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**Oral History Project  
Interview Transcript**

**Sarah Hirschman  
Interviewed by Linda Arntzenius  
November 5, 2009**

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*Linda Arntzenius:* It's Thursday, November 5, and I'm here at 16 Newlin Road to record an interview with Sarah Hirschman at her home, for the Archives, the Oral History Project, at the Institute for Advanced Study. First of all, before we talk about the Institute, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about yourself. You were born in 1921 in Lithuania, but your parents were Russian, I understand.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, Russian Jewish family.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And why were they in Lithuania?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Because under the Tzarist regime, Jews could not live in the center of Russia and they all lived in outlying areas.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So the family had good reason to move to Paris.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, that had nothing to do with moving to Paris. They moved to Paris for other reasons because they wanted to move from Lithuania and go to Paris.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And that was when you were 4.

*Sarah Hirschman:* And I was about 4 and a half, I think.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you remember that move?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, yes. Yes, I remember. I remember a lot of things about Lithuania.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Can you tell me something of your time there?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, you know, my grandfather was sort of important in the community and so he could do things for me. He put some sand in the park because I liked to play in the sand. *(Laughter)* And I had nice little friends, and I saw my first ballet there. I remember that very well.

I remember the apartment, the house. We all lived on different floors of the house, my grandfather and us, and so yes, I do, a few things.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Were you an only child?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, I was only child.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Were you a reader then as you are now?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Am I what?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Were you a good reader then as you are now?

*Sarah Hirschman:* At 4?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Not yet.

*(Laughter)*

*Linda Arntzenius:* Not yet. Okay.

*Sarah Hirschman:* No. But, you know, I had lots of fairy tales told to me by my Russian nurse, but I did not read yet. I learned that in France at school.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Having grown up in your formative years in France, do you think of yourself as French or as Russian or as American?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, I'm afraid I can't think of myself in any distinct terms like that because I don't really – I belong everywhere and nowhere, you know. We're a people without too many roots, so. *(Laughter)*

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Is that something that you share with your husband? Does he –?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, he has a completely different history from mine.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, at 18 you studied with Simone de Beauvoir, I read, and I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about her, what you remember.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, she was my – in the French school of that time, after you passed your first entrance exam to a university, you had one more year in high school, and it was either science or philosophy you could choose, so I chose philosophy and I got her as a teacher because in France there was this very good system that the people who would later become a very famous professor had to start their career by teaching.

They had to teach in high schools. So either – you know, if they were lucky, they got a job in Paris or if not, in the provinces and so on. So Simone de Beauvoir, who was already well known, not nearly as well known as later, but she just became my teacher of philosophy in the last year of high school, so I had her. I had her

like in the kindergarten, just one teacher all day long (*Laughter*).  
And so –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. (*Laughter*) Was she a good teacher?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, no, she was not a good teacher in – you know, in the conventional way. She did not prepare lessons, and she sort of chatted on about what had gone on in the café the night before, but it was very stimulating.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I bet.

*Sarah Hirschman:* So it was very interesting and gave us the desire to learn more, which is, after all, important.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And this was a rather turbulent time. Did your parents shelter you from knowledge of what was going on in Germany at that time, would you say?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, but, you know, people didn't know nearly as much as they do today or that they knew later. You couldn't quite believe what you heard and so no, they didn't shelter me particularly, but we didn't talk about politics ever in my family. My father didn't believe in that and so –

*Linda Arntzenius:* What did your father do for a living?

*Sarah Hirschman:* He was a businessperson, so – and he didn't – and I did not – I ate with my family in the evening, but otherwise my life was very independent of them.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So how did you feel when your father, I take it, announced that you were leaving Paris and moving –?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, I felt terrible and – because I felt very French. I tried to enlist in the Red Cross, but they wouldn't take me because I had a Lithuanian passport. They said the only way I could do that would be to marry a Frenchman, but I didn't have anybody handy.

(*Laughter*)

*Linda Arntzenius:* Is that something you regret happened; I mean that you weren't able to stay in France?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No. You can't live with those regrets. You just go on.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did your parents have friends or relations or any people to come to when they came to New York?

