INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

NOTE TO USERS

The original manuscript received by UMI contains pages with print exceeding margin guidelines. Pages were microfilmed as received.

This reproduction is the best copy available

UMI

The Succah: Ritual Dwellings in the Jewish Vernacular Landscape

by

Jennifer Ann Cousineau

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Art History

Carleton University
OTTAWA, Ontario
April 28th,
1997, Jennifer Ann Cousineau

**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-26906-X

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis
The Succah: Ritual Dwellings in the Jewish Vernacular Landscape
Submitted by Jennifer Cousineau, B.A. Honours (Queens)
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Kelly Crossman, Thesis Supervisor

John Shepherd, Director: SSAC

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

May 1997

Index

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Note on Terms.....	iii
Glossary.....	iv
Introduction and Literature Review.....	1
Chapter One: The Succah as Ritual Space.....	19
Chapter Two: Dwelling.....	33
Chapter Three: Contemporary Succot in Montreal.....	65
Conclusions.....	88
Illustrations and Photographs.....	92
Interviews.....	112
References.....	157

Abstract

This thesis is about a Jewish folk-vernacular building type called the *succah* (plural *succot*). The *succah* is a temporary ritual-dwelling built for and lived in during the eight days of the festival of Succot. This holiday commemorates the protection provided by God for the biblical Israelites during their forty year sojourn in the Sinai desert. The first historical reference to succot is literary; they are mentioned in the Hebrew bible and thus have a history of almost three millennia. Succot are still being built in contemporary Jewish communities world-wide. My thesis is an attempt to place the contemporary *succah* in historical context by drawing upon the considerable literary tradition in which the structure is rooted. I will also investigate the *succah* as it exists today, drawing on six case studies conducted in the Jewish community of Montreal in the fall of 1996.

My first chapter will explore the nature of the *succah* in terms of the interplay of holy and profane space that is particular to Judaism. In order to understand whether the *succah* is a holy space, it is necessary to understand the Jewish concept of *kedusha*, which means separation or devotion. While the *succah* has no intrinsic holiness, it becomes holy by virtue of being built for a religious festival, through being constructed according to ritual guidelines, and through ritual use. The holiness of the *succah* is dependant upon both time and human agency.

My second chapter will focus on the profane function of the *succah*, or the *succah* as dwelling. The *succah* is a devoted space, but the actions which are to be conducted within it are mundane, including eating, sleeping, singing, talking, business, reading etc. My examination of some of the literature pertaining to dwelling in the *succah* and my case studies of actual succot in Montreal show that the meaning of dwelling has fluctuated over time. In every period and in each society, dwelling has taken its meaning from the culture in which the *succah* was built.

My final chapter focuses on the building processes and the results of these processes in contemporary Montreal. Although the classical Jewish texts provide the basic guidelines for construction, the building process seems to be largely independent of them. Oral history, family tradition, learning-by-doing, and even modern technology all play roles as important in the process as the texts. The limits imposed by the text still allow for great variety in the practice of making succot. Succot in Montreal come in many sizes, a number of materials, are located on an infinite variety of sites and are decorated according to individual and family tradition. This reflects a general tendency in Jewish law to allow for individual expression within community ritual culture.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Kelly Crossman, for his support. Without the generosity of those interviewed for this thesis, it would not have been written. I thank them all without naming any of them. I am grateful to Ron Finegold and Mr. Harris at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, to Janice Rosen at the Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress and to Estel Backman at the Ottawa Jewish Community Centre Library. Julie Drolet and Todd Montgomery hosted me during weeks of research in Montreal and I thank them. To Rabbi Eli M. Braun of Congregation Beth Shalom in Ottawa, for suggestions, books and references, my sincere thanks. I would like to acknowledge Adam Margolis, who suggested the succah to me as a subject of study. Victoria Angel passed on her insights at every stage of the research and writing process. I am grateful to Joanne Cousineau for commenting on numerous drafts of this thesis. To Lynda Fish and the staff at the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, where much of this thesis was written, thanks. Finally, I would like to thank my family; this thesis is dedicated to them.

Note on Terms

This thesis is about a Jewish building type. Many terms used in it are either Hebrew or Yiddish. In my discussions of texts, I have used the Modern Hebrew transliteration, standard for scholarly or scientific writing. A number of the people interviewed for this thesis are native Yiddish speakers. I have rendered key terms in their culture in a simple phonetic equivalent of English. Foreign words are rendered in italics, other than the words *succah*, *schach*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *kedusha* and *Torah* which, for the convenience of the reader have been exceptionally left in romans. They occur so frequently throughout the text that to render them each time in italics would be unnecessarily intrusive.

Glossary

Amoraim: Rabbinic scholars who contributed to the Mishna.

Ashkenazi: Jews of east European descent

Capote: long black coat worn by Hasidic men

Daaven: to pray

Eruv: symbolic boundary around a public domain which transforms it into a private domain

Etrog: a citron; one of the four ritual species used during Succot

Halachah: Jewish law

Hasidim: literally pious; sects of ultra-Orthodox Jews, usually originating in eastern Europe.

Heimish: homelike, comfortable

Kabbalah: Jewish mysticism

Kadesha: in biblical Hebrew, temple prostitute

Kedushin: marriage

L'Chaim: toast meaning to "life"

Nigun: melody or song

Mitzvah: ritual commandment or duty, usually from the bible

Mezuzah: small scroll with written inscriptions from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 placed in a container and affixed to the door-post of a residence.

Rebbe: the leader of a Hasidic group

Sefer: literally book; in Orthodox circles, a book of religious content

Sephardi: Jews of Spanish, North-African or middle-Eastern origin

Shabbat, shabbos: the Sabbath

Chol Ha Moed: the intermediate days of a festival

Torah: The first five books of the Hebrew bible: Genesis, Leviticus, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers

Schach: ritually correct roof of the succah

Shul: Yiddish for synagogue

Shtreimel: round fur hat worn by Hasidic men

Spodik: tall fur hat worn by Hasidic men

Ushpizin: seven ritual guest invited into the succah, one on each night of the festival

Introduction and Literature Review

You shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 23: 39-44)

You shall make yourself a festival of Succot [booths] for a seven day period, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine cellar. (Deuteronomy 16: 13-17)¹

This thesis is an investigation of a folk vernacular building type known as the succah (plural, succot), Hebrew for booth or tabernacle. The succah is a Jewish ritual dwelling built for and lived in during the annual Jewish holiday of Succot. In the Jewish tradition, Succot commemorates the shelter and protection provided by God for the Israelites during their forty-year sojourn in the Sinai desert after the Exodus from Egypt. Although the origins of the succah date further back than biblical times, the first literary references to it are to be found in the biblical books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Succot are essentially impermanent structures, built specifically for the eight days of the festival and taken down shortly thereafter. They are most often built by their users. It seems ironic that these temporary dwellings alone, among the other important Jewish buildings mentioned in the Hebrew bible, have withstood time. The Holy Tabernacle described in the book of Exodus and the temples of Solomon and Herod in Jerusalem described in the book of Kings and in the Gospels, all central to Jewish religious practice at one time and intended to be permanent, have become the stuff of legend, while the

¹Rabbi Nosson Sherman, ed., *The Arstscroll Tanach Stone Edition*, (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1996, 305), 467-69.

apparently ephemeral succah still flourishes as a living folk building tradition at the end of the twentieth century.²

Because their nature is ephemeral, we have no material evidence for past succot, save one nineteenth-century succah preserved in the Israel Museum. Succot are, however, part of an ongoing, living tradition and they can be studied in detail when they manifest themselves each year. Additionally, and unlike most vernacular architecture, the succah is a building rooted in an extensive body of literature, beginning with the Bible. This literature has defined the form and use of the succah as long as it has existed, and must be considered in any study of this building type.

Given the nature of the evidence, my thesis will focus on the meaning and function of the contemporary succah. I shall attempt to understand the relationship between the texts regulating the succah and the surviving practice around this vernacular structure as observed in contemporary Montreal. The locus of the surviving tradition is largely within the Orthodox Jewish community. For this reason, I have chosen to draw upon five representative case studies carried out within the Orthodox community and one case study of a succah belonging to a synagogue which has been called "conservadox". Although the Bible alludes only to private succot, that is to say, succot

²For a discussion of the origins of the synagogue, see Carol Herselle-Krinsky, *The Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1988) 5-7. See also S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*, Vol 2. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, Chapters 17, 18 and 20) for a history which relies almost exclusively on Jewish/rabbinic sources. See E.P. Saunders, *Judaism in Practice and Belief: 66 B.C.E to 33 C.E.* (London: SCM Press, 1992) for a discussion of the social history of the second Temple relying heavily on rabbinic sources. Also see M. Avi-Jonah et al., *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. 4 vols. (1994).

owned by individual families, I have found that public, or communally used succot are a common phenomenon in the contemporary landscape and have therefore included three among the six case studies.

The study of the succah presents considerations both historiographic and methodological. From an historiographic perspective, the succah is interesting because it has, with one exception, not been studied *qua* architecture, although its religious symbolism and its place in Jewish life and law have been covered to some extent in the field of Jewish Studies. Given its lengthy history -- the first mention of succah construction can be dated to approximately 300 B.C.E. -- it is surprising that the succah has been excluded from the canon of architecture as defined by architectural historians of the past century and that almost no critical literature exists on the subject. If one considers the defining characteristic of those buildings that have thus far been studied by professionals, the reasons for the exclusion of the succah become clear. The succah is unambiguously vernacular, but architectural history has thus far favored high-style, architect designed buildings. Architectural historians have focused on buildings which have become a relatively permanent part of the built environment. Temples, churches, palaces, villas and sky-scrapers all provide time-resistant testimony to the culture of their builders and users. So, one might argue, does the succah, but its temporal nature implies a degree of difficulty in its study; the fact that it is used only for seven or eight days each year means that it is less likely to attract and excite the attention of scholars of the built environment. When it does, its limited life-span complicates a process of study predicated on the analysis and examination of physically present monuments, or at least

of monuments the former presence of which has been documented in visual or literary form. Further, architectural historians have favored the building traditions of the majority. In the context of North American and European scholarship, this has meant that until very recently, ritual structures of Christian derivation have received more attention from scholars than the buildings of any other tradition. Synagogues have not been widely or closely studied within the field of architectural history. The most comprehensive scholarly work on synagogues is Carol Herselle-Krinsky's recent *The Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*. Along with the significant contributions of Richard Krautheimer, Ira Levy and Paul Smith, Krinsky's work seeks the Jewish equivalents of churches in Christian culture and focuses on the formal analysis of purpose-built, monumental buildings. Underlying this type of analysis is the modernist view that because synagogues often adopted the prevailing national or local building style, rather than forging an authentically Jewish style, Jewish architecture was derivative and therefore inferior. The search for creative genius expressed through "the authentic" or unprecedented intellectual or material production was bound to cast synagogues as generally inferior. An emphasis on formal qualities as defined by a culturally or politically dominant group as a standard for excellence or for worthiness of study ensures that vernacular structures like the succah will be ignored or overlooked.

