough year.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** I missed though, where was this high school? Not Manhattan or Brooklyn?

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:09]:** It was in Brooklyn.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** In Brooklyn.

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:10]:** In a place called Bensonhurst.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Bensonhurst.

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:13]:** From Bay Parkway.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Is that still there?

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:16]:** I saw it about a year ago.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** It is still called that? The same name?

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:21]:** The [unintelligible word] High School.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** For goodness sakes. And you came back…you finished school.

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:25]:** Yes, I came back and went to UB.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** You didn’t have any trouble getting into UB?

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:32]:** No, not at all.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** That’s good. At that time you decided that you were going onto college.

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:37]:** Yes.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Evidently, there was something in you that you recognized that you did want a college education, but you didn’t know what you wanted to do?

**Dr. Selig Adler [20:47]:** It was that, but you always have to remember that unlike today and most people worked on Saturday, the best day of the week from a business point of view. I
noticed at [unintelligible word] high school there were a number of observant teachers who were teachers because it was a way of keeping the Sabbath and I think that was my main motivation.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Oh wow, for goodness sake. What were your impressions of the college when you went there the first time?

**Dr. Selig Adler [21:26]:** Well, I’ve often said it, with all the millions of dollars that the State has spent on UB, if we ever could get back to the quality of education in 1928, it would be a goal, it would be far beyond our expectations. College was small, Chancellor Capen had come six years before. He chose his faculty very carefully, unlike today there was an ordered curriculum. I enjoyed my UB years very much.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** There weren’t as many buildings, that was on the Main Street campus?

**Dr. Selig Adler [22:19]:** Main Street campus.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** I might suppose the surrounding weren’t as crowded as they are now.

**Dr. Selig Adler [22:25]:** No.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** It was way out in fact, wasn’t it?

**Dr. Selig Adler [22:28]:** For instance, Lockwood Library had not yet been built and the library was upstairs in Hayes Hall, but most of us lived in town and night after night I would trudge down to the Grosvenor Library, which was really the university library although it was downtown.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Yes, it was used more I suppose and by the university people more than anybody. Let me see…you weren’t an athlete you said, so you didn’t have anything to do with athletics on the campus?

**Dr. Selig Adler [23:07]:** No, I had practically all A’s and I failed in a compulsory gym and the only way I graduated was by special dispensation from the Chancellor.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** You did?

**Dr. Selig Adler [23:23]:** All A’s and a F.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** [Laughter] Oh! Dr. Adler that must have look ridiculous!

**Dr. Selig Adler [23:28]:** Yes.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** You just really weren’t an athlete.
Dr. Selig Adler [23:32]: That was at and also partly this compulsory gym was hard for anybody. There was a fella named Tommy O’Neil who taught it and he was a sadist and one time he threw me across a leather horse that they had there and I remember Joe Manch, long time superintendent of schools in Buffalo, he was an athlete and in the end, he said you just try and punch Joe and see if you can make an indentation. And it was like hitting a brick wall.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: [Laughter] Oh that is something. So, you were glad to get rid of that weren’t you?

Dr. Selig Adler [24:25]: I was.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes. I have some names down here I picked up here and there from your biography. Would you like to comment on certain people? I don’t know whether you would want to but what were your impressions of Capen? The famous Capen?

Dr. Selig Adler [24:43]: Well I knew Dr. Capen first as a student and then I was on the faculty for many years when he was still Chancellor. He didn’t retire until 1950. He was a typical liberal, Yankee, Unitarian, school master, and [he] was a very, very sharp person. He could make things appear democratic, but he always got his way in faculty meetings. They air was one of extreme democracy, but I never saw him lose out.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: For goodness sakes, the iron hand with the velvet glove.

Dr. Selig Adler [25:33]: Yes. He was very liberal in social matters but he was extremely Conservative in economic matter. He never voted for Rosenblum [?], he voted for [unintelligible word] in 1936.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: He said that?

Dr. Selig Adler [25:52]: Yes. There was sort of an avant-garde faculty, some of them were, and it cost him a good deal in contributions because of the extreme liberalism of some of these faculty members. I once heard him mention it and then he planted his fist down and said this probably cost me $2 million which was a lot of money in those days, but it was worth.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: He stood for his own ideas, didn’t he?

Dr. Selig Adler [26:33]: Yes. You see, he had been a professor of German originally and Lare Freinheit [?] and Lanne Freinheit [?], academic traditions in Germany before Hitler, this was long before Hitler, and he believed in academic freedom. Although, there were limits to his tolerance., I recall…

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: He wasn’t prejudice, was he?

Dr. Selig Adler [27:10]: No, I don’t think he was prejudice except in favor of the kind of liberalism that he had found, but there were limits to his liberalism. When I was in school, a
member of Modern Languages had taught Italian had been picked up by the police and had been charged with molesting a male and Capen dismissed him immediately and he never met another class. A group of faculty members, again the avant-garde, suggested that he be given classes of all girls, and Capen again, his beard stuck out and he slammed his fist down and said, he will never meet another class in this school. So, there were some limitations on his liberalism.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** For goodness sakes, but he did get along…I mean, he was respected and feared.