*Sarah Hirschman:* They had – it was a sister of my – of an aunt of mine that was in New York, so she's the one that arranged for the first apartment and so on.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And then shortly after that you moved further west to California.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, it was a little more complicated. My parents didn't like New York and so they moved to California and – is this okay? [indicating tape recorder]

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, we're okay.

*Sarah Hirschman:* So I went to – I was very depressed, very discouraged because of the war, because of France, and also I didn't know English. I didn't want to be in this country. I wanted to be in France. (*Laughter*) So anyway, somebody somehow managed to put me in the middle of the year in Cornell and I spent a semester there. I learned English and by then my parents had moved to California.

So I was able to go to Berkeley and that was wonderful because I didn't – you know, all these weird rules in colleges and so on were very unfamiliar to me, and I wanted to be in a big place where nobody would keep track of me and all that.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So it was a joy for you when you got to Berkeley.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Ah, yes. Yes, absolutely. Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And, of course, that's where you met Albert.<sup>1</sup>

*Sarah Hirschman:* And I met Albert, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So I wonder if you can tell me a little bit about that. Can you remember the first time that you set eyes upon him?

*Sarah Hirschman:* I met him in the cafeteria, and we just got along, so. (*Laughter*)

*Linda Arntzenius:* So, well, he was from Germany, but he'd lived in Paris. Were his parents still in Germany?

*Sarah Hirschman:* His father had died and his mother by then had gone to England.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Ah.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert O. Hirschman (1915-2012), Member in the School of Social Science, 1972-1993; Professor, 1974-1985; Emeritus Professor, 1985-2012.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Was he from a Jewish family also?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Mm-hmm.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So they were suffering in Germany and he had left earlier around 19 –

*Sarah Hirschman:* He left in 1933, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What did your parents think about your friendship with Albert?

*Sarah Hirschman:* They were very agreeable to the whole thing.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Can you tell me a little bit about what he was like, what attracted you to each other?

*Sarah Hirschman:* That's too complicated a question. *(Laughter)* You know, I appreciated a lot about him. I liked him, so we got along.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Did he talk about his experiences? I understand he fought in the civil war, Spanish Civil War – did he talk about those things with you?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, in fact, I was living in International House, and he came to International House and left almost immediately because they wanted him to talk at those candle-light dinners and so on, and he did not like to do that, so he left International House almost immediately.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So he really didn't want to be on show.

*Sarah Hirschman:* You know, after you've passed through the kind of things that he passed, you're not really interested in just telling about it to a lot of people. It's too complicated, too emotional.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Did he ever mention Varian Fry?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, Varian Fry was an enormously important event in his life. Yes, of course.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Is that something that has been documented or has he written about?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. There are many books about it and now somebody's writing a book about Albert, so you'll find out about this.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Is that Jeremy Adelman?<sup>2</sup>

*Sarah Hirschman:* Adelman.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Okay. So is he [Adelman] covering that aspect of his [Albert Hirschman's] life?

*Sarah Hirschman:* He is covering his whole life, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you know what Albert might have known about the Institute at that time in his life?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No. At that time, I don't think so.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And another question – I don't want to spend all my time focusing on Albert - but I would like to ask you if you know what motivated him to become an economist?

*Sarah Hirschman:* It's a long, long story. I think you'll have to read it in that book. *(Laughter)*

*Linda Arntzenius:* Wait for the book.

*Sarah Hirschman:* It was a complicated thing. He didn't necessarily want to be an economist, but because of certain factors in France, he was more or less pushed into that rather than the political science or philosophy or so on.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I see. So it seems you had some things in common. I mean you had both studied in Paris.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, we had a lot in common. *(Laughter)* Otherwise, we wouldn't have gotten married.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Adelman (1960- ), Member in the School of Historical Studies, 2001-2002.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Yes, we – mostly we had in common the French culture, you know, because we had read the same books. We had – so that's the important part.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm. You married in 1941. Did you still have a Lithuanian passport at that time?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What was your legal status?