I would further expand on the historiographic neglect of the vernacular elements of the Jewish built environment by referring to the classic study *A History of Western Architecture*, in which architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner claimed that vernacular architecture was "not architecture". His narrow definition has since been significantly

broadened by historians of vernacular architecture, but it is clear that as long as Pevsner's school of thought held sway, succot and buildings like them would be left outside the canon.³

There is one source, however, mentioned above, which does approach and examine the succah as architecture. In 1994, the Spertus Museum in Chicago held an exhibition entitled *The Chicago Booths Festival*. Eleven Chicago architects were asked to design and build succot and to provide written statements of intent to accompany their design in the exhibition. The exhibition's focus was on the succah as architectural and ritual object and the introductory essay in the catalogue emphasizes this exhibition's unique capacity to bridge the gap between the museum's dual mandates to preserve Jewish ritual objects and to present them as living objects relevant to contemporary Jewish life.

A second essay, used as the educational wall-panel in the actual exhibition, analyses the Jewish texts related to the succah. The author lifts from each source an interpretation of the meaning of the succah in their own times as the meaning of the succah. With this concise essay in hand, the exhibition visitor is equipped with a prism through which to view the exhibition and a set of meanings to apply to the buildings they are about to experience: agriculture, thanksgiving, hospitality, charity. The third essay, "The succah as an Architectural Type" by architectural historian John F. Hartay, characterizes the exhibition as "a controlled experiment in semiotics". In addition to

³For a succinct discussion of problems of definition see Dell Upton, ed., *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), XV.

assigning the typology of “garden architecture” to the succah, Hartay discusses several building types which might be associated with the succah on an aesthetic and symbolic level, including Japanese tea houses, Christmas crèches, and Abbé Laugier’s primitive hut.

Though original and provocative from the perspective of museum education, the exhibition as a whole tends to present an incomplete or distorted view of the succah. One problem is that the authors of the catalogue essay do not approach the classical Jewish sources critically. Passages on succot from the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic literature, the commentaries of Maimonides and medieval liturgical poetry are presented without their historical or sociological contexts and their relationship to succah building is thus obscured.

A larger problem with the exhibition is that its emphasis on the formal qualities of the succah leads scholars to place it awkwardly within the categories established in the history of architecture. The succah is not a folly, nor is its purpose related to the leisure pursuits of the upper-classes. The purpose of the succah is religious ritual, and the study of it must incorporate the element of use. With a few notable exceptions, for two or perhaps three thousand years architects had virtually no role to play in succah construction and design. In its presentation of the succah as a primarily aesthetic object, I find this study unconvincing.⁴

Another possible source of historical knowledge about the succah is the field of Jewish Studies. Jeffrey Rubenstein has produced a history for the succah in the biblical

⁴See Danby, H. ed., *The Mishna*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

and rabbinic periods. In his 1994 and 1995 articles in *The Journal of Jewish Studies*, on the symbolism of the succah, Rubenstein dismisses the possibility that the succot mentioned in the biblical book of Leviticus ever existed as actual architecture. Rather, he writes, the succot of the Bible were 'clouds of glory' which, according to the interpretation of a later biblical scholar named Rabbi Akiva, God was said to have provided as shelter for the Israelites as they moved through the desert. If there is no evidence for man-made succot in biblical times, there is even less for 'clouds of glory' or the literary fabrications of rabbinic sages writing more than one thousand years *post facto*. This points up the most problematic aspect of Rubenstein's scholarship: his almost exclusive reliance, in attempting to write history, on rabbinic sources. A number of scholars have discussed the dangers of relying heavily on material which is explicitly theological in character and which makes no claims to being historical in terms of either persons, places or chronology. In dismissing the historical possibility that succot were actual booths, he provides no evidence other than to say that the desert would not be a likely place in which materials for succot could be found. He also states that actual succot are improbable because they are not mentioned in other biblical books. Not only are they mentioned, but one later book can be regarded as the first historical recording of the use of succot.⁵ Rubenstein's approach, while perhaps useful in the context of Jewish Studies, is too mystical to be of use here, in the study of the succah as architecture.

I have found that scholarship in the field of vernacular architecture by people such as Dell Upton, Annmarie Adams, Dolores Hayden and Thomas Hubka, offers the

⁵Nehemia, discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

most useful models and methods for studying the succah. The scholarly study of vernacular architecture is a relatively recent phenomenon, having gained academic autonomy only in the 1980s. A single definition of vernacular architecture has yet to be offered; perhaps this is appropriate to an area of study encompassing spaces from wooden churches to garages and from bedrooms to pre-fab suburban bungalows, the study of which is carried out by scholars of architectural history, anthropology, folklore and heritage conservation to name only a few fields of inquiry. In attempting to define vernacular architecture, scholars have suggested terms like ordinary, everyday, or commonplace, or have defined vernacular in the negative as non-high style, not designed by professionals, not monumental, un-sophisticated or 'mere building'. Central to any definition of vernacular architecture is the idea that the intentions, desires and tastes of the users of buildings are as important as the act of designing and building itself.⁶ Upton writes that the study of intention "shows us people in charge of their own lives, people engaged with their own surroundings in a critical way, and people making their own histories in the face of authorities trying to make it for them".⁷ These comments are particularly relevant to my study of the succah. The creative spirit and historical memory of its users, a dispersed minority, were important factors in ensuring the continuity of their building tradition over more than two millennia; perhaps because of this, the succah remains an integral part of Jewish ritual life worldwide today.

Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* in

⁶Ibid., XXIII.

⁷Ibid..

discussing the social aspect of space, provides an important methodological model for my research. Hayden's case study of Los Angeles considers vernacular buildings as elements of the complex social history of a diverse community. She highlights the thus far ignored socio-spacial histories of women and of the ethnic communities of Los Angeles -- Japanese, Chinese, Native American and Mexican. My thesis concerns the history of a minority group living in a city as ethnically diverse as Los Angeles -- Montreal. Succah building has not only been an important part of the history of the Jewish communities of Montreal, but during this century, and probably in centuries previous, this activity has excited the curiosity of non-Jewish neighbors, the concern of Heritage conservationists, and the attention of city-councillors who have regulated their construction through municipal by-laws. Following Hayden's model, I will focus on the twentieth-century social history of the succah.

Like Hayden, I feel it important to discuss the gendered aspects of architecture where they are relevant; they are with respect to the succah. Scholarship on Jewish architecture has yet to venture into the field of gender and space, despite the fact that the topic lends itself well to this kind of analysis. Within traditional Judaism gender roles are clearly delineated; the distinctions made between men's and women's roles are reflected in Jewish architecture, including the succah, and dictate how it is used, when, and by whom.

Because it is both a ritual space and a dwelling, the succah is a blend of the sacred and the profane. Dell Upton's *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* provided me with an invaluable model for the study of the social and

architectural histories of vernacular religious buildings such as the succah. Especially relevant to my paper is Upton's discussion of how "holy things and profane, fused in an eloquent manner, animated the Church and gathered the parishioners, in a process in which construction and use of the church were symbolic acts."⁸ The meanings of *profane*, *sacred*, *holy* and *dwelling* as these terms relates to Jewish spatial culture, and their relationship to one another in that culture, will be considered at length in this paper. Also of importance in Upton's study is his methodologically original and insightful exploitation of artifacts in reconstructing the history of churches. He includes the buildings themselves, their furniture and decoration and the ritual items used during religious celebrations and ceremonies in his study. Ritual items have an important place in the history of the succah, where items such as hand-made posters and ceiling decorations act as bearers of meaning to the users of the succah.

Some literature on the construction of folk architecture is relevant to this study. Thomas Hubka's article "Just Folks Designing"⁹ on the design process of folk housing is particularly germane. The transmission of knowledge about succah construction parallels to some extent Hubka's description of the way in which the process of folk design is transmitted from generation to generation, where people learn by doing and watching and acquire information orally rather than in written form. Other building types for which this process is valid and which are like the succah by virtue of their temporary natures include

⁸Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia*. (The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986), 9.

⁹Thomas Hubka, "Just Folks Designing", in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

North American native tent-dwellings and igloos.

The work of two other American scholars of vernacular architecture is relevant to this study. Both William D. Moore and Susan Garfinkel have investigated the socio-architectural history of religious minority groups in North America. Moore's recent article "The Masonic Lodge Room 1870-1930: A Sacred Space of Masculine Spiritual Hierarchy" emphasizes the theatrical and religious aspects of the Masonic lodge and through changes in construction and use of the lodges, traces changes in American religion, economics and conceptions of gender.¹⁰ Susan Garfinkel's goal in writing "Letting in the 'World': (Re)interpretive Tensions in the Quaker Meeting House" is to understand the Quaker meeting house as the site of the theological and ideological dualities which exist in Quakerism.¹¹ Her focus on the interplay between "belief and practice, silence and speech, the group and its single members" is not unlike my proposed exploration of the sacred-profane duality at work in the succah. Given Garfinkel's claim that there are no explicit provisions for the design and construction of the Quaker meeting house and her reliance on visual and built sources, my method will necessarily depart from hers in that I will rely to some extent on the Jewish texts upon which the construction and use of the succah is ultimately based.

Literary Sources

¹⁰Moore, William D. "The Masonic Lodge Room, 1870-1930: A Sacred Space of Masculine Hierarchy," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 26-40.

¹⁰Susan A. Garfinkel, "Letting in 'the World': (Re)-interpretive Tensions in the Quaker Meeting House," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 78-95.

Although vernacular, the succah in fact has roots in literature and scriptural writing. All Jewish buildings are to some extent regulated by Jewish law as laid down in biblical and rabbinic literature, but the succah is distinguished by the number of laws devoted to its construction and use. Whereas there are less than five written laws concerning the construction of synagogues, codifiers of Jewish law have dedicated volumes to the construction and use of the succah. My literary sources include those which have become known as the classical Jewish writings and which contain instruction on how to lead a religious Jewish life. They include: the *Torah*, the *Mishna* (0-200 CE), Maimonides *Mishnah Torah* (Recapitulation of the Torah, 1178) and the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (1864). While the Bible's language is terse and concise, later Jewish texts -- legal in nature -- interpret and expand the terse biblical injunction to build and dwell in the succah, providing detailed instructions for both activities. These writings positioned their authors -- mostly rabbis and scholars -- as the ultimate authorities on the building and dwelling of the succah. The problem, where architecture is concerned, is that the discussions about succot in the texts are legal and theoretical in nature; they are not about actual succot and tell us little about the traditions of succah building and dwelling in their own time. I will not, therefore, attempt to write a history for succot based exclusively on these texts. Without recourse to additional literary, archaeological or material evidence, it would clearly be impossible to discern the historical nature, status or use, of the ritual dwellings in question. Many scholars, most recently Norman Cantor in *The Sacred Chain*, in light of the lack of further evidence, view the text of the Bible as

an elaborate fiction.¹² My focus will be on the succah in its contemporary form and use, and on the ways in which contemporary readers understand some of the classical Jewish writings which have influenced the construction and use of contemporary succot.

In addition to the classical texts, this study will consider a second type of literature, which I shall call popular instructional literature. The latter half of the twentieth-century has seen a return to Orthodox Jewish practice, under the influence of ultra-Orthodox Hasidic communities established after the Second World War.¹³ Many returnees have little or no knowledge or understanding of the Jewish religious practices that encompass almost every aspect of daily life for the observant. One response to this phenomenon was education through the production of popular instructional books. The Jewish how-to manuals to be analyzed in this paper, written by authors from within the tradition, are easily accessible in any Jewish and many non-Jewish libraries or bookstores, and are common currency on Jewish family bookshelves. These books present the fundamentals of Jewish law, *halacha*, in English, in a thematically organized format, and in simple language easily understood by the average reader. The biblical and rabbinic texts upon which popular instructional literature is based, in contrast, were originally written in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic. They are difficult legal texts, outside the scope of the average reader whose goal is to extrapolate from them the practices and rituals of

¹⁰ Norman F. Cantor, *The Sacred Chain: The History of the Jews*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994).