**Dr. Selig Adler [28:20]:** Oh highly. And a very striking looking man, I wouldn’t call him handsome, but he had a Van Dyke beard which was unusual for those days. He was the only man on the campus to have a beard.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** So they all recognized him I guess [Laughter].

**Dr. Selig Adler [28:39]:** And he was extremely well-dressed and I often heard him say that he represented the university and he always had to be extremely well groomed.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Well that’s a good point, isn’t it? There were other names mentioned in your biography, such as Julius Pratt, Horton, Shear, Kurr [?], Julian Park, and others, do you remember their names?

**Dr. Selig Adler [29:13]:** Well, Will Pratt is still living in retirement in New Jersey and I am in constant correspondence with him, he is 94 years old. I would say that he is one of four or five greatest living American historians. He was a jewel in the crown of UB and he changed the interpretation of American history on four five vital points. He did more to scare me into history more than anything than anybody else. John Horton is still living at 79 in Buffalo.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** He is?

**Dr. Selig Adler [30:02]:** He was a magnetic teacher. I see him very often and his classes sparkled. Wilfred Kurr, died young. He was a Canadian, a man of some prejudice, very-stout prejudices.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Alright, we were speaking about Kurr.

**Dr. Selig Adler [30:35]:** Kurr, Sheare another typical [unintelligible word] professor. He was the librarian of the Grosvenor and he professor of History. And you see, the university didn’t have much of a library at that time, but because Sheare was on the faculty he opened the Grosvenor to UB students and it was really the university library and a very good one at that.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Yes, it was one of the greatest in the country I believe even its considered?
**Dr. Selig Adler [31:20]:** I have worked at innumerable libraries and I never worked in a more comfortable place than the Grosvenor.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Yes, I understand, of course it was gone by the time I got here, but I understand the reputation of the place is phenomenal.

**Dr. Selig Adler [31:35]:** It was a phenomenal library.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** All of these men you admired greatly and they influenced you and other people too I’m sure there was a great number of people going into the…

**Dr. Selig Adler [31:48]:** Oh yes. It was Pratt who got Richard Hofsteter [?], one of the poets of [unintelligible words], into history. One thing I regret is the time, a little after my retirement, Pratt wrote me a letter saying of all his students he was most proud of Hofsteter [?] and myself and foolishly I destroyed the letter. I should have put it in the Pratt Papers at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Why did you do that? Because you have your scrapbook.

**Dr. Selig Adler [32:29]:** I don’t know why I did it. I don’t know just a minute of thoughtlessness.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Yes, because you didn’t throw away a lot of other things.

**Dr. Selig Adler [32:40]:** No.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** My goodness, but that’s something you can recall, but you know you don’t have proof there.

**Dr. Selig Adler [32:45]:** I can hardly ask him to write it again,

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** No, my goodness. Well, is there anyone else that you would like to comment on?

**Dr. Selig Adler [32:56]:** Well Capen had a very good faculty and he had at least one strong man in each division who was both teacher and a scholar. There was the late Martin Farber in Philosophy, an international reputation in [unintelligible word]. There was Nat Kantor in Sociology who died rather young, but a Socratic teacher, kind of prolific scholar. There was a controversial, Daniel B. O’Leary, in Psychology, I guess it was not O’Leary, I guess it was Leary, I can’t remember for sure. I don’t think so much of his scholarship but he was a well-known. There was Henry Tenite Ferry and Oscar Silverman, in English, they were more gifted teachers than they were scholars. Harry Gaiman in Mathematics, I could go on and on. But, you see, they paid very little there. But, Capen had an electric spark, he had charisma, it was a nice place to work and people stayed here despite the small salary and despite other physical handicap because of the collegiality of the place.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: The camaraderie I guess and the love that was there.

Dr. Selig Adler [35:55]: Yes, something that doesn’t exist today on the Amherst campus.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, that’s too bad. Well, we are going to come back to UB because I want to keep this sort of chronological. Long and around this time you met Janet, right? Would you like to comment on that? Do you remember when you met her the first time?

Dr. Selig Adler [35:14]: Yes, I do remember. It was in the Fall of 1930, we were introduced at the Grosvenor Library and I think I became attracted to her because Buffalo was never much of a town for Jewish tradition and while she was not by any means Orthodoxy, she was a Hebrew School teacher, and she knew the holy lingo as we call it, and that was a natural attraction. We were married in 1936 because of the Depression, our marriage was delayed.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh goodness it certainly was a long time. She was going to school?

Dr. Selig Adler [36:13]: Yes, she was a freshman and I was a senior.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh my. And when she continued her education while you went on to…

Dr. Selig Adler [36:22]: To Illinois.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Illinois and that was okay, she waited.