*Sarah Hirschman:* I became a citizen through Albert being in the Army.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Ah. So he had presumably a German passport, but when he –

*Sarah Hirschman:* He – well, that's very complicated. No, he didn't have a German passport, but you really can't get into all that stuff because it's so enormously involved and complicated. *(Laughter)* And –

*Linda Arntzenius:* But when you –

*Sarah Hirschman:* – hopefully the book will come out soon.

*(Laughter)*

*Linda Arntzenius:* All right. So – but you did become citizens at the time of Albert's induction into the U.S. military.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, sometime after, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And that was when he joined the Office of Strategic Services.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did you know what he was doing for them or did he keep that –?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, no. You – that was a secret service.

*Linda Arntzenius:* He kept quiet about that, but you knew he was part of that presumably.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. So it was something – did you – you didn't inquire? You weren't curious?

*Sarah Hirschman:* I wouldn't have gotten any answer, so –

*(Laughter)*

*Linda Arntzenius:* And then your children were born – Katia in 1944.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And Lisa.

*Sarah Hirschman:* And Lisa in 1946.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And then you moved to Washington when Albert was working with the Marshall Plan. How did you feel about moving around so much with two young children?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, I didn't have the children then because – I had one child, yes - because our first child was born when he was overseas.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Ah, I see.

*Sarah Hirschman:* He only met her when she about 2.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And where were you living at that time?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, for part of the time I was studying in New York, and then I went to live with my parents in California.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That must have been a very lonely time for you.

*Sarah Hirschman:* It was.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, very difficult, especially with a young baby and trying to study and your husband overseas.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Well, no, I studied just until I was about ready to have the child and then I moved at that time to my parents.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And you were studying philosophy?

*Sarah Hirschman:* At that time I was studying literature, French literature. My undergraduate studies were in philosophy and then my master's was in literature, and I was studying towards a Ph.D. in French literature.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm. In 1952, you went to Colombia, to Bogotá. Tell me a little bit about your life there.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Now what does all that have to do with the Institute?

*Linda Arntzenius:* We're going to get to the Institute. I mean if you –

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, okay. No, I was just surprised. I – well, it was – you know, they were very, very interesting years. We spent almost five years there. That was a discovery of a new country. We all learned Spanish. We learned about different people, so it was an enormous influence on the whole family. Albert wrote a very important book at the end of this, and I started working on my project, which I'm still working on, this *People & Stories, Gente y Cuentos*. The children learned Spanish and it has influenced them a great deal all through their lives. They did all kinds of work with Spanish. In one way or another, this was very useful.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So that was an important part of your career – your future career path - going to these countries and learning Spanish.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Not that it had been planned that way, but –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Was there anything particular that you saw in those Latin American countries that influenced the direction of your path, your career?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, yes, an enormous amount. I'm now just reading the proofs of a book which I've just written. I spell it out a little bit there, what kind of things, the way that the Colombian people solved problems very, you know, different sometimes from our reliance on plans, on strategic plans. They don't quite do things that way, so I discovered many other ways of thinking.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What is the title of your book and when is it coming out?

*Sarah Hirschman:* It's just *People & Stories, Gente y Cuentos*, and it has a subtitle.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That's wonderful. Well, let's move along to *People – Gente y Cuentos*. Paulo Freire. I don't know how to pronounce his name.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, Freire, Paulo Freire.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me about meeting him.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, Albert was teaching at Harvard at that time, and Paulo Freire came to Harvard to give a seminar, from Brazil, and I attended that seminar and that was how I got to know his thought and I was very influenced by that.

*Linda Arntzenius:* It was about this time – we’re now around the early ’70s, 1972 – that Albert came to the Institute as a member.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did you – you were living in Cambridge at the time. Did you come with him for that year?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, of course. Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And did you see this year as an opportunity to pursue your own interests?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, I started to work in Trenton with this program which I had already started in Cambridge, so I organized some groups, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What impression did you have about the Institute at that time?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, the first year we had no intentions of staying here. I mean this was not – this came as a surprise that Albert was asked to become a faculty member, so –

*Linda Arntzenius:* So the year – the visit as a member wasn’t a sort of to see what it was like, to –

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, no, no, not at all. He was invited as just any other regular member, and it was a wonderful year with a house that was taken care of and we loved it, living on von Neumann and not having any cares and so on, and we explored New Jersey and New York, and it was a fun year, but it was – we had no idea that there was any future to that because Albert was going back to Harvard.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Back to Harvard, yes. Now that was a pretty turbulent time at Harvard. Was he caught up in that in any way?