¹³ See Solomon Poll "The Impact of Hasidism on American Judaism" in Reuven P. Bulka, ed. *Dimensions of Orthodox Judaism*. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1983), 199-211.

everyday life. Popular instructional literature then, can be seen as an intermediary between the rabbinic writings upon which it is based, and the general practising Jewish public.

I have selected three popular guides to Jewish life, two of which are currently in print: *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household* by Blu Greenberg and *To Be a Jew*, by Hayim Halevi Donin. The third is a standard reference entitled *The Jewish Catalogue* by Siegal, Strassfeld and Klein, which influenced a generation of newly religious North American Jews. All of the authors write from the perspective of Modern Orthodoxy, an ideological stance which purports to combine Orthodox Jewish practice with the realities of contemporary life. In addition to the biblical and rabbinic sources cited by the authors, all draw upon the accumulation of Jewish culture passed on orally and through custom within families and communities. For the authors, written law and custom have become inextricably bound up with the fabric of everyday life in a way that makes popular instruction manuals much more obviously products of their own time and place, in addition to being interpretations of eternally valid commandments. Still, these manuals do not claim to be about real succot; instead, they simply advise contemporary readers on how to build and use their own succot. For this reason, I have turned to oral history as a method for dealing with the succah in real life.

Oral History

Oral history as a method is critical to this thesis. Although the extent and depth of the literature on succot attests to their importance, in the end, these texts do not describe reality. Vernacular architectural historian Annmarie Adams has insightfully tackled a

similar problem in her article “The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia”. Adams exposes the discrepancies between prescriptive literature and lived experience, which she discovers through first person interviews with the residents of one domestic environment.¹⁴ Her method is fundamental to this thesis, part of which will examine the relationship between some of the Jewish texts which contain the laws that regulate the construction of the succah, and the experiences of several groups and individuals. The advertising and promotional literature discussed by Adams predicted a middle-class lifestyle and prescribed certain modes of behaviour and of movement in the houses under consideration.

The Jewish texts I will consider represent not a prescription, prediction or suggestion from promoters and salespeople, but a set of commandments from God and his earthly representatives to the Jews. We would expect that practitioners of Jewish law would hew close to the letter of the law. In the absence of descriptive historical sources on succot and because succot are by nature temporary and leave little material evidence of their existence, oral history becomes valuable as a means of accessing, within the limits of living memory, traditions of succah building and use as they exist today and have existed recently. The first-person interviews conducted in the autumn of 1996 with six owners and users of succot will allow me to begin writing a history of the succah which might stretch back three generations. Contacts established within the Orthodox Jewish community during a previous study of Jewish architecture in Montreal helped me

¹⁴ Annmarie Adams “The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Post-War Suburbia” in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 164-179.

to locate potential interview subjects for this study. Because my contacts were primarily among Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of east European descent), including Hasidic Jews, the succot considered in this thesis all fall within that tradition. A larger study would necessarily encompass the succot owned by Sephardi Jews (Jews of Spanish, North African and Mediterranean descent). This was not possible for me within my limited time-frame for primary research -- about two weeks. As stated earlier, I felt it important that both private succot owned by families, and public succot owned and operated institutionally, be represented here and consequently sought out both types. One succah belonged to a student organization, one to a restaurant and one to a synagogue. Three succot were privately owned by families residing in the Mile-End, Outremont and Cote-St-Luc areas of Montreal. I interviewed both women and men in an attempt to understand the roles of both with respect to the succah. Supplementing the interviews are photographic illustrations of the succot under consideration.

The method is not without its problems. Oral history deals with human beings. It is not scientific, systematic or reliable in the same way that documents can be. But ultimately, this thesis is about the way in which humans interact with their vernacular built environment. For all its lack of objectivity, oral history is the most appropriate and effective method of dealing with this subject.

The writing of Columbia historian Yosef Yerushalmi underscores the need for the combination of methods which I have adopted in this thesis. His collection of lectures *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* raises important questions about the practice of historiography. Yerushalmi places Jewish historiography and Jewish collective

memory in diametric opposition to one another; where Jewish history writing is described as the secular replacement of religious tradition, carried out largely by those only loosely affiliated with religious practice. Those who still have a Jewish collective memory, i.e., religious or traditional Jews, are, in Yerushalmi's view, forever suspended in biblical history, re-living the archetypal events of Jewish history daily, monthly and yearly. This group is seen as having no need for professionally written histories. I accept this to an extent; the succah is an historical building in the sense of a living historical tradition based on the reconstruction and re-enactment of biblical events. I would suggest, however, that Yerushalmi has overlooked and simplified for the sake of argument. Folklorists, social historians, historians of native cultures, feminist historians and most recently historians of the built environment have acknowledged the value of oral-historical traditions and of learning and teaching by doing as a method of transmission of historical knowledge. Historians of buildings and material culture value visual representations and objects as two and three-dimensional historical documents. The succah can be seen as one such document, and although the oldest surviving succah dates only to the eighteenth century, I will argue that each individual succah built and rebuilt must be considered the repository, not only of two millennia of biblical history, but of specific family and community histories. Each contemporary succah has a short history of its own involving family, neighbourhood and community traditions. The general tendency among secular scholars to label religious Jews as ahistorical must be reconsidered in the light of material evidence to the contrary.

My intention, in this thesis, is to place the architecture of succot within an

historical context. My effort has necessarily been based on both written sources and on interviews which seek to understand the current and continuing practice of succah construction and use. These sources have led me to understand that the succah is unusual in that it is both sacred and secular, both a votive space and an actual dwelling place. My first and second chapters will explore these dualities in detail, focusing on the notion of *kedusha*, or holiness and on the meaning of dwelling. These concepts exist within a real, clearly defined tradition. My third chapter will look at that tradition as it is manifest in contemporary Montreal.

I The Succah as a Ritual Space

Knowing that the succah was and still is a ritual dwelling associated with a religious festival and thus on some level, with "the holy", it seemed to me important to begin by establishing the nature of this space in terms of its holiness and/or profanity. Because little historical evidence for succot exists, my inquiry will focus mainly on contemporary succot. My investigation will be in two parts. The first part will examine the concept of *kedusha*, the Hebrew word for holiness, and the meaning of this term as it functions within normative Judaism. Drawing mainly on the classical Jewish texts and on popular instructional literature in which the tenets of normative Judaism are laid out, I will attempt to understand the way the term is applied to the succah in a strictly literary context. Since contemporary rabbis are the heirs to the rabbis who wrote the classical texts, I have also drawn, in this section, upon material from an interview with the Orthodox Rabbi of an Ottawa congregation who volunteered his time for this project. The second part of this chapter will be about actual succot. I will draw upon personal interview conducted with six Orthodox Jews in Montreal in the autumn of 1996 to explore the way in which religious literature is applied to actual buildings. The interviews reveal how the *kedusha* of the succah is understood by some builders and users of succot in the contemporary landscape.

Mercea Eliade's classic text, *The Sacred and the Profane*, deals in general terms with some of the ideas I will explore in this chapter about holiness and its relationship to space. Eliade's purpose is to "bring out the specific characteristics of the religious experience, rather than to show its numerous variations and the differences caused by history".¹ In this initial

¹Mercea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1959), 10.

exploration of the succah, my purpose here will necessarily be to draw out the real and significant differences which exist between religious traditions which are expressed, in this case, in the built environment. The vernacular succah is unique to Jewish culture, and as such deserves close examination on its own terms.

Two other differences between this work and Eliade's should be highlighted. Eliade claims that the human dwelling has become de-sacrilized. Through industrialization and scientific thought, he claims, the sacredness of the dwellings of "archaic man" and "traditional society" have been lost. For Orthodox Jews, as this thesis will show, this claim is not valid. The Jewish dwelling has retained an important measure of sacredness which manifests itself both ritually and in domestic material culture. In a Jewish household, for example, the table at which meals are eaten is perceived as a miniature altar, a replacement for the destroyed altar in the Temple of Jerusalem. Jewish door frames are marked by *mezuzot*, small scrolls containing biblical passages. Ritual candelabra, wine glasses, bread plates and covers are part of the sacred "furniture" of the Jewish household.²

Further, Eliade's argumentative framework admits spaces that are either holy or profane. The holy spaces Eliade discusses are of two specific types; first, holy *places* -- cities, mountains, caves, etc. associated with the creative act of a Deity in that place at a specific point in time. These holy places are commemorative in nature. The second type of holy space is the earthly recreation of celestial phenomena, an example of which is the Temple at Jerusalem. The succah fits into neither of these categories, although it is commemorative in nature.

²Blu Greenberg, *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), Hayim Halevi Donin, *To Be A Jew: A Guide To Jewish Observance in Everyday Life*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1972).

Finally, Eliade's distinction between the sacred and the profane, which tends to polarize the two, has given way to more moderate conceptions. Recent scholarship on vernacular architecture has shown that divisions between the two realms are not always so discrete.³ Before embarking on this research, I has assumed that succot were, like the churches and the chapels of Christianity, holy spaces. This, despite the fact that in all of the literature, succot are clearly associated with the mundane function of dwelling. Clearly, the succah cannot be properly understood using the same language and conceptual approach that is used to discuss the holy spaces of other groups -- at least not without clear qualification of the terms involved. This chapter is dedicated to creating an understanding of holiness as it relates specifically to Jews and Jewish space, which I will then use in my discussion of actual succot.

Holiness and Kedusha: A Clarification

Although it would be possible to explore the larger Semitic origins of the word *kedusha*, I will confine my analysis to Jewish sources, since this thesis is concerned primarily with Jewish culture. My analysis will begin with the Hebrew bible. The Hebrew word *kedusha* is most often translated into English as *holiness*. This translation, however, can be misleading. The root of *kedusha*, *kadosh*, is usually defined as holy, but is perhaps better defined as separate, set apart or devoted.⁴ Something which is *kadosh* enjoys a privileged relationship to God, a notion which is consistent with the biblical notion of the election of the Jewish people to whom God is thought

³J.B. Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1986), Susan Garfinkel "Letting in the World: (Re)-Interpretive Tensions in the Quaker Meeting House" in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V*, (Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 78-95.

⁴Interview #7, Ottawa, March 1997.

to have said:

"You shall be to me a nation of priests and holy nation."⁵

"You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."⁶

The concept of separation is imbedded in both the Hebrew language and in Jewish culture. In the *Torah* (the first five books of the Hebrew bible), a *kadesha* is a temple prostitute, a woman or man set aside for ritual purposes. A *kiddush* is a sanctification or a blessing, such as that made over wine on the Sabbath. *Kedushin*, or marriage, is the unique relationship between two individuals. What is meant, then, by *kedusha* is not holiness in the intrinsic or inherent sense, but that which is set aside and devoted to God and used for a higher purpose.⁷

This is not to say that the bible does not recognize other kinds of holiness, such as the intrinsic holiness of some geographic places, based on the privileged relationship of a place to God; it does. In the book of Exodus, God says to Moses

"Do not come closer to here, take off your shoes, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground."⁸

Other holy places include the Holy Ark and the Holy of Holies in the first and second temples of Jerusalem. Both of these spaces were surrounded by prescriptions and prohibitions. Only the high priests or Kohanim were allowed into the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year. The Holy Ark was carried through the desert and cared for by a special class of Jews.⁹ After the fall

⁵Exodus 19:6.