Dr. Selig Adler [36:25]: She always worked while she went to college. She’s either been teaching at religious schools or principal as she is now.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Where did she go to school?

Dr. Selig Adler [36:40]: UB.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: She went to UB.

Dr. Selig Adler [36:42]: Yes. And I always tell her she’s been working at that temple from Coolidge to Regan.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: [Laughter] Well she went to the college…as a young girl did she go to the campus school here?

Dr. Selig Adler [36:57]: Yes. She lived on Richmond Avenue and Buffalo State was then where Grover Cleveland is today, was almost around the corner and so she went to the campus school.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I see. And then when she finished…she went to high school there too?
Dr. Selig Adler [39:18]: No, she went to Lafayette [High School].

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Then Lafayette to UB. What was her major? Education I suppose, wasn’t it?

Dr. Selig Adler [37:24]: No, her major was history in college.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh! She changed that after she met you?

Dr. Selig Adler [37:34]: Possibly.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: So, then after you left UB you went to Illinois.

Dr. Selig Adler [37:43]: I had a fellowship there.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, how did you manage financially at UB? Did you work? How did you...did you get a scholarship?

Dr. Selig Adler [37:49]: No, I didn’t work but I got a scholarship and friendly uncles help.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You know I think it’s remarkable how you developed, you just budded so to speak because…and I bet that surprised you yourself didn’t it? Or did it, you know that you’re an intellectual? [unintelligible words] increasing more and more.

Dr. Selig Adler [38:13]: Yes, I think I was surprised.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you know you had a lot of history already in you, the knowledge of history from your father and your traveling and it just added on to it didn’t it?

Dr. Selig Adler [38:27]: Probably.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes. That’s great. Then you went on to Illinois, did you enjoy your stay at Illinois?

Dr. Selig Adler [38:32]: Yes and no. You see, today there’s no limit to how long you can get an assistantship or a fellowship. They had limited it lately, but people take six or seven years in which they are subsidized, but during the Depression they would only subsidize you for three years. So I had to get that PhD in three years.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Your masters and PhD.

Dr. Selig Adler [39:07]: Yes, masters and a PhD. I worked very, very hard and of course it was the depth of the Depression and I had very little money to go by. In addition to my scholarship money, I received loans from various Jewish foundations all of which I paid back eventually.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s wonderful. You didn’t do much travelling back and forth then to Buffalo did you?

Dr. Selig Adler [39:42]: I came back for the winter vacation and the spring vacation.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I would think you would be doing a lot. Did you have any trouble finding your subject for your dissertation for your paper?

Dr. Selig Adler [39:57]: No I discovered it myself. I had come across a man named George F. Edmund who was a senator from Vermont for 25 years, a very important senator. I became interested in him; my dissertation sponsor had never heard of him. But he was, among other things, the real author of the Sherman Anti-Trust Vac [?], Sherman did not write that. And he was the main man who settled the electoral controversy between Hayes and [unintelligible] in 1876-77, author of the Electoral Commission act and many other things. I picked out that dissertation.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: What is your title? The title?

Dr. Selig Adler [40:57]: The Salutatory Career of George F. Edumund, 1866-1891

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did that eventually become a book or…?

Dr. Selig Adler [41:08]: No, cannibalized it into articles.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Then at that time too you discovered or had you known that you were a teacher? Because you taught too, didn’t you while you were going to…?

Dr. Selig Adler [41:20]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you enjoyed it.

Dr. Selig Adler [41:23]: Yes, I enjoyed it very much.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You mentioned yesterday to me that you didn’t know of anybody else that had graduated with the degree…

Dr. Selig Adler [41:35]: Summa cum laude and a MA and a PhD in about five years and ten months. But I don’t give myself as much credit as I do the times. The times were incredibly hard and there was a limit to the amount of student loans that I could get and I had to get out and make some money.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You were well, too weren’t you? Your health was holding out pretty well, and were you strong?

Dr. Selig Adler [42:06]: I was never particularly strong and I was easily fatigued, but I would work and rest and work and rest and I got the work done.
**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** You had a natural leaning towards that so you enjoyed it, I mean you didn’t mind doing that.

**Dr. Selig Adler [42:26]:** No, no.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Then when you came back and forth, I suppose you and Janet had been corresponding?

**Dr. Selig Adler [42:30]:** Yes.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Very good. And then when you came back from Buffalo, you applied a couple of places for jobs and you didn’t?

**Dr. Selig Adler [42:39]:** I didn’t get them.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Now where did you apply? Here at the college?

**Dr. Selig Adler [42:43]:** Well, there was nothing open here yet. But in those days Dr. Rockwell was an extremely prejudice man who made no [unintelligible word] about his prejudices and I don’t think there were any Jews or Catholics on the faculty, say nothing of black. I applied for the job that a Dr. Peterson eventually got, I didn’t even get an interview.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** For goodness sake, did he tell you?