*Sarah Hirschman:* It was turbulent here.

*Linda Arntzenius:* It was – yes.

*Sarah Hirschman:* *(Laughter)* It was. I don’t remember it being that turbulent in Harvard, but –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, perhaps we might focus on the Institute now. At that time, Carl Kaysen<sup>3</sup> was the director. He had been an economist himself at Harvard.

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Kaysen (1920-2010), IAS Director, 1966-1976.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, he was an economist.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Was he the person who invited Albert?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Okay.

*Sarah Hirschman:* He and Clifford Geertz.<sup>4</sup> Clifford Geertz was very important because he was building up the social science department.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Now knowing that that was the year of the Bellah<sup>5</sup> affair blowing up, did that give you and Albert some pause for thought? Did you think, “Well, would it be wise –?”

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, no. We know Bellah quite well and just thought the whole thing was dreadful.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What did people in Harvard – did they say: “Don’t go there.”?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, as you know, as always one has very close friends, and I was very sorry to leave Cambridge and Albert also and, you know, in a move like that it’s always very painful, but on the other hand, for Albert this was obviously paradise.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So what aspect of the Institute was it that drew him?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, he was not particularly fond of teaching, and he was very fond of writing.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did you support him in the move? Did you want to come, too?

*Sarah Hirschman:* I didn’t particularly want to come to Princeton, but I could see that this was absolutely marvelous for Albert, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So when you did arrive, where did live to begin with, when you came –?

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<sup>4</sup> Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), Professor in the School of Social Science, 1970-2000; Emeritus Professor, 2000-2006.

<sup>5</sup> Robert N. Bellah (1927-2013), Member in the School of Social Science, 1972-1973.

*Sarah Hirschman:* In '72 or in '74?

*Linda Arntzenius:* In '74, as faculty.  
[Crosstalk]

*Sarah Hirschman:* In '74 we rented this house, yes. And then I said, "Well, if I have to live in Princeton, I want to live in the country." And my idea was to live in the wilderness, but after a few months when I saw how convenient it was to be near the Institute and at the end of the year we had a choice of either moving or buying the house, so we bought the house [16 Newlin Road].

*Linda Arntzenius:* So you bought the house.

*Sarah Hirschman:* – together with the Institute. There's a percentage that belongs to the Institute.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm. Were there any other considerations that went into your decision to come here from Harvard?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, it was all very straightforward because it was exactly right for Albert, as was proven by the fact that he wrote so many books after that. Yes, there are all the books [pointing to collection of Albert Hirschman's books]. (*Laughter*)

*Linda Arntzenius:* Who welcomed you to the Institute? Who were your friends at that time?

*Sarah Hirschman:* We had no friends here. We made friends gradually, you know. The Institute was a very small place. Everything was very simple. If you needed something, you asked Mary Wisnovsky or the Kaysens who were good friends. Annette Kaysen was – she was a very aesthetical person, so she helped me; said, "No, no, no. You don't cut these bushes down. You put this up." She liked my taste of everything white, so she liked to, you know, participate.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Were you sorry when they left the Institute?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. I wasn't that close to them that I would be distraught, but –

*Linda Arntzenius:* (*Laughter*) You've observed the administrations of five different directors over quite some time. I wonder if you could say a little bit about the differences between them, the differences in style.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, each one has their own style, you know. Some – of course, I had nothing to do with the directors myself except go to dinner sometimes, so this kind of question really Albert could answer, if he

could, better than I could. The wives of the directors had different things to contribute, like Annette, as I say, was very involved with details with the people that she liked and that she approved the taste of. Taste was very important to her. And other wives were doctors so they were very helpful. You could ask them things and it's – some people would invite you for more intimate gatherings; others only for formal dinners. You just went along with whatever their style was.