⁶Leviticus 19:2

⁷Ibid., and Donin, *To Be A Jew.*, 1972, 34-6.

⁸Exodus 3:4-6.

⁹An understanding of the function and place of the Holy Ark and the Holy of Holies would require a thorough reading of the entire biblical text. Some of the most relevant selections would

of Jerusalem in 70 CE, however, Judaism never recovered the kind of holiness that existed in the Temple, although vestiges are left. Orthodox Jews, for example, will not set foot upon the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the former site of the second Temple, for fear of treading on the Holy of Holies, the exact location of which is unknown. In terms of a hierarchy of holiness, one might conceptualize a series of concentric circles emanating from the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount toward the farthest reaches of the diaspora community, space descending in holiness as the circles move outward. Other types of places, such as the purported grave-sites of the Jewish fore-fathers and fore-mothers, Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca and Rachel, in contemporary Israel have a retroactively ascribed level of holiness granted in part by tradition and in part by contemporary Zionism. Synagogues have, to some extent, replaced the Temple and become mini-temples, but their holiness comes from the fact that they contain the Torah scrolls on which the word of God to Moses is written.¹⁰ That the level of *kedusha* of a synagogue is of a different and lesser type than that of the Temples in Jerusalem is evident even in terms of the behavior that is allowed in the synagogue. In addition to praying, congregants gossip, sing, study, and celebrate without hierarchical or ritual groupings except for the separation of women and men in Orthodox milieus.¹¹

include: Exodus 25-30 on the building of the Ark and the priestly service, Kings 5:15-7 on the construction of the first (Solomon's) Temple, and Ezra 3-5. The works of Josephus Flavius are important documents on the second temple. See Josephus Flavius, *The Jewish War*. trans G.A Williamson, (London: Penguin Books, 1970 [90]).

¹⁰Interview 7, Ottawa, March 1997. Also see the laws of synagogue building and use in Solomon Ganzfried, ed. Code of Jewish Law: *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: A Compilation of Jewish Laws and Customs*. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1961 [1864]), 4.

¹¹Samuel Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Also see J. Cousineau "The Shtibl: Toward An Architectural History of Hasidic Houses of Prayer", unpublished dissertation (University of Oxford, 1996), Chapter 2.

The holiness of the succah is of an altogether different sort. It flows from the construction and use of this space within a biblically determined time-frame and for the purposes of fulfilling a biblical commandment:

" On fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be a Festival of Succot (booths)...you shall dwell in succot (booths) seven days".¹²

The holiness of the succah lasts only as long as the festival of Succot -- for only eight days each year. Although most succot are built only for that eight day period and are thus temporary dwellings, permanent succot with retractable roofs, built into the structure of a house or apartment, are not uncommon in the late twentieth-century.¹³ In these cases, a temporary roof must be constructed within a limited time-frame before the beginning of the festival, in order to satisfy the requirement that the succah be a temporary dwelling.¹⁴ Time, then, as much as the space itself was a critical factor in the way in which the succah was originally conceived, and in the way succot are currently being constructed and used. The phrase "Jewish time" is a commonplace referring to the Jewish calendar and yearly cycle of festivals and fasts, as well as to the Sabbath celebrations that mark each Jewish week. In much the same way as the creation of the world was divided into six days of creation and one day of rest, Jewish religious culture divides the week into six profane days and one holy day -- the Sabbath -- and the festival days from the other days of the year. The space of the succah is part of the Jewish cultural norm of time-separation and of the resultant *kedusha* or creation of holiness.

¹²Leviticus 19:33.

¹³Danby, ed. *The Mishna.*, 172-181.

¹⁴Rabbi Aisenstark of Montreal is the owner of one such Succah. See Susan Schwartz "Booths Sprout as harvest festival is celebrated" *The Montreal Gazette*, 1992.

The responsibility for separating and for creating and using the succah in the appropriate holy time period, rests squarely on the individual Jew. Experience of the holy space of the succah is impossible without human action. Indeed, the explicit instructions as to the construction and use of the succah in legal texts and popular guides to be discussed later in this chapter, attests to the primacy of the human act in bringing about the effect of holiness. British-Jewish theologian Louis Jacobs underscores this point in his book *Jewish Values*:

"holiness must be wedded to humanity...the idea of holiness as a quality in one's life is held up for all Jew...this idea is not for an esoteric group of saints but an attitude of mind and a course of action for normal men and women, living in the world and sharing in its joys and pleasures, its hopes, frustrations and ambitions."¹⁵

Writing half a century before Jacobs, Solomon Schechter, the first Reader in Rabbis at the University of Cambridge succinctly described how ordinary Jews could achieve holiness in their everyday lives. In stating that holiness was the highest achievement of Jewish law, Schechter meant that holiness was within the grasp of every person who would observe the precepts of *halacha*, the ethical and legal system based upon the writings of the Torah and the interpretations of those writings by legal authorities in post-biblical times down to the present.¹⁶ A small guide to the Festival of Succot prepared and published by an Orthodox Jewish association in Montreal underscores this point, emphasizing the importance of human agency where it states that:

"With the Torah, Israel [Jews] can merge with the infinite by sanctifying the material world in the performance of the mitzvot, which is the ultimate

¹⁵Louis Jacobs. *Jewish Values*. (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1960).

¹⁶Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909).

completion of Gods' plan of creation."¹⁷

By instituting the *mitzvot* (ritual commandments), the Torah presented injunctions to act. Later rabbis and legal codifiers explicated and expanded the injunctions, providing the practical guidelines for living all aspects of a holy life, including instructions on how to build and dwell in a succah.

The Perception and Practice of Holiness in the Contemporary Succah

One of the questions posed to interviewees was whether they perceived the succah as a holy space. Answers were ambiguous: some responded with a definite yes, others with a definite no and others were not certain. Some redefined holiness in the Jewish context, as I have above. This led me to believe that the idea of holiness as related to the succah required further investigation, the findings of which I have assembled in this chapter.

The owners interviewed tended to begin by explaining the religious significance of the succah. In so doing, they returned to what they perceived as the origins of the succah, located in the passages in the Hebrew bible quoted in the introduction. They defined the succah as a dwelling that is historical in its relationship to the Exodus narrative, in which succot appear as desert shelters for the Israelites. Further, owners stressed the ritual status of the succah, the building of which and the dwelling within which is one of many biblical commandments.

"To my mind, the succah is built as a *mitzvah* for the holiday of Succot. It symbolizes the Israelites' sojourn in the desert and the temporariness and ephemeral condition of our lives...it is also when the Israelites were walking in the desert. They had a certain comfort, certain rules established for what they were doing. But when they built a succah, they remembered that their life wasn't

¹⁷The Lubavitch Youth Organization, *Sukos: The Season of Our Rejoicing*. (Montreal: Chabad House, n.d.), 14.

as comfortable as they thought it was.¹⁸

"Succahs are a kind of *mitzvah*...that relates to an historical event. We know about leaving Egypt, and it says we lived in a succah...So we sit in a succah like on Passover to remember [that] we left Egypt and we were stuck outside in these shacks but nonetheless, despite the elements and whatever else might have been around us, Hashem, our god protected us. So that is historical. The history of the construction in specifics, it is not. How long have lumber yards existed? How long has lumber existed?"¹⁹

The characterization of the succah as a *mitzvah*, a ritual commandment, positions the structure squarely in a triangular relationship consisting of it, God and man, and within the realm of separated (or holy) acts.

Some users' comments on the sanctity of the succah reflected clearly the idea that holiness comes from use and from the separation of the space of the succah from the space of everyday life, even though the important elements of the quotidian were continued and contained, to an extent, within the walls of the succah:

"But in Judaism, there is no difference between sacred and profane. The profane is what you don't do. There is sacredness, there is kedusha from the moment you get up in the morning till the moment you go to sleep at night. Whatever space you happen to be in, you try to make that sacred. If it is your own home, your table is an altar -- a miniature just like that in Jerusalem. So there is not the dichotomy that you find in western culture where you say that the spiritual is for the lord and the temporal is for Caesar. No. To a religious Jew, who considers himself spiritual and practicing, there is no dichotomy. Whatever you do should be sacred. There should be nothing mundane in your life. This is just another form of it We make space sacred. Whether it is the synagogue, whether it is in the home, whether it is in the succah. As you are commanded."²⁰

One succah owner suggested that the type of holiness I had implied might have been the

¹⁸Interview #4, Montreal, December 1996.

¹⁹Interview #1, Montreal, October 1996.

²⁰Ibid.

conception of a religion other than Judaism, where holiness had to do with a space being somehow outside the material presence of the mundane. Having experienced a variety of apparently mundane activities in the succah, she could not envision this space as separate from day to day life, which in fact, it is not.

"No [I don't think the succah is a sacred space]. Maybe because we do so many things there. We have birthday parties there. I don't know if it is sacred. I don't consider it sacred. Maybe special or set aside, perhaps unique. Sacred...I think that is a Christian concept, because if you look at the whole concept of kedusha or holiness, that also means that it is separate or special...when we got engaged, we came up here for the first time officially with my parents Succos time, so we had an engagement party that was half in the Succah and half in my in-laws house."²¹

In contrast to this succah owner's view about the space, the administrators of the Peel St. Chabad House (the downtown headquarters of the Lubavitch Hasidic group) perceived the succah as having a heightened sense of holiness by virtue of the fact that through the active participation of users, the presence of God was invoked in the Succah itself. In "Torah and Mitzvot: The Bond Between Finite and Infinite", an article published in the above mentioned guide to Succot, the author writes that:

"...the performance of any mitzvah creates an eternal bond with God that stands above all the limitation of time and space"²²

The Lubavitch Hasidic tradition has incorporated elements of Jewish mysticism into its philosophical structure and religious customs, such that the succah is seen by Lubavitch Hasidim as the space of revelation. Indeed, so holy do the Lubavitch consider this space, that certain types of activities allowed by other groups in the succah, are, according to a resident Rabbi, prohibited

²¹ Interview # 3, Montreal, November 1996.

²²Chabad Youth Organization, *Sukos*, 13.

in the Lubavitch succah:

“Some people have the tradition that if possible they sleep in the succah. In Chabad...we do not sleep in the succah. For us, we realize that it is a very sacred space and it is serious. It is not a place to go to sleep. You don't go to sleep in the presence of somebody serious, right? Therefore, we recognize it as a kind of sacred space. On the other hand, we do eat and drink and be merry. Then again, we do that in the synagogue also. So in a holy space, there is great revelation, that is to say that God is readily accessible there. Now what's with the succah? A succah is a radiation -- in cabalistic terms, it is called a *mafikim of bina* which means the infinite aspect of understanding. This is what happens in a succah. A tremendous revelation. *Makif* implies that something surrounds you like a succah surrounds you... so that makes it a holy place. A certain type of relationship, a certain type of rapport is accessible in the succah. Do we tune in is another question. It is a holy space, and it is just upon us to tune in.”²³

This approach both lessens and enhances the individuals responsibility vis-a-vis the creation of *kedusha*. People are responsible for creating the succah and for participating in activity in it, but for the Lubavitch, God's presence is more strongly manifest here whether willed or not. In keeping with this, the Lubavitch do not decorate the succah, or as they see it, allow anything to intervene between the participant and the experience of the holy space.