**Dr. Selig Adler [43:22]:** Oh, he had made so many speeches about his prejudices, you didn’t even have to guess what he thought. I wasn’t even treated civily.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Goodness. You got a letter from him though saying that you weren’t…or did you call and ask for an interview?

**Dr. Selig Adler [43:43]:** I tried to get an interview and I never got one.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** So you knew then it wouldn’t be.

**Dr. Selig Adler [43:50]:** Yes.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Then you went to UB and they just couldn’t afford to hire you?

**Dr. Selig Adler [43:58]:** Well, what happened was UB and the Depression, it was so broke that the faculty had to take one third reduction. So they said, if we are going to keep open we have to reduce salary by one third and incidentally that was not restored until 1946 after the war. So, I had no choice but to take the Buffalo High School examination, 125 took it and 8 were appointed and I headed the list, I came out first.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Goodness so you had first choice of what school you wanted?
Dr. Selig Adler [44:43]: No, I didn’t.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You didn’t have any choice.

Dr. Selig Adler [44:45]: It was up to Dr. Robert T. Backs [?] who was worse than Rockwell and he sent me to the reservation as they usually call Grover Cleveland High School and he should have sent me to Bennett or Lafayette training would be college students. At Grover Cleveland nobody ever went to college.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And why did they call it reservation?

Dr. Selig Adler [45:19]: Well you know, Indian reservation.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you worked there a couple of years?

Dr. Selig Adler [45:26]: I worked there from 1934 to 1943, in the meantime I had started to teach UB [during] nights, summers, and afternoons. Gave a seminar in the afternoon.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you got married then too.

Dr. Selig Adler [45:47]: Yes. And then in 1943 and 1944, Dr. Pratt was away on war duty and I took his place. But then when he came back they still didn’t have money for me. And so I went to Kensington High School but remember at the same time, I was teaching night school at UB twice a week, I was teaching summer school, and then in 1947 they finally got enough money, $3,000 to hire me as an assistant professor.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Now is Janet working all this time too? Did she continue to work?

Dr. Selig Adler [46:35]: Yes, she worked and to this day.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: To this day. Now, your years at Grover Cleveland, were they different from Kensington?

Dr. Selig Adler [46:45]: Well Kensington was a better high school and I have to use some pull to get to Kensington after I came back from UB.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Why do you suppose…was it just the pull of strings going to Grover Cleveland or was it the neighborhood where the cooler people lived?

Dr. Selig Adler [47:03]: Well it was fifty something years ago and it was 98 percent Italian and the Italian hadn’t become acculturated yet. There were rough boys, I remember the first day I got there. One fella gave me an awful lot of trouble and one of the female teachers said, “He is the worst boy in the school they’ve given you your homeroom, the worst and the toughest. There’s
only one thing to do with him, wait until he is in the electric chair and laugh when they pull the switch.”

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Do you know whatever happened to him?

Dr. Selig Adler [47:52]: I saw him not so long ago.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: He turned out alright.

Dr. Selig Adler [47:58]: Not too bad.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Well, you mentioned one time in talking that you had more Italian students and Irish teachers. That must have been quite a combination there.

Dr. Selig Adler [48:11]: Yes. They didn’t always get along so well.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: No. Would you say overall that you didn’t really enjoy those years too much, or did you enjoy? What were your impressions of those years?

Dr. Selig Adler [48:21]: Well, money meant a lot in those days. I started at $1,600 a year [and] I thought I was a millionaire. I bought a car, new clothes, but I was frustrated because I was trained to teach on the college level.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you knew eventually you wanted to get to the college [level].

Dr. Selig Adler [48:50]: Yes, and I kept writing.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: When were your children born? Helen and Joseph.

Dr. Selig Adler [48:57]: Helen was born December 25, 1939 and Joe was born August 25, 1944, both born on the 25th.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: On the 25th, yes, one was on Christmas.

Dr. Selig Adler [49:17]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And where were you living? Where did you live? You lived on Bird Street?

Dr. Selig Adler [49:25]: Bird Avenue. That was with my grandmother and then after I got married, we had two apartments in different ends of Richmond Avenue and from there we moved to Auburn Avenue near Delaware and then out in the Hertel section until we stayed until 1975. Then out to Amherst where we still lived.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Your mother stayed on Bird Avenue with your grandmother.

Dr. Selig Adler [50:00]: As long as she lived.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: As long as she lived, she stayed at that homestead I guess it was. Was your mother born there?

Dr. Selig Adler [50:09]: My mother was born in Buffalo, September 29, 1876, she was born on Bennett street way downtown. At that time, North Street was the city boundary.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s right, isn’t that amazing, North Street, that’s still downtown as far as we are concerned, that’s very interesting. Now we are down to question ten, what were your first years, what are your first years at the university? When you went back I’m sure your attitude was a little bit different than it was as a professor and a teacher.