*[Crosstalk]*

*Linda Arntzenius:* The culture of the Institute presumably must have been very important to you because you would find your friends there and go to social gatherings there.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. It was always very nice to know that every year you have a bunch of interesting people that are there, but then they leave, so –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Have you made any lasting friendships with any of the members who have come and gone over the years?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes. Yes. Some of them I keep up with. Some of them came and I knew them before. Of course, there was José Serra,<sup>6</sup> who might well be the next president of Brazil, and he came as Albert's assistant and because he was at that – he had been the head of the student union and the military regime, he could not go back, so he stayed here for a very, very long time as sort of Albert's assistant.

Albert never really used those assistants as assistants, so he became a very dear friend, and I'm still in touch with him, of course. You know, he would call Brazil every day to ask when he could return without being killed. And so now he's the governor of São Paulo and is going to run for the next president's election.

*Linda Arntzenius:* You've mentioned Carl Kaysen who was followed by Harry Woolf.<sup>7</sup> I understand he was a very social director and in contrast to Dr.Kaysen. Can you say something about him and –?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Which?

*Linda Arntzenius:* Harry Woolf.

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<sup>6</sup> José Serra (1942- ), Member in the School of Social Science, 1976-1978; Director's Visitor, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Harry Woolf (1923-2003), IAS Director, 1976-1987; Professor-At-Large, 1987-1994; Emeritus Professor, 1994-2003.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, Harry Woolf. Yes. Well, he was a very easy person to talk to, very pleasant. I had – it was a very nice relationship. I mean my own involvement with directors of the Institute has never been very deep because I had no business with them and the social relations were dinners and gatherings, and they were always very helpful in case of need. I should say that. If there was – actually, Harry was particularly helpful because Albert at one point was very sick, and I needed a really good surgeon for that particular operation, and Harry went out of his way and found a surgeon and called them. And so if you really needed them, they were extremely helpful. I would say all of them were very helpful. Perhaps Harry, because of his knowledge of the medical profession, in that particular case was extremely helpful.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, went out of his way.

*Linda Arntzenius:* The Institute has been described as an educational utopia and other people have said, “Well, yes, but there’s a certain degree of stress that comes with an appointment at the Institute because an appointment usually goes to someone who is extremely self-driven and self-motivated, and there’s a competitive drive that can be very stressful in this environment.” Is that something that you observed?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, I cannot speak for others. I can speak for Albert. It has been a marvelous environment for him because he is a very broad person intellectually, so he had a lot of intellectual contact with the historical school as well as the social science school as well as some of the scientists. He was very good about moving between these tables that are sort of separate. (*Laughter*) And this was very good for his intellectual development. On the other hand, he had complete freedom to write, which is what interested him. He had a complete freedom to travel, as he had many connections all over the world that he needed for his work.

So you certainly couldn’t imagine a better climate, as this has resulted in books that have a lot of influence even today, where I get letters very frequently about how – you know, from younger people saying how Albert has changed their life because they read this and this and that. If people believe in the intellectual activity and its influence, the Institute is a marvelous place, and it’s just what one needs for this kind of thing, so I have absolutely no criticism, and I think that it’s wonderful that such places exist because these books would not have existed if he had just continued to teach students, but he’s teaching a lot of people through those books.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What about – well, I'll get to People & Stories shortly - but have you seen, over the period you've been here, have you seen the Institute change in any ways?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, enormously. Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Could you please speak a little bit about that?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, it was a very small, very cozy institution when we came. Everything was – you know, you needed something; you went to Mary Wisnovsky. You needed something else; you made – went to the person that delivered the mail or someone in the dining room and that was it. Today, it's just an enormous organization, so lots of people that are still very helpful, but it's just much, much bigger.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you think it has lost something because of that – because of the growth?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, I don't think so. I think it's still – you know, I talk to people who come as members. They're all having a wonderful year. It depends, you know. Some people are more attuned to this kind of life. Some people need the city or need more interaction, but others are very happy.

[Crosstalk]

*Linda Arntzenius:* Did your being associated with the Institute facilitate your work with People & Stories in any way?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, had nothing to do –

*Linda Arntzenius:* So totally separate.