Somewhat puzzling in consideration of the Lubavitch custom of neither sleeping in nor decorating the succah, is that fact that a pamphlet published by the Peel St. Chabad (Lubavitch) House Youth Organization does not mention either of these customs, nor does it discourage readers explicitly from either decorating or sleeping in the succah. It emphasizes, rather, standard practice (which includes sleeping and decoration), the meanings of rituals and blessings and the origins of the festival.²⁴ Such a discrepancy between prescriptive literature and practice underscores the need for the oral history research methods used later in this thesis, in trying to

²³ Interview #1, Montreal, October 1996.

²⁴Chabad Youth Organization, *Sukos*.

understand this building type.

Other succah owners mentioned similar mystical tradition. A member of the Belzer Hasidic group compared the sanctity of the succah with that of the synagogue, where certain types of activity were prohibited. In the same breath, the interviewee mentioned a contradictory source, followed by himself and his family, which suggests that more activity of almost any kind in the succah during the holiday period raises the level of its holiness because the space can only be used during that unique period.

"It is not part of your house, but it is. If you look into the *hasidische schinah*, you can see that a lot of them are mentioning that the *Schinah* is there in the Succah and we shouldn't talk. You should be more like you are in the Synagogue, which is the house of Hashem. It is dedicated to praying and to...but it is still mentioned that you should live as you live in a house. So...if you want to talk, you want to make business, go to the succah because it is a *mitzvah* every minute you are in the succah. It is like you live there. So it is like a house and in certain ways it is holy. You should watch what you talk about."²⁵

A further indicator of the holiness of the succah -- the manner in which materials used for the succah must be disposed -- was signaled by an interviewee. Although the materials used for the succah have no intrinsic holiness, they become elevated through the act of separation for use in the performance of a *mitzvah*, or commandment:

"If you consider *kedusha* or sacredness as being apart from the mundane, it is a sacred space. It is a devoted space. In Judaism, something that is devoted to spiritual ends, let us say, like the Temple in Jerusalem, it becomes sacred, put aside. A succah fits into that. For example, I am not allowed to use any of the materials that I use for my succah for mundane purposes. Even the walls and whatnot. They are set aside only for use as a succah because I have used them for that *mitzvah*. Even if you have to destroy it, it should be done in a very dignified way."²⁶

²⁵Interview #2, Montreal, October 1996.

²⁶Interview # 4, Montreal, December 1996.

Many of the literary sources discuss the disposal of succah materials, prohibiting the mundane use of reusable succah materials and the uncaring disposal of non-permanent materials, especially the roof, considered to be the most important part of the succah. It is for this reason that the Shaar Ha Shomayim Synagogue, a Conservative congregation located in the Westmount area of Montreal, asked its congregants to return their ritual *etrogim* to the synagogue. These were subsequently made into etrog jam and therefore disposed of in an appropriate manner. Most succah owners store their succah materials and permanent decorations in boxes, garages or attics.²⁷ We can almost, then, speak of a memory of holiness which remains with the materials once devoted to the fulfilment of the commandment to build succot.

Several conclusions can be drawn in light of the evidence of Jewish literature and Jewish experience. First, that the researcher attempting to understand the buildings of any ethnic or religious group must be prepared to delve into the language and history of that group, which invariably inform its material culture. Having done so here, I have found that the holiness of the succah is not an intrinsic holiness. It is intimately bound up with time and with human agency. It is the construction and use of the succah -- whether construction is limited to the roof, or encompasses an entire structure, within a tightly circumscribed period that makes it a holy space. Hebrew, the Jewish language in which the succah and its attendant culture were first discussed, most accurately conveys the nature of the space. The Hebrew word *kedusha* is the most appropriate descriptive term for the type of holiness that exists with respect to the succah, because its correct translation into English, separation, or devotion, carries the implication of

²⁷See Interviews #1, 2, and 5, Montreal, October, November and December 1996 and Interview #7, Ottawa, March 1997. Also Greenberg, *How To Run*, 1982.

human action. In the chapter to follow, human action or agency will again be my theme, this time, in exploring the profane function of the succah. Whereas this chapter has examined the succah as a ritual structure, the next chapter will be devoted to an inquiry into the succah as a dwelling.

II Dwelling

In the stepwise process of coming to an understanding of the succah, my next step will be to analyse its secular nature; that is, the succah as dwelling. This chapter will investigate the concept and meaning of dwelling in Jewish literature and in contemporary practice. To my knowledge, apart from the collected anecdotes in Phillip Goodman's *The Sukkot and Simchah Torah Anthology*, no historical records exist which document succah-dwelling.¹ In light of this lack, the most effective means of gaining access to what was meant historically by dwelling in a succah is to return to the classical sources of Jewish law -- the Torah, the Mishna, medieval law codes and later compendia. For information on dwelling in contemporary succot, I shall continue to draw upon the interviews discussed earlier in this thesis. I shall also draw upon my ethnographic fieldwork and my experience as a participant-observer in the succah-building process, where I feel that this is relevant in the section on contemporary succot. If Jews have not kept records of their succot, even fewer are the accounts of succah-building by outside observers, and my research is in this way a unique contribution to the history of this building.²

The actions which constitute dwelling are defined specifically in the texts which I shall discuss in this chapter. Some explanation of their development and function needs to be given before proceeding. My investigation of Jewish literature might be likened to an archeological excavation plumbing several layers of the past. The Torah, comprised of the books of Genesis,

¹Philip Goodman, *The Sukkot and Simhat Torah Anthology*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977).

²To my knowledge, the newspaper articles collected for this thesis are the main source of information about succot by non-users.

Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers, constitutes the foundation layer of Jewish law from which all other laws are derived. Orthodox Jewish tradition teaches that the Torah actually exists in two forms. The smaller, *Written Torah*, the books of Genesis through Numbers, is thought to have been revealed to Moses at Sinai. The larger, *Oral Torah* consists of the knowledge transmitted by Jewish spiritual leaders from generation to generation, beginning with Moses and culminating with the rabbis living around the turn of the first century of the Common Era. Near the end of the third century, Judah Ha Nasi made the first attempt to set down an official version of the *Oral Torah*, which had until then, as its name indicates, been transmitted orally. The Mishna is the result of his efforts, and it constitutes the second layer of Jewish law. We can assume that the subject of the succah was of considerable import to the early Jewish sages who devoted an entire section of the Mishna to the subject. Between the third and fifth centuries, the next generation of rabbinical scholars interpreted and expanded the text of the Mishna, just as the Mishnaic scholars had expanded the Torah. The end product was Talmud, which in turn made biblical and Mishnaic law relevant to a later time and place. With the completion of the Talmud in the sixth century CE, the canon of normative Jewish law was complete. The process of interpretation did not end, however, with the Talmud. It continued long after this period, with each authority making the texts meaningful for their own societies.³ The

³For a discussion of biblical exegesis as practised by the Mishnaic and Talmudic sages, see Robert Goldenberg, "Talmud" in Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classical Jewish Texts*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 129-177. The translation used for this thesis was Danby, ed. *The Mishna*. Jacob Neusner's extensive contribution to the scholarly study of the Mishna is an invaluable source. Relevant works include Jacob Neusner, ed. *The Modern Study of the Mishna*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970 and *Then We Sat Down*. New York: Ktav Publishing, 1976. Samuel Heilman's *The People of the Book*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) provides overview of the function of the classical texts in contemporary life. Also see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi,

process continues today, and in order to reflect some current trends in interpretation of the classical sources, I have chosen to include three popular instructional guides among the sources for this thesis. Although these books do not have the force of law, each is widely read and the instructions contained within are often followed as if they constituted laws.⁴

The process of the expansion of the biblical passages related to the commandment to dwell in succot eventually resulted in a definition of dwelling that touched upon all aspects of dwelling and all activities possibly included in it. As mentioned in Chapter One, the legal texts only state how people *should* dwell, not how they actually did and one would be ill advised to write history based on these texts. I will limit myself to investigating what dwelling might have meant at the time various Jewish texts were written. With contemporary succot, it is possible to go beyond guessing at meaning and use. With an anthropological method based on oral history and participant-observation, it is possible to begin documenting the form, construction and use of real contemporary succot closely and carefully. I hope that my investigation of contemporary succot will provide a critical record upon which future research can be built.

Dwelling in The Bible

The first injunction to dwell in succot is found in the biblical book of Leviticus. All subsequent legislation relating to the building and use of the succah is based on the following passage:

“You shall dwell in booths for a seven day period; every native in Israel shall dwell in booths. So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of

Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), Ch.1.

⁴Interview #7, Ottawa, March 1997.

Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the land of Egypt.”⁵

What did this passage mean to the ancient Israelites where dwelling was concerned? Since the Torah was believed by ancient Jews to be the word of God transposed directly, we can assume that the injunction to dwell in booths was felt as a religious imperative. In other words, the ostensibly mundane act of dwelling took on an element of sanctity because it had been commanded by God through Moses. Significantly, the Leviticus passage links the act of dwelling in the succah to the act of remembering and both are made into holy acts. Joseph Yerushalmi’s discussion of the sacred act of remembering elaborates this theme.⁶

Biblical scholars have in turn praised and cursed the language of the bible. It is both plain and terse. Although the Leviticus passage imposes time limits on the observance of the festival of succot -- seven days -- and specifies the group which is bound to observance -- all native Israelites -- and provides a rationale for the injunction -- to remember and commemorate a specific historic period -- it does not reveal to the reader what, exactly, God meant by the term dwell. Archeological, material and literary sources from the centuries before the Common Era fail to provide evidence about early succot, but they do reveal that a wealth of domestic customs, rituals and ideas about dwelling existed in the ancient middle-east. Although it would be outside of the scope of this thesis to investigate this material, I would suggest that the history and material culture of nomadic groups in the middle-east might be fruitful as an area of comparative research on the early history of succot as architecture and on the nature of dwelling in such

⁵Nosson Sherman, ed., *The Artscroll Tanach, Stone Edition*. (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1996).

⁶Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 1982.

temporary structures. Within the limits of the biblical text, however, we can find the beginnings of the answer to the question of what was meant by dwelling.

There is, in the book of Deuteronomy, a second passage relating to the festival of Succot, which alludes to the agricultural origins of the festival. In Deuteronomy, the succah is associated with the temporary huts of farmers and harvesters during the period:

“You shall make the festival of Succot for a seven day period, when you shall gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine cellar. You shall rejoice on your festival -- you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, the Levite, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are in your cities. A seven day period you shall celebrate to Hashem, your God in the place that Hashem your God will choose, for Hashem will have blessed you in all your crop and in all your handiwork; you will be completely joyous”⁷

Although the passages does not repeat the command to dwell, it does dictate that a joyous mood should prevail during the festival, and that the Israelites should celebrate. If we assume that the biblical commandments were followed consistently, it is possible to say that dwelling in the succah incorporated these elements. The passage also suggests that at that time, the Israelites lived in “cities” or settlements of a quasi-permanent nature. Their permanent dwellings in these settlements would have provided a contrast to the temporality of the agricultural succot.