Dr. Selig Adler [50:47]: I enjoyed it very much. I was almost a new man and this coincided with the veteran influx and I had extremely large classes and I can hardly go around the city of Buffalo today without meeting somebody who was in my class. I taught a great many lawyers, judges, physicians, everywhere I go. Some newspaper reporter when I retired, I don’t know how accurate his [unintelligible word] was, he said if you figure out…the teaching assisting I did in Illinois, night, days and summers at UB, and high school. I had classes of often 800-900 students; he figured out I taught 60,000 students.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s pretty good! One of the questions you prodded me to ask you which I was going to right now, how did you manage a class of 1,000? You had that many in one class? It must have been an auditorium.

Dr. Selig Adler [52:08]: Well, I can’t say for sure if there were a thousand, but there were certainly 800-900 and I had draft ten assistants and I never marked all of those papers. And we would give multiple choice exams and some had [unintelligible word]. And I always had what I called my Madame, usually a female doctoral student who was in charge of my office and I had sort of suite in Crosby Hall on the first floor with my own seminar offices, seminar room rather and I was point one head assistant and she would run the assistants and they would take care of office hours, except that they would refer difficult cases to me.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: What was the subject in which you taught? American history?

Dr. Selig Adler [53:21]: Survey of American History, diplomatic history which I taught after Pratt retired. In the good old days I had 200 but not 800-900.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: So you just lectured?

Dr. Selig Adler [53:42]: I lectured with a microphone. I had somebody who came in who always adjusted the microphone around my neck, but I always managed to get in some lectures. Then we had some quiz sections run by the assistants and so we got some discussion in.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: The students didn’t mind that did they?
Dr. Selig Adler [54:12]: No, I don’t think they did at all. I think if you know how to do it, you can teach 900 as well as one hundred.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you had their attention? You didn’t have any trouble?

Dr. Selig Adler [54:25]: No, never.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I guess the students were serious about it, they were there…

Dr. Selig Adler [54:29]: Yes, especially the postwar veteran influx were very serious.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you notice the difference in the students through the years ever?

Dr. Selig Adler [54:37]: Yes, the difference came with the student upheaval of the 1960s, we lost ground that we never regained.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Now, through those years too you took part in as a member in committees and you were a very busy man. You were doing a lot of community work, you were writing.

Dr. Selig Adler [55:03]: Writing.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You were teaching.

Dr. Selig Adler [55:05]: Teaching and lecturing.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you ever find yourself chasing yourself or meeting yourself going the other way [Laughter]?

Dr. Selig Adler [55:13]: Well, there were times when I was very tired, there’s no question about that. But I was pretty busy.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You found it a challenge, though you enjoyed it. You were happy doing what you were doing.

Dr. Selig Adler [55:28]: Yes, I would say so.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: The next question too was, how did your health affect your professional life?

Dr. Selig Adler [55:37]: Well I was never a strong person, although as I told you yesterday, I didn’t have my first serious illness until I was sixty-three. But, I was easily tired and I didn’t have an awful lot of pep.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Maybe you were sick and you didn’t realize it?
Dr. Selig Adler [55:58]: Well if you never find out, I don’t know.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you did an awful lot despite your fatigue.

Dr. Selig Adler [56:06]: I did an awful lot and yes, when I told my wife of our conversation yesterday, she said, “You were always in bed at 9 o’clock and never got up until 8 o’clock in the morning.”

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But that meant you needed that.

Dr. Selig Adler [56:23]: I needed the rest, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: If you hadn’t then you wouldn’t have done it. It’s crazy, our bodies tell us what we need too. What about your lectures? You mentioned yesterday but I would like to have it on tape though, what were the subjects of your lectures? What got you into the lecture field?

Dr. Selig Adler [56:47]: Well, what got me into it was mostly that I needed the money. Academic salaries were very modest at that time and I was asked I think the first on the panel I went was Rochester, I used go every Wednesday night for ten years, as a lecturer at a synagogue there.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you develop a class, a particular…?

Dr. Selig Adler [57:23]: Yes, my lecturing career was pretty well-divided between Jewish subjects and foreign policy or something like that.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: May I insist on the Jewish subjects, was it dealing with the historical connotations of Jewish life?

Dr. Selig Adler [57:46]: Yes, the earlier stuff.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh okay, I didn’t know if it was religious.

Dr. Selig Adler [57:50]: And, in October 1955, I addressed I think the largest audience that I ever addressed in my life. It was a Hadassah, a women’s Zionist organization, a national convention in Chicago. It was a hit. I was so busy after that travelling for Hadassah for many, many years. I was also…I signed up with lecture agencies in New York and Chicago, but I went all over, all over.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: While you were doing that did you realize also that it was good to have it in a file, in a professional file?

Dr. Selig Adler [58:48]: Yes, because every year at the end of the year, the department wanted to know how many lectures you gave and what you had been doing throughout the year. So, I always kept a record of it and I suppose that record exists somewhere.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: When you did this, when you turned in the report, could you turn in the religious reports too because it was educational as well, it was historical a matter.