*Sarah Hirschman:* It is totally separate. It – the only thing is that I find people with whom I can speak. I gave my manuscript to read to Danielle Allen,<sup>8</sup> and she's written a very nice preface for the book. Well, that was wonderful. Yes, of course, I meet lots of people through the Institute, so that has an influence in my life, but as far as the work itself goes, it's totally different.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, let's get back to People & Stories then. Could tell me a little bit [about] how it developed after your arrival in Princeton.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, it just barely had started. I had had just one group in Cambridge just to start and then when I came here and I realized

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<sup>8</sup> Danielle Allen (1971- ), Professor in the School of Social Science, 2007-2015.

that I would be living here, I started developing it in Trenton, so Trenton was my center.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And it was still primarily Spanish language at that time?

*Sarah Hirschman:* For about ten years, it was only Spanish, yes. For a very long time I worked alone and just in Spanish and then around '85, I think, something like that – '84, '85 – the – I wanted to do something with older people and the director of the senior center said, "Why don't you do something intergenerational?" So then I realized I had to do it in English, you know, with high school students and –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Who was that, the director of the – do you remember?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, yes. I should remember her name. It will surface in a minute. And so then I had a workshop and trained a lot of people, and we started to work also in English, so that was a big change because I began to work with other people organizing workshops, etc.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And eventually, I understand, that in '81-'82 you received a National Endowment for the Humanities for the project.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, I had several. I had one by myself. I don't remember exactly now the year, where it was just for Spanish-speaking people, and I worked in, I think, four states and then we had another one for both Spanish and English, which was much larger and we worked in 14 states.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That is extraordinary, I mean, *you* can't be in 14 states.

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, no, no. By then one of the people that I trained in that workshop, she was particularly good, so she became a very important coordinator of groups and then she became co-director with me and now she's the executive director, so she's the one that ran, for instance, that new NEH [program].

*Linda Arntzenius:* So as more people came onboard, you were able to expand and not just in New Jersey but into other states.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, other states and also we have programs in France and in Colombia and now, I hope, in Argentina –

*Linda Arntzenius:* That's amazing. It must be gratifying to you.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, it is.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And now you've written a book about it. Did you ever think when you were beginning – did you have any inkling that you wanted to create something as big?

*Sarah Hirschman:* I just do one thing at the time. No, I didn't have any large ambitions.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What was it that convinced you that the idea of taking literature to people, some of whom are barely literate – what gave you the idea that that would work?

*Sarah Hirschman:* You'll have to read my book.

*(Laughter)*

*Sarah Hirschman:* It's all spelled out there. *(Laughter)* But the basic idea is, you know, I think people have life experience that allows them to enter a complex short story that's about love, that's about death, about crime, about children. Everybody knows about that and not just the Ph.D.s.

*Linda Arntzenius:* How in the beginning did you choose your stories, your Spanish-language stories?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, you've got to read my book.

*(Laughter)*

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, it's complicated but we use classic published stories that are complex and that are good literature.

*Linda Arntzenius:* You choose stories that are in the public domain?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So there's no copyright issue.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, I had a friend who is a lawyer, and he actually has put his students in Washington to study this to give us a report on the copyright and problems or possible problems. And we're okay. We're not publishing any of this. We're not –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm, just reading them.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Just discussing stories, so.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. I have to say that I attended one of the Crossing Borders –

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, yes. Oh, how nice.

*Linda Arntzenius:* – and it was at the Trenton – I want to say soup kitchen. But – and maybe it was at the Trenton Soup Kitchen and –

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, they have them in different places.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes, it was some years ago, and I was absolutely flabbergasted by the comments that came from people and the engagement – not just with the stories - but with each other in the group, which is precisely what you had hoped would happen.

*Sarah Hirschman:* That's great that you have because sometimes it's a little difficult to explain, you know, what goes on. *(Laughter)*

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. And now there's support from the NEH and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities for the program.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Off and on. Certain years we have it; certain years we don't have it. We have support from many foundations and also very importantly from friends, you know.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Oh, you have a group, Friends of People & Stories?

*Sarah Hirschman:* It's not the group the way it is at the Institute. It's more – in fact, that's one of the things I still have to do this afternoon. I have to go to sign these letters. We have a mailing list and I will send a note to them.