A third biblical passage from the book of Nehemiah, dated to approximately the fourth century BCE, provides the first record of succot being built and used:

“They found written in the Torah that God had commanded through the hand of Moses that the Children of Israel should dwell in succot during the festival in the seventh month. They commanded that they should announce it and make a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the mountains and get olive leaves, pine needles, myrtle leaves, palm leaves and leaves of the braided tree, to make succot, as written. So the people went out and brought [these items] and made themselves succot, each man on his

⁷Deuteronomy 16: 13-15.

roof, and in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the Temple of God, in the plaza of the Water Gate and in the plaza of the Gate of Ephraim. The entire congregation that had returned from the captivity made succot and dwelt in succot. The Children of Israel had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, and there was very great joy.”⁸

The passage gives the first construction details for succot in terms of the materials used and the siting of the buildings, but still does not illuminate the idea of dwelling except to say that the injunction was widely observed as a joyous, public celebration.

The Hebrew bible, then, provides the *who, where, why* and *when* of succot, but does not reveal *how* dwelling was to be carried out. Faced with a lack of definition and detail on how to proceed in obeying that law, as well as with social, geographic and political changes affecting their lives, the Jews of the early first millennia began the process of exegesis which would amplify and clarify the meaning of dwelling in the biblical text and which would eventually provide the legal framework for normative Jewish practice life over the following two millennia. In short, we assume that they interpreted the texts in order to know how to dwell. It is to the first product of that exegetical exercise, the Mishna, that we now turn.

Dwelling in The Mishna

The Mishna *Succah* opens with the broad statement that :

“Throughout the seven days [of the feast] a man must make his Succah a regular abode and his house a chance abode.”⁹

The passage introduces the concepts of permanence and temporality into the laws of Succot. The words “regular” and “chance” describe two types of environments that must, according to the

⁸Nehemiah, 3:16.

⁹Danby, H. ed., *The Mishna*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

passage, be exchanged in order that the ritual requirements of the holiday of Succot be fulfilled. Users were required to make both a physical change of place and a symbolic and spiritual shift in thinking when they dwelt in the succah. Whatever the actual physical structure or location of the dwellings of Jews living in the early rabbinic period, the use of the word "regular" in the text suggests that contemporary Jews at that time knew and enjoyed permanence, stability and order. The use of "chance", by contrast, implies a vulnerability or sense of loss implicit in the act of leaving a permanent place for a temporary one. It might be revealing to return, at this point, to the original meaning of the verb "to dwell" or the noun "dwelling". J.B. Jackson points out that these words imply lingering or pausing with the intention of eventually moving on toward a further destination.¹⁰ The succah, in its Mishnaic conception, seems to imply exactly that. The duration of dwelling is exactly seven days, after which one returns to the permanent abode.

The following passages outline the most essential acts involved with dwelling in the succah as it was understood by the authors of the Mishna:

"Men may eat and drink at haphazard outside the succah."

"A man is bound to eat fourteen meals in the succah, one [each] day and one [each] night."

"There is no prescribed number save [that he must eat within the succah] on the night of the first Festival-day of the Feast."

"If a man slept under a bed in the succah, he has not fulfilled his obligation."

"If a man put a board four handbreadths wide over the succah it is valid, provided he does not sleep beneath it"

In the Mishna, dwelling is identified primarily with two activities essential to human life.

By eating and sleeping in the succah, users could fulfill the command to dwell in it. Although the

¹⁰J.B. Jackson, "The Moveable Dwelling," in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

various contributors to the Mishna disagree on the frequency with which one must eat in the succah and the amounts which must be eaten, they do agree that at some point during the holiday, the act of eating must take place in order for the requirement to dwell to be fulfilled.

In the Mishna, the gender, social status and age of dwellers became an issue. Where the biblical passages suggest that all Jews were obligated to keep the laws of succot, the above passages of the Mishna reveal that by the time it was codified, the commandment to dwell in the succah had become gender specific and only men were obligated to fulfill it. The gender split is made explicit further on in the Mishna, where it says that:

“Women, slaves and minors are exempt from the [the law of] the succah”¹¹

It would be wrong to assume because the text of the Mishna explicitly states an exemption for certain groups, these groups did not dwell in succot. The Mishna is a record of the legal discussions of scholars and rabbis and makes no claim to have documented social phenomena. We cannot assume that the gender and class barriers erected by the rabbinical sages around the succah stood firm without evidence to confirm it. The evidence of contemporary practice, as I will show, gives the lie to this. While the gender boundaries set down in the Mishna are still recognized in normative Judaism, it is widely known that women participate in all aspects of succot construction and use.¹²

Dwelling: From Codes of Jewish Law to Popular Instructional Literature

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in the Mishna and later in the Talmud,

¹¹Tbid.

¹²Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, "Jewish Feminism and "New Rituals", in *Canadian Woman Studies* Vol 16 No 4, Fall 1996), 50-55.

the rabbinic exegetes created the canonical texts of normative Judaism. Scholars, rabbis and ordinary Jews since the time the Talmud was complete until the present day have returned to these authoritative texts as a source of guidance for daily Jewish living. The texts are problematic, however, because they could not easily be translated by the non-specialist reader, into practice. The material is organized by topic and in the Talmud, rabbinic discussions and debates, narrative material, stories, biblical passages appear in a style and arrangement that would confuse all but the specialist-reader. Women, who were, as male Jews, held responsible for living a Jewish life and for the raising of children in accordance with Jewish law, constitute only one group which would have had difficulty in making sense of the Talmud as a sources for Jewish law.

In response to this dilemma, beginning in the medieval period, authoritative Jews began to organize Talmudic material in such a way that it would be accessible by topic and useable by the masses of Jewry who did not have time to study the primary texts. Moses Maimonides, one of the first to attempt such an endeavour, in his *Mishna Torah* (recapitulation of the Torah), and his followers in subsequent centuries, were harshly criticized for what was perceived as discouraging primary interaction with the foundational texts. It might be argued, however, that these codes supported and sustained the popular practice of Judaism in the face of the reality that not all Jews could or would be Talmudic scholars, or *Talmidim*. Additionally, the codes allowed compilers to respond to contemporary dilemmas by interpreting the Mishnaic and Talmudic sources afresh in their own time. Maimonides' and subsequent codes were eventually accepted as authoritative, thus creating a tradition which has survived almost eight centuries down to the present day. It would be beyond the limits of this thesis to delve into the meaning of dwelling in

the succah in each major code, but I shall draw upon two which are considered to have had significant impact in their own time and thereafter: Maimonides *Mishna Torah* from 1178 and Solomon Ganzfried's *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* from 1864. My discussion of dwelling in the texts will conclude with an examination of two contemporary books which might be considered heirs to the tradition of codification. I have called them popular instructional or "Jewish How-To" books. Blue Greenberg's *How To Run A Tradition Jewish Home* and Hayim Halevi Donin's *To Be A Jew*, do not claim to be codes of law, nor do they attempt to replace the classical sources. They do, however, play a similar role to the codes for a late twentieth-century audience. The explicit goal of these popular guides is to counsel newly observant Jews and converts, of which there have been a significant number in recent decades, in the fundamental practice of Jewish law and ritual including the laws and rituals of building and dwelling in a succah.¹³

In the Mishnah Torah, Maimonides wrote that:

"One should eat, drink and reside in the booth day and night throughout the whole of the seven days of the festival exactly as he resides in his house during the rest of the year. During these seven days one should regard his house as a temporary home and the booth as his permanent home...Thus one's finest utensils and bed spreads should be kept in the booth, as well as one's festive drinking vessels, like goblets and cups. Eating vessels, like pots and dishes, however, should be kept outside the booth. One's candelabrum should normally be kept in the booth, but if the booth is small, it may be left outside...Both by day and by night, one should eat, drink, and sleep in the booth. No meal may be taken outside of the booth on any of the seven days unless it is merely a casual snack...not even a casual nap may be taken outside the booth."¹⁴

¹³Hayim Halevi Donin, *To Be A Jew: A Guide to Practical Observance*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1972). Blu Greenberg, *How To Run A Traditional Jewish Household*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983). Seigal, Strassfeld and Strassfeld, *The First Jewish Catalogue: a do-it-yourself guide*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976).

¹⁴Moses Maimonides, *The Code of Maimonides Book Three*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961[1178]), 393.

Here, Maimonides' code reiterates and amplifies the Mishna's injunctions to eat and sleep in the succah. Although eating and sleeping remain the basic parameters for dwelling, Maimonides describes *how* one should eat and sleep by suggesting that during the seven day festival, these acts should be carried out with greater ceremony than they would in the permanent dwelling. In twelfth-century Spain this meant the addition of one's special table-ware and best bed spreads.¹⁵ Maimonides further suggests that reading should be done in the succah; the candelabrum mentioned in the list of items to bring into the succah was a practical and necessary addition to the furniture in the succah. Certain items, by contrast, such as dishes (eating vessels) seemed still to be too much part of the mundane world for inclusion in the dwelling ritual.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, or the *Concise Code of Jewish Law* (henceforth to be referred to as the *Kitzur*), compiled in 1864 by the Hungarian Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, is an abridgment of the much longer *Shulchan Aruch* (Set Table), written by Joseph Caro and amended for an *Ashkenazi* (east-European Jewish) audience by Moses Isserles in the sixteenth-century. Since Maimonides *Mishnah Torah* was known to both Caro and Ganzfried and because all three were based upon the same Mishnaic and Talmudic sources, some overlap is to be expected.

Like Maimonides code, the *Kitzur* begins with a reiteration of the Mishna's injunction to:

"dwell in the succah seven days even as we dwell in our house during the whole year. We should make the succah our principal abode."

The text then proceeds expand the Mishnaic and the Maimonidean definition of dwelling in the succah even further by introducing activities and items not mentioned in earlier texts:

¹⁵Ibid.

“... there we should bring our fine furniture and household linens; there we should eat, drink, study, amuse ourselves, and sleep; even our friends should be entertained in the succah, and if we pray privately, we should likewise pray in the succah.”¹⁶

To the aforementioned essential, life-sustaining activities of eating and sleeping have been added the idea of leisure and of leisure activities -- private amusement and the entertainment of guests. By the nineteenth-century, then, the succah as a dwelling has become a devotional space for prayer, a space of amusement and leisure and a place for study and self-edification. Indeed, the multiplication of functions in the succah mirrors the same phenomenon with respect to domestic architecture. The succah was intended to replace the home for seven days, and since the home had evolved from a purely functional structure to one which encompassed luxury and leisure activities, so did the succah. Ganzfried's language reflects a bourgeois middle-class, European culture in which “fine furniture and linens” were commonly to be found in reader's homes and where entertaining friends in the home was widely practised; a culture that recognizes the difference between public and private and that accepts the idea of time spent in pursuit of activities which please the individual. Indeed, this description comes the closest to the actual descriptions of dwelling in the succah in the late twentieth-century by interviewees for this thesis.