Dr. Selig Adler [59:17]: Yeah.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s good. And your class schedule permitted you to do this, you were submitting on time.

Dr. Selig Adler [59:24]: Yes, I always had Tuesdays off so I could go away. In those days you could travel at night on sleeping cars, so I could go to New York on Monday night and lecture Tuesday night and take the midnight back to Buffalo and be back Wednesday morning. It was the same thing with Boston and Chicago.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: So it worked out very well. That’s very interesting. Would you like to reflect on some outstanding experiences that you had at the university? What were your main concerns, committee work? I’m sure that’s recorded somewhere but I wanted to know if you would like to talk off the top of your head.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:00:12]: Well I guess my busiest years at the university were the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That was your peak.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:0022]: The university decided at that time, the chancellor was the nominal head, but I was vice president of the faculty senate and I chaired for many, many, years on the Committee of Educational planning. I was very, very busy and I was also on the Executive Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences, never held any administrative posts.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Did you enjoy your committee work or did you resent the fact that it took you away from your research time?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:01:04]: Oh, partly. I was very intimately connected.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You mentioned that you were closely connected with the merger of the college.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:01:20]: I was the faculty representative on the merger and my duty was to look out for the interests of the faculty. There was some opposition on the part of the faculty and I had to overcome the opposition.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You were in favor of it.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:01:41]: I was in favor of it, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Why?
**Dr. Selig Adler [01:01:46]:** Well simply because I thought that Chancellor Furnish was about as good a representative to the Buffalo community as you could kind find. He was a very genial, jovial, man and he was able to unloosen every possible dollar. But you see, the big money in Buffalo, the holders of that, they had gone to the ivy league colleges, once more they saw of UB as sort of a ban of radicalism which it really wasn’t by the 1950s. But, for instance, in 1952 there then a man named Thomas McConnell who was Chancellor. And a group of us endorsed Stevenson and he was very angry and he called a faculty meeting, and he said, “Don’t you understand how hard it is for me to collect money from the industrialist all of whom wanted Eisenhower, if you people go around endorsing Stevenson,” and furnish never went that far to reprimand the faculty, but he had difficulty in collecting money and Furnish convinced me that we would go under if we didn’t become State.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Yes, financially. That’s the reason given, I mean everybody says that’s the reason given, that it was financial.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:03:46]:** In those days I was in Albany almost every other week and I remember one time coming and this was before the actual merger took place. And I was to tell Dr. Furnish to increase salary, this was many December, retroactively to September, and he couldn’t believe me. And you see this was the heyday of Nelson Rockefeller and there was no end to the money. He was a man who once made a speech and said, “Now the average American making $75,000 a year.”

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Rockefeller [Laughter].

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:04:38]:** And there was a lot of money there, there seemed to be no end to it and we were anxious to share, at least I was.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** And it went through. When was the actual merger?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:04:55]:** I think it was September 1, 1962, twenty years.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Goodness, 1962. And then course the sixties began and that was kind of hard on the university.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:05:08]:** Very, very hard. On one day, Friday March 15, 1970, I saw out of my office window, I saw students with ski masks break into the registrar office and steal records. I saw students burn rare Spanish books, just broke into the rare book collection and made a bonfire. I saw them burn a police car and there was nothing to do but be occupied the way we were. You remember, forty-five faculty members broke into the president’s office and tried to occupy and they were arrested. Then they called me up and had bail for the forty-five and I said, “You mean jail for the forty-five?” [Laughter]

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** Did they stay in jail? What happened?
Dr. Selig Adler [01:06:24]: Well in the fall of 1970, Robert Ketter took over as president and I had a fair share in his selection and I remember one faculty member who not particularly a radical, but he had been out of the country for a year and he was frightened, and he to Ketter, “My president, don’t you understand, students will not barricade to cross the campus,” and I said, “They will be reduced by our superior fire power then.” And we opened up after much hesitation and we stayed open. But these wild, wooly, and unpleasant days.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Well, Ketter then has been president then for a longtime then wasn’t he? Chancellor?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:30]: Yes, eleven years.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes and he had been on the campus.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:33]: He has been on the campus, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And he is going to continue to be on the campus. He is a relatively young man.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:42]: He is fifty-four.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh he is just his forties.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:45]: Forty-one.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: When he became president?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:46]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s very young for a president of the university, isn’t it?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:50]: Yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: My goodness!