*Linda Arntzenius:* To your supporters. Yes. You've also received – you've been honored with several awards for your work with People & Stories. How important are such awards?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, they're very important. They're important. People give you money when you've got an award. *(Laughter)* I don't know why. You've become a more valuable piece of –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Property.

*Sarah Hirschman:* There was this very long article about me in Town Topics which you may have seen this fall. Many people in the street told me, "Oh, I saw you," recognized me because there was a picture, and certainly it's very important for fundraising.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Mm-hmm. What has been your association with the Princeton Research Forum?

- Sarah Hirschman:* Well, I was in at the very beginning of the Princeton Research Forum and for a long time I participated in one of its activities, which was a poetry group.
- Linda Arntzenius:* That held at Hildred Geertz's?
- Sarah Hirschman:* Well, at that time, it was in another place and then also at Hilly's – Hilly Geertz's, yes, who's a very close friend of mine and then what happened? I guess I got busy with other things. I read a lot in different languages – French, Spanish, English, Italian. It takes time and I enjoy it and it's important for my work. And Russian – I read a lot in Russian. I enjoy that.
- Linda Arntzenius:* It's not productive for you.
- Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, not productive and the poetry group I abandoned because I've been having a problem with my hearing aids and so again, you know, I just decided to do my own thing. And I still belong. I still pay my dues, but I'm not active in it.
- Linda Arntzenius:* What are you reading now? Do you focus primarily on short stories or are you reading novels?
- Sarah Hirschman:* No, no. Because now that I am not – for so many years I read so many short stories to choose them for the program that I'm very happy that I don't have to do that. That's one thing I'm not doing, so right now I'm reading Alan Pauls, an Argentinean author, so that's interesting in Spanish. Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* I actually want to go back. At one point, I read in Jean Stratton's article actually, that you had worked as your husband's assistant for a period.
- Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.
- Linda Arntzenius:* And you mentioned learning something about problem-solving methods at that time. Can I bring that up and ask you about that again?
- Sarah Hirschman:* Well, yes, that's again in my book. I was extremely ignorant in social science and through Albert, working with him, I've had a certain amount of instruction in that, and I'm kind of fascinated by his thought. He is always asking questions and revisiting certain things that he's thinking of. He is very opposed to these fixed strategic plans and so all of that has influenced me, doing a lot of observation to see how – you know - we went together on this trip on the book that he wrote about several countries on small

development projects: observe how people really start developing something and learn from that rather than to look at the project and say, "Have they followed the rules which we have set up in Washington?" No, they haven't, so it's no good. But it *is* good.

*(Laughter)*

*Sarah Hirschman:* It really *is* good and they're developing, so let's see how they did it, you know?

*Linda Arntzenius:* So what is the secret to People & Stories? Its growth has been sort of organic and it's very successful program. What is your secret?  
*(Laughter)*

*Sarah Hirschman:* I think people enjoy what we're doing with them. It helps them to find their voice. They realize they can talk about important things. They realize they can discuss things together, that they can listen, that they don't, flare up if they disagree, they don't get angry. They're sort of interested to hear – and because it's just a story – it's less threatening than if it's about –

*Linda Arntzenius:* Can you recall an instant when someone you observed reacted in a way –?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, you'll have to read my book. I have pages and pages of examples.

*Linda Arntzenius:* *(Laughter)* Excellent.

*Sarah Hirschman:* It would be a little complicated, you know, to explain.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, you can see you have a readership awaiting your book.

*(Laughter)*

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, that's great. That's great.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Yes. Your husband, Albert, is now 94. Is that right?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* And he's rather frail. Can you tell me a little bit about the difficulties of taking care of him?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, he has dementia and, you know, he is not suffering, but he just sits there with his eyes closed pretty much all day. He eats well. He sleeps well.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Is he walking?

*Sarah Hirschman:* No, no. Well, he may take a few steps from his bed to the bathroom with a lot of help, yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* That's very sad for you, very difficult.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, so.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Tell me, did you ever think of moving back to Europe?

*Sarah Hirschman:* We did when Albert retired because our daughter, our grandchildren and everybody, lives in France, and we even found a very nice apartment next to my daughter and Albert was quite ready to sign the papers and then I remembered Firestone, and I thought, "Oh, my God. Where am I going to get my books?" Because I take books in all languages, whatever I want –

*Linda Arntzenius:* You're not serious.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Really?