At least as interesting as what the author of the *Kitzur* prescribes are the activities and things which he lists as prohibited in the succah:

“We must not bring in there, vessels used for menial tasks, such as pots, pitchers with which we draw water, vessels in which we keep flour, kneading troughs, kettles, frying pans, mortars or the like. The rule is also not to bring there earthen

¹⁶Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, ed. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: A Compilation of Jewish Laws and Customs*. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1961).

candlesticks because they are repulsive. We must not perform in there menial work like washing the pots or dishes, but we wash glasses there. We must not urinate there even in a vessel, even if we are accustomed to do so in our houses. Cohabitation may be had in the succah”

Just as the list of prescriptions revealed much about what middle-class nineteenth-century Jews like to do at home, this text reveals a significant amount about what people in the nineteenth-century considered distasteful with respect to their houses. The prohibitions on urination, on cleaning food from dishes reflect an attitude toward domesticity which features a strong aversion to activities related to the natural bodily functions of eating and elimination. Such activities were hidden or disguised in nineteenth-century middle-class houses and it is not surprising that they would be prohibited in the temporary structures which replaced the permanent dwelling for seven days out of each year. The use of vessels for urination and of candlesticks, earthen or otherwise, as sources of light, and of kneading troughs and mortars for bread-making, places the text firmly in an era before toilets, electric lighting and modern kitchens.

It is clear from the text of the *Kitzur*, as it was with the Maimonidean code, that despite the injunction to treat the succah as a regular abode, certain caveats existed in theory, as they likely did in practice. Despite the insistence of the texts to the contrary, the succah was not intended to replace the home in every detail. Nineteenth-century decorum required that certain aspects of the mundane world remain contained within the spaces of that world -- in the permanent dwelling. In order that dwelling in the succah remain a primarily spiritual, rather than a physical experience, it seems that codifiers tried to ensure that certain activities be banished from the space of the succah.

Surprisingly, this does not apply to "proper sexual relations". The *Kitzur* explicitly states that "cohabitation may be had in the succah". In light of the fact that washing dishes is not, one

required to have conjugal relations with his wife after she has visited the *mikveh* (ritual bath). If this should happen during the period of succot, the man, who is obliged to dwell in the succah, has the option of either entering the house to be with his wife, or of having his wife join him in the succah. Some commentaries aptly point out that in the case of a shared succah, where several men might sleep, a woman could not join them and the man's obligation to be with his wife would override his obligation to dwell or sleep in the succah and he therefore could join his wife in their permanent dwelling. The *Kitzur*'s mention of cohabitation, then, has strictly practical implications. In the case where the wife did elect and was able to sleep in the succah with her husband, marital relations simply became part of dwelling.¹⁷

From the late nineteenth-century *Kitzur*, we move to the popular instructional guides written from the mid to late twentieth-century. Rabbi Hayim Halevi Donin's *To Be A Jew*, from 1960, was written for an audience of "Jewish people who have had a minimal Jewish education and/or have not been brought up in an intensive religious environment...college study groups, adult education, the guidance of proselytes, young couples about to be married, Jewish families interested in enriching their lives through the study of their ancient heritage." The book provides both a philosophy for living a traditional Jewish life and the laws fundamental and necessary in order to live that life under contemporary conditions. Chapter 14, entitled *Succot* has been divided into three distinct sections. It opens with a discussion of the biblical origins of and rationale behind the festival of Succot, with an emphasis on the observant Jew's four-fold obligation to commemorate an historical period and to remember God's place in it, to be thankful for the

¹⁷Interview #7, Ottawa, March 1997.

harvest and to rejoice in its abundance.¹⁸ Although these acts do not in themselves constitute dwelling, they do, for the author and presumably for readers, set the tone for the activities which do take place in the succah. Donin continues with the statement, presumably based on experience, that "Gay religious celebrations, highlighted by much singing and dancing, are particularly associated with this holiday."¹⁹ Under the heading "Dwelling in the Succah" Donin quotes the appropriate biblical passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy and recapitulates the Mishna's injunctions about dwelling. Where he states that the observant are obligated to exchange their permanent home for the succah and to eat all of their regular meals in the succah and in his explanations of the conditions under which one is not obligated -- undue cold, rain, illness, when travelling, if one is a woman -- his instructions cleave close to the classical sources discussed above. Donin's position as a North American and his consequent understanding of some of the potential difficulties involved in dwelling in a succah under climactic conditions in parts of this diaspora community, is reflected in his acknowledgement that eating could constitute a bare minimum of necessity. Realizing that for many North American Jews it would be impractical to live in temporary huts in late September or October, he has set eating regular meals -- defined by the inclusion of bread with the meal -- as the act which ultimately constitutes dwelling under the conditions named.

The fact that this guide, unlike the *Mishnah Torah* and the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, was produced for an audience with minimal Jewish education and therefore little knowledge about

¹⁷Donin, *To Be A Jew*, 250.

¹⁸Ibid., 251

produced for an audience with minimal Jewish education and therefore little knowledge about how to dwell in the succah, is betrayed by Donin's inclusion of specific instructions about the blessing through which dwelling in the succah is sanctified by the user. Popularly known as the *Layshayv b'succah* (to sit in the succah), the blessing for dwelling is provided in Hebrew and English, with a transliteration of the Hebrew for the readers who cannot read the original Hebrew text. In keeping with the idea that eating constitutes dwelling, instructions for saying the blessing dictate that it should be said after the blessing over bread, and therefore before a regular meal, and at no other time. In keeping with the Mishna and the codes, Donin repeats that women are not obligated to eat or say the blessing, and therefore are not obligated to dwell in the succah.

Despite an introduction in which she claims experienced practitioners as her readers, Blu Greenberg's 1982 *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Home* is clearly directed at a female American audience unfamiliar with Jewish religious tradition and rituals. Greenberg's primary goal in writing is to describe the functioning of a contemporary traditional Jewish household -- her own -- which is intended to be a model for reader who, it is assumed, has no other model. Like Donin, but in a more familiar literary voice, the author reviews the biblical and agricultural origins of the festival at the beginning of the chapter entitled *Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah* and emphasizes the importance of eating all of one's meal in the succah, and if possible, of sleeping in it.

Two aspects of Greenberg's interpretation of dwelling in the succah stand out. First, her emphasis on the ritual aspects of dwelling. Most of the chapter is devoted to explaining rituals associated with the holiday including the building of the succah and the assembly of the *lulav* (myrtle) and *etrog* (citron) -- the two most important ritual items for the festival -- the

preparation of food and the blessings which must be recited during the use of ritual items. To the blessing over dwelling (*Layshayv b'succah*) cited by Donin, Greenberg has added the blessing recited on most festival days, the *shecheyemu*, (who gives us life), the blessings over wine and bread (*kiddush* and *hamotzi*), and the blessings which close the first two and most sacred days of the festival (*havdullah*).²⁰ Readers are thereby made aware that eating and drinking in the succah are sanctified acts and that the act of dwelling must be shaped and moulded by ritual. It can be assumed that before Jewish emancipation, in the late eighteenth-century, and even into the mid-nineteenth century when the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* was codified, Jews would have been familiar with both blessing and their associated rituals and would not have needed such explicit instruction. Greenberg's guide documents the extent to which American Jews have become disengaged from religious ritual, and its popularity (it has been re-printed several times) of the fact that many are returning to it.

How to Run A Traditional Jewish Household differs from all previously discussed sources in that it is directed explicitly toward women, simultaneously acknowledging their part in the creation of Jewish life and according them a measure of power in being able to do so. In this sense, Greenberg, who positions herself as a "transitional woman between pre and post-feminist values", can be seen as reaching out to a generation of contemporary women who had achieved positions of power in the workplace and who may have become disenchanted with Judaism's apparent dismissal of women in ritual practice.²¹ The ritual of dwelling in the succah is ultimately associated with home, as were women in the domestic mythologies of the nineteenth

¹⁹Greenberg, *How To Run*, 343-373.

²¹Ibid.

and twentieth-centuries. Greenberg's association of women with the succah might be seen as bolstering these myths; except that the idea that women can direct the entire ritual process from the building of the succah to reciting of the blessings, is both new and empowering for Jewish women. Further, in commenting on the idea that women are not obligated to dwell in the succah, Greenberg attempts to reduce the degree to which the commandment to dwell is regarded by readers as a man's obligation. She calls the decision "historical" rather than "halachic" or legal" -- an important distinction because a decision not codified by law is open alteration or modification. She further point out that "Increasingly, Orthodox women take every meal in the succah as do their male counterparts -- and not just on the sacred days" and provides the example of her daughter and herself seeking out a succah in Manhattan in which to eat. Greenberg addresses, then, not only the content or the act of dwelling, but the people who dwell. If we consider Greenberg's book and other previously discussed texts as historical documents, then her personal testimony becomes important as one of the first to show and detail women's active participation in this millennia-old Jewish ritual. It is possible that women in Mishnaic times, in the time of Maimonides and in the nineteenth-century played as important a role as Greenberg would have their twentieth-century counterparts take on; the nature of the evidence from centuries previous to ours does not reveal it.

The First Jewish Catalogue: a do it yourself guide, originally published in 1976 was the collaborative production of Richard Seigal, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld, all young New York Jews. The large format softcover manual is a compendium of information on all aspect of Jewish life, including religious and ritual practices, music, American, Yiddish and Hebrew literature and travel, to name but a few of the subjects touched upon. One rabbi has cited

its influence on an entire generation of Jews, and indeed, the *Catalogue* was directed toward a young American audience.²² It both responded and contributed to the revival of religious or traditional Judaism that had begun in the mid 1960s. The authors attempt to broaden the appeal of traditional Judaism by giving it a cosmic significance and linking the holidays and festivals with natural phenomena. Like Donin and Greenberg's books, the *Catalogue*'s section "Festivals and Special Days" opens with an explanation of the biblical and agricultural origins of the festival and its relationship to the rest of the ritual calendar. Succot is characterized as a "tremendously universalistic holiday" in that coming at the end of the year it can be likened to the time of the coming of the Messiah.

The *Catalogue* is distinct from the other two manuals in that the authors make a conscious attempt to separate law from custom in discussing the holidays, although without citing sources. With respect to dwelling in the succah, for example, it sets minimums and maximums; the minimum requirement for dwelling is saying the blessings over bread, wine and dwelling (for which it provides the Hebrew blessing and English translation). Eating is the next requirement, followed by sleeping. Although not mentioned as one of the requirements, the custom of inviting guests is given lengthy consideration. A short history for this practice is assembled from other uncited legal, mystical and legendary Jewish sources. The custom of inviting one symbolic guest (known as *Ushpizin*) to enter the succah on each night of the festival, is set out as a model for inviting actual guests, as well as an incentive to decorate the succah with *Ushpizin* posters and an inspiration to tell or read stories. Guests and stories are presented as central to the act of dwelling; if hospitality and storytelling are not portrayed as

²²Interview #7, Ottawa, March 1997.

having the force of law, readers are nevertheless given a sense of their weight in custom and history. A marginal note emphasizes the following:

"Eat every meal there (including breakfast). Sleep in it if you can. Invite guests to your succah and share it with all who have none. Always invite the guest of the day according to the Ushpizin ritual."²³

The practice of inviting guests assumes particular importance in the geographic and temporal context of New York City, where many Jews live in apartment complexes and would be unlikely to own private succot. Finally, the *Catalogue* provides what the other two contemporary sources do not: plans, instructions, and a details list of materials for building the ritual dwelling (fig. 1). In a note to the plans, the authors write that dwelling should involve not only the correct ritual acts, but the right mood, people and the satisfaction to be had in enjoying the fruits of one's labour.