Dr. Selig Adler [01:07:53]: I doubt if he ever comes back but he is wise to retain his association, there’s nothing else.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: For goodness sake. So, those were the…that sort of memory stands out in your mind.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:08:15]: Yes. I can remember when Ketter became president and I was one of those who urged him very strongly on the Buffalo business group. And I think I had something to do with the selection but for months there had been students of both sexes lined up. They would sit in the entrance hall to the president’s office chanting the worst obscenities that
you can think of, the very worst. And the president had to go through all of that and had to clean that up in a week.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: He did?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:08]**: Yes. Meyerson, they just…

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: Given up.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:11]**: Given up on this thing.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: That’s too bad. And you saw a lot of changes then probably from the time that you were a student to the president.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:21]**: I certainly did.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: Now all of this took place on the old campus, didn’t it?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:29]**: Yes.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: They moved over to the new campus not too long…

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:32]**: Well we moved in June 1974, the history department.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: 1974, yes. So Ketter saw…he went through the terrible sixties.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:46]**: No, he didn’t take over until 1970.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: 1970.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:09:52]**: Shortly after Kent State, but that was May 4, 1970 and we couldn’t even finish school, we have to send the students home, we just gave them grades without exams.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: Without exams, that must not be easy [unintelligible word]. He was there at difficult times, cleaning up after the Kent State, [unintelligible words], the Vietnam situation and then moving over to the new campus.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:10:25]**: Yes.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: His years there were very difficult years. That would test anybody wouldn’t it?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:10:32]**: And of course the economy, the money petered out.

_Sister Martin Joseph Jones_: You have to give it to him, my goodness, the man had a lot against him.
Dr. Selig Adler [01:10:42]: He accomplished a great deal. In retrospect, I think he should have made even more changes while the iron was hot and I think also he should have consulted the faculty more.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Was he a hard man? I mean he was tough, wasn’t he?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:11:06]: He could be tough, I never found him tough.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You always got along with him.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:11:10]: I got along with him. In 1959, when Pratt retired I became Samuel P. Capen professor and then 1975 I got my Distinguished Service Professorship.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That was under Ketter?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:11:26]: Well, not the first one, but the second/=.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Not the first one, but under Ketter the second one.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:11:30]: Yes and he pushed it. These things are not easy to come by and he pushed it a great deal. I always got along very well with him.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That was a lot of work getting that, that’s a great deal of work going [unintelligible word], getting a signature, you’ve got to have a committee working with you, you’ve got to get letter and all…

Dr. Selig Adler [01:11:48]: And after I got it, I was put on the committee to grant it in Albany. Remember all throughout those years I was travelling back and forth still do.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And you were never though, per say, an administrator, you were never given the title of an administrator.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:12:09]: No, I was once acting head of the department for three months.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Were you ever approached to be an administrator?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:12:18]: No, never was.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Do you feel sad about that, that you weren’t?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:12:23]: No. I think that they felt that I was primarily a teacher and it would be wrong to take me out of the classroom.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: So you didn’t resent that?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:12:33]: No, not at all.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s good. You’ve had some happy years at the university.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:12:39]: Very happy.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: As you look back, do you have any regrets?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:12:45]: Well, you’re bound after so many years to have some regrets. Of course, I needed the money and undoubtedly the amount of time I put into lecturing cut down on my research productivity, but as you can see from that book, was still four books and maybe thirty-five articles and countless reviews. I addressed many meetings of the American Historical Association and you always regret that you didn’t accomplish more. You might say to me, “Why don’t you write now?” Well my health will not permit it. It’s hard work.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: I think that it’s unique though. I might have the desire to write, but it’s getting the ideas…you have the ideas as well as the ability to write and that’s wonderful. That’s a gift.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:13:57]: And of course I directed so many doctoral dissertations which took a lot of time.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, now when you directed the doctoral dissertations, didn’t the students have to get the subject themselves or did you help in that collection? That’s hard work too.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:14:14]: I would say, three quarters I suggested and a quarter maybe they came up with.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Well that is remarkable because being able to pinpoint subjects.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:14:30]: Well it’s not so remarkable. I taught the survey course in American history almost to the end and I always jotted down an idea when it came to my mind and I kept it in a file and most of them worked out.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh okay, I see. Right now, after working on an Indian selection, you could probably suggest.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:14:57]: Two or three.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: They just make [unintelligible word] selection.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:15:00]: Also, the society of [unintelligible word].


Dr. Selig Adler [01:15:06]: Which is my favorite.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, your favorite. You’re going to get that one yeah I think Dr. Adler, we’ll try that before both of leave here, maybe we will get that. That’s very good. I think you’ve answered this question but I just want to ask for the record. What part did your religious commitments have in your life? What place?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:15:48]: Well it always had a very strong part. I was always active in local and national affairs. I served on the New York State Kosher Law Board for twenty-seven years, which took me to New York once a month. I am a life member of the Executive Council of the American Historical Jewish Society. That took me quite a bit of time and my religious commitments were so wide, I hardly think I have time to go into them, but they were both on the local and national level.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Of course you’re famous for your…among Jewish circles particularly, *From Ararat to Suburbia*, your history of the Jewry…Jews in Buffalo.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:16:38]: You might ask why I wrote that.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, why did you write that?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:16:44]: With an Irishman, Thomas E. Connolly.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes [Laughter].