*Sarah Hirschman:* So I said, "No, no, no." I'm going back to Firestone.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Really. And you couldn't have found some library in Paris, of all places?

*Sarah Hirschman:* There are no such organizations in Paris. There's a library where you have to ask for the book, and you come back the next day and the book is there for you. You can't take it home. I have a whole library here from Firestone upstairs. I mean I can keep it for a year.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So it's not a trivial [concern].

*Sarah Hirschman:* And the books I take, nobody ever recalls them, so – and I find books in Russian in several editions, in French, in English, in Spanish, whatever I want. It's like paradise. So that's important. Plus, I wanted to continue my work, too.

*Linda Arntzenius:* But I understand your daughter is involved in a program [in France].

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, she started that but that was much later. I mean she recently started that maybe three years ago.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Do you see the program going on in your absence?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, that's why I wrote the book really because I wanted to leave something, you know, about why I started it, how it came about and the method of doing it and all of that, so I hope so.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, I've come to my last question. *(Laughter)* Is there a question that you expected me to ask you that I haven't asked you?  
*(Laughter)*

*Sarah Hirschman:* No. I'm relieved that you haven't asked me more about the Institute. I thought that – I'm surprised that there were more questions about myself because in a way my connection is only the wife of a faculty member and I have no – even though everybody's always been enormously helpful. They've been enormously helpful in helping me with my computer, with – you know, in so many ways, so that's not quite correct to say that I don't have any connections because I do, but still, I have all of that only because I'm the wife of Albert, so I expected you to do an interview on the Institute – so I'm very glad because actually I don't have that much to say about the Institute.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, if you have anything else you would like to say about the Institute, I would be happy to hear it. I mean I know that –

*Sarah Hirschman:* No. I mean I think that – I should say that even for a wife now with a husband that is not anymore, unfortunately, active in the Institute, it's a very important place. I've just been to a seminar. I've been asked to participate in the special seminar on education, so now I'm going to two seminars. *(Laughter)*

There are wonderful concerts. There's extraordinary food. I eat there practically every day. So I live in this wonderful house, so I'm getting an enormous amount from the Institute because of my association, and I don't feel – you know, I'm a feminist, but I don't feel badly about that because – okay.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Is that something that is different from, say, being a faculty wife at Harvard, for instance?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Oh, yes. Oh, yes, very different.

*Linda Arntzenius:* What's the difference?

*Sarah Hirschman:* As a wife of faculty, you really have no connections except social. And yes, you always have the library card, which, you know, is key and here, of course, I have the library card, the parking privileges, all these goodies, you know. But the library card is – absolutely key.

*Linda Arntzenius:* When you came to the Institute or at any point during your time here, did you ever think about the founders, the founding theory behind the Institute and wonder about that, wonder whether their vision had been manifest or –?

*Sarah Hirschman:* I don't tend to think in these grandiose terms. I'm more a daily doer. I just think what they do is wonderful, that they give an opportunity to people to work intellectually in a wonderful atmosphere, and it's enormously important outside of administrative duties, outside of having to perform all kinds of other services like you do at the university, for instance, or – this is just – you know, if you think that intellectual activity is important then to have a place where you can do it is absolutely marvelous, and there are not that many places where you can do it.

*Linda Arntzenius:* So do you think it really has enhanced – obviously, it enhanced Albert's life, but you would think it – the same goes for you?

*Sarah Hirschman:* Yes, immeasurably. I'm quite sure that he's been enormously productive here in writing one book after another and giving a lot of talks and lectures and getting lots and lots of honorary degrees. *(Laughter)* So that he got to be known and it's interesting now, I understand that younger people are again interested in that kind of economics where for one time it really swung so strongly towards the more mathematical kind.

*Linda Arntzenius:* Well, thank you for giving me your time.

*Sarah Hirschman:* Well, thank you.

*Linda Arntzenius:* I very much appreciate it.

*Sarah Hirschman:* It's been very enjoyable.

*(Laughter)*

*[End of Audio]*