Dr. Selig Adler [01:16:48]: Well, I was writing my major opus, the isolation [unintelligible word] and the tercentenary of Jewish settlement was coming around and the Jewish Federation put a great deal of pressure on me and foolishly I tried to write two books at one time and teach and lecture and I sort of broke under the strain. My doctor told me I would need a collaborator. I did the research really, it was paid research assistant, and I would write a rough draft, and Connolly would polish it.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: How did you get Connolly? How did you meet him?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:17:44]: He was a next-door officemate.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Oh at the university?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:17:49]: University, yes.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s interesting! And he helped polish?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:17:55]: Helped polish it yes. And he wrote some of it and I polished. I don’t think it was…

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: He wasn’t Jewish though was he?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:18:02]: Oh no. A fervent Catholic, just about as Catholic as you can be.
**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** [Laughter] For goodness sakes, but it came out alright, it did well.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:18:12]:** And I think there was a certain objectivity to it. It has been cited many times as a model Jewish community, a history. I would say I get more correspondence on that book than any of my other books.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** When I read it, that was one of the first books I read when I came to Buffalo by the way, I was taken by it. I thought, my goodness how did people get all of this material, I was really quite impressed with it. There’s a lot of work behind that, of course you had your research assistant.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:18:53]:** Well I think it has been a success, and I think it had been, is mainly due to the fact that I was one of the very few authors who knew both American history and Judaism. A lot of them just knew American history and they made ridiculous errors in the Jewish context. And some of them knew the Jewish content but they didn’t know American history.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** I thought the title was quite [unintelligible word] how did you get that?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:19:29]:** I did not make up that title. There was an advertising man who now lives in California by the name of Manis Roden (?) and he came up with the title.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** It’s catchy.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:19:45]:** Yes.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** You could have just said, the Jews in Buffalo or the history of the Jews in Buffalo.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:19:48]:** No, we wanted something different.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** But it was very good. And is it still selling?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:19:55]:** Yes, it is still selling.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** That’s excellent. How about your family life? How is that? You have a son and daughter and you said that yes, you educated them, they loved education.

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:20:09]:** I sent my daughter to Barnard and my son first to the University of Pennsylvania and then for a PhD at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland. But you see, all of this would not have been possible without the money that I made from lecturing.

**Sister Martin Joseph Jones:** My goodness, you made more from that than your teaching?

**Dr. Selig Adler [01:20:36]:** Well I wouldn’t say that, but it helped.
Sister Martin Joseph Jones: It helped. I asked you yesterday and I’ll just put this on the tape, but I asked if it interfered with your family life and you were saying the family is very happy that you could do this because it helped them and it helped everybody.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:20:53]: I wasn’t away that much. I went away for a couple of days, a week, a month.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: And they were busy with their activities too.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:21:03]: Yes, I don’t think it had an effect.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: It was a close-knit family, your children are very close to you, your son and your daughter. Your daughter lives in Michigan and your son lived in New York City.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:21:16]: Staten Island.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Staten Island and he works as a social counselor?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:21:19]: He couldn’t get a job in history because he got out just when the history field fell. So again, he went to NYU and he got an MA in Rehabilitation Counseling and that is what he is doing. My daughter has a MWS from the University of Michigan and she is a Social Worker. And so is my daughter in law, a very talented social worker.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Is that right? Is that how your son met her?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:22:03]: Yes…no wait a minute, they met at Western Reserve, but when she was in social work and my son was in history but later on he went onto social work.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Well maybe she influenced him.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:22:19]: I think probably.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: That’s good. Does he enjoy his work?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:22:22]: It’s very hard work and relatively low pay and advancement is very slow. An awful lot of competition and for the few jobs and supervision that there are, and of course I think he is frustrated he wanted to be a history professor.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Yes, and I guess he wanted to do research too, took after you. Well, looking back though and we all do this as we get older, we look back and think, “Well what have I done with my life? How do I go onto the next [unintelligible word]? Have I left a good life behind me?” And I think you can say that, can’t you?
Dr. Selig Adler [01:23:09]: Yes, I think so. So, I told you yesterday, apart from being plagued with a good deal of ill health, I think I would have accomplished much more. And I have to work, I didn’t have the energy, I had to push myself.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: But you know, you’ve left your career, you’re retired, you’ve left your career with a knowledge that you have made education for many people a little happier or a lot, because they enjoyed your classes, you were an excellent teacher, you contributed a great deal to research in your field and to the reputation of the university you were situated. All in all, you’ve had a very rich life.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:24:00]: I don’t have major regrets.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: Very good. Is there anything you would like to add? Any reflections you would like to record?

Dr. Selig Adler [01:24:11]: No, I really don’t think so, I think you’ve covered it all.

Sister Martin Joseph Jones: You think so. Well thank you very much.

Dr. Selig Adler [01:24:16]: Alright, thank you Sister.