Dwelling in Contemporary Succot

Although it is necessary to refer to textual sources in order to understand what Jewish scholars, rabbis and spiritual leaders meant when they advocated dwelling in the succah, it is equally important to acknowledge that succot are still being built and dwelt in. It is therefore vital that they be studied as part of a real and vibrant building tradition. Further, the writings of Greenberg, Donin and *The Jewish Catalogue* show that the meaning of the succah as a dwelling is still being defined and interpreted in the late twentieth-century. The process of interpretation unfolds not only in texts, but in life, in real succot, built and used by groups and individuals constantly making choices and creating traditions within the larger Jewish tradition of the holiday of Succot. Drawing

²³Seigal, *Jewish Catalogue*, 130.

primarily upon personal interviews but also on photographs, synagogue bulletins, newspaper articles and participant-observation, the following section will move to an examination of real succot and the ways in which contemporary Jews understand dwelling and actually dwell in their succot.

The Domestic Succah

Most succot are domestic; that is to say that they belong to a family and are built on the property where the family home is located. The holiday of Succot in 1996 provided a good example of how the routines and practices of daily life are incorporated into the succah. In 1996, the first day of Succot fell on the Sabbath, which meant that regular Sabbath activity, including candle-lighting by the women and the ritual Sabbath dinner, had to be incorporated into the dwelling activities in the succah. One of the families under consideration has celebrated birthdays in the succah every year because the birthday of a daughter always falls during the holiday. This same family also celebrated an engagement party in the succah -- a fondly remembered occasion for this family. Another succah owner described his multifarious use of the domestic succah this way:

"When you are hungry you don't just sit down to the table to put some food on it. You say, well, I have to prepare my breakfast in the succah. You do your whole activities as if [you] are apart. Even reading my newspaper in the succah is doing something sacred."²⁴

A third succah owner agreed that mundane activities, including talking about business affairs, should be part of dwelling, since it was also part of daily activity for some people:

²⁴Interview #4, Montreal, December 1996.

"If you learn, you learn in the succah. Whatever you do, you do in the succah. If I have guests, I bring them into the succah. I don't bring them into the dining room unless it is raining hard. This time it was hard because it was raining alot, so we tried to shorten up the seudah -- the meal. Then we close the retractable roof from the outside and then we just spent time in it. We just sat."²⁵

This same person also recalled having an evening of Hasidic singing in the succah whilst gentile neighbours looked on curiously. Celebratory gatherings of Hasidic men singing the traditional melodies of their particular Hasidic group are a long-standing tradition born in the Jewish cities and towns of eastern Europe and transplanted to North America in the post-war period. The reception of this phenomenon in Outremont, where the highest concentration of succot in Montreal are located, has not always been positive. The Hasidim have been criticized for singing too loudly and late into the night, especially on the Sabbaths and festivals. We can say that, criticism notwithstanding, singing constitutes an important part of dwelling in many succot.²⁶

Women in the Succah

The Mishna is the first text to specify gender boundaries for the succah. Succah owners and users also commented on this aspect of dwelling. All of the succot under consideration, both public and private were used by both men and women, despite the general understanding that only men were obligated under Jewish law to do so. At Shaar Ha Shomayim, the "Sisterhood Simcha in the Succah", a luncheon for over one-hundred-

²⁵Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

²⁶For further discussion on Hasidim in Outremont and Mile End, Montreal, see J. Cousineau, "The Shtibl: Toward An Architectural History of Hasidic Houses of Prayer." (Unpublished thesis submitted to the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Oxford, 1996), Chapters 2 and 3.

and-sixty people, most of whom were women, was one of the major events of the week. Not only was the event attended mostly by women, but the ritual blessings were led by women and the three keynote speakers were women commenting on their experiences of Succot. The owner of Pizza-Pita restaurant in Cote-St-Luc pointed out that if a couple or a family came to eat at the restaurant, they would not separate simply so that the man could eat in the succah. Likewise in private or domestic succot, main meals were taken with the entire family in the succah. One woman succah owner described family succah activity in terms of "we" rather than the "he" which would refer to her husband or son alone:

"We eat all our meals together there...At night we eat in the succah. In the morning after services we have lunch there. In the afternoon if the kids or my husband are going to have anything, if any of us are going to have anything that we have to wash or say grace for, or if we want to have cake, then we will go into the succah there...At night we eat supper in the succah altogether, even if my husband's not at home at that time, because I don't want Naphtali to eat by himself and it's much nicer in there. So everyone takes in their plate, prepares their plate in the kitchen and then we take it out and then we go back in. Salt, ketchup, juice and the phone."²⁷

Even among the Hasidim, where one would expect to find the sexes more strictly segregated since Hasidim pride themselves on cleaving close to religious law, women participated in the succah ritual along with the rest of the family. To be sure, the one Hasidic interviewee did suggest that this was not the case for all families:

"I can eat anywhere. But we do sit down for the meal, so we do end up eating there. Some people that don't have place, they only have a small succah, so only the men eat there. I don't have that mitzvah, the girls don't have that mitzvah. But if they come in to eat, they are allowed to make at

²⁷Interview #3, Montreal, November 1996.

the bracha which is special...There is also a tradition by us that we try that the women should at least eat something in the succah and say the bracha. The first bite of the chalah. But there are certain Hasidim which, since women are not obliged to eat in the succah, they wouldn't have them make the bracha. But by us [the Belzer Hasidim] they do.²⁸

Women's participation in succah activity, at least where private succot are concerned, seems to be related to a desire for families to participate in rituals and meals together, rather than any emancipatory gestures on the part of individuals. In two cases, if the succah was filled to overflowing, the women would tend to move inside, but still took part in the festivities.²⁹

Guests

While the literature suggests that having guests in the succah is important, the interviews confirm the importance of guests in actual Succot celebrations. One woman, building a succah for the first time in Canada since leaving Morocco with her family years earlier, emphasized the importance of bringing her mother and brothers into the succah:

" Not having a succah, my mother did not feel it was Succot. It was very hard...So as soon as I got married and we had a back yard, I said " That's it, I'm making a succah" And that brought alot of joy to my mother...I have her here for the holiday and since then...she always came to us for Succot. In the first few years, my brothers weren't married yet, so they came with us and as the years went by, they got married, they brought their wives. they brought their young children...at one point, we sat twenty-two people in my succah...and it was a big celebration."³⁰

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Interviews # 5 and #3, Montreal, December and November 1996.

³⁰Interview #5, Montreal, December 1996.

therefore be welcomed as a guest in her family succah. Another succah owner agreed, but alluded to some potential difficulties involved in having guests:

"According to Halacha, it is very important, but according to reality it is very hard because everyone has to be home by his family. We are talking guests? We are talking about poor people -- that is the real mitzvah....We had [people] many times...Someone who was alone two years ago we had someone who was here from the States. He was Jewish. He wasn't so religious, but invited him. Who ever feels like coming, comes."³¹

Scanning the numerous succot in the Outremont area, many of them built on small, second-floor balconies, one can see how the size of such succot would present practical problem where guests are concerned; they are simply too small to accommodate any more people than the household contains. Still, to invite guests into the succah remained an important ideal for all of the interviewees.

The Succah as a Public Space

While the biblical passage from the book of Nehemiah records Succot as a public celebration, the evidence for contemporary Succot festivities demonstrates clearly that whatever "dwelling" in the succah might mean in terms of specific actions, in Montreal in the late twentieth-century, both the public and the private realm are involved. For the purposes of this thesis, public space will be that which is used in common by individuals and groups without an ownership relationship to the space in question. Physically, a public succah is one that is not attached to an actual dwelling or a private home, rather, they are generally built adjacent to or near a public institution. Public succot tend to be larger than private succot, by virtue of their purpose. Public succot in Montreal can be found at

³¹Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

public succah is one that is not attached to an actual dwelling or a private home, rather, they are generally built adjacent to or near a public institution. Public succot tend to be larger than private succot, by virtue of their purpose. Public succot in Montreal can be found at synagogues, restaurants, student associations and at any institution where a significant number of observant Jews are employed. The Jewish Family Services building, the Canadian Jewish Congress, Pizza-Pita Restaurant and the Peel Street Chabad House are among the public institutions that provided a succah for the shared use of the public (fig. 2) The *shul* (synagogue) succah at the Shaar Ha Shomayim Synagogue in Westmount represents only one of many such succot provided by synagogues throughout the city (fig. 3) Although the number of private succot that have existed in Montreal over the past three centuries is unknown, *shul* succot represent a long-standing tradition of public succot. Many late twentieth-century succot, then, are shared spaces where dwelling is experienced in common by a number of people; fellow congregants, neighbours, co-workers and, in the case of restaurants, strangers.

In the case of the succot at both the Shaar Ha Shomayim Conservative Synagogue and the Peel Street Chabad House, dwelling involved activities designed specifically to encourage communal participation in the festival. At Shaar Ha Shomayim, several different groups organized activities either in the *shul* succah, which is a permanent structure incorporated into synagogue design, or in members' succot. The Sisterhood of Congregation Shaar Ha Shomayim, the largest women's association at the synagogue, hosted a luncheon for approximately 160 women and men during the intermediate days (*Chol Ha Moed*) of the festival during which three women guest speakers were invited to

share their experiences of the holiday and its impact on their lives. The Men's Association of the synagogue participated with the Sisterhood in a Succah Sale where nineteen succot ordered through the Sisterhood Gift Shop were delivered and installed by members of the Men's Association and the youth of the synagogue. A third group, the Study Group Chen, organized a Succot weekend retreat at Sugarbush, Vermont around the theme "To Pamper Your Soul with Judaism". Twenty-one congregants participated in the building and decoration of the succah and in the food preparation, meals, speeches, discussion, readings and religious services on the first two days of the festival. They described their shared experience in the following way:

"Everyone agreed that a most successful and meaningful spiritual group experience was had by all."

"Our children's Jewish spirit and memories begin by bringing tradition into our homes and encouraging them to look to the Shaar Ha Shomayim as a source of understanding their heritage."³²

Other activities sponsored by the synagogues included a "Succah Tour" during the intermediate days of the festival, when members of the Sisterhood banded together to visit succot in the Westmount area. The students at of the congregation organized a similar activity entitled "Limousine Succah Hop" during which participants would ride from succah to succah in Westmount in a stretch limousine. At the *shul* succah itself, the congregation hosted a "Succot Supper" on the first night of the festival, presumably for members without their own succah.³³

A second succah with a mandate to serve the public was located at the Peel Street

³¹Congregation Shaar Ha Shomayim Bulletin, Vol. 71, No. 3, October 25th, 1996, 6.

³²Ibid.

Chabad House and has been for the past twenty-years, according to the rabbi in residence. The Chabad movement was given its current form by Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe and an internationally recognized Jewish spiritual leader, and has a specific mandate to bring secular Jews back to observance. Chabad Houses like the one on Peel Street and several others in the city of Montreal are oriented toward education and generally offer religious programming including classes on Jewish subjects, spiritual counselling and regular and holiday prayer services. The four-storey building on Peel Street houses a small kosher restaurant -- the Kotel -- in its basement. During the holiday of succot, the succah located behind the building serves as an extra dining-room. Eating, then, as related to the commandment to dwell, enters not only the public realm, but also the business world. One of the important functions of this succah is to enable diners who work in Montreal's downtown business district to observe the commandment to eat in the succah. In the words of one resident Rabbi:

"Dwell means eating. As Napoleon said: an army goes on its stomach...the stomach tells us where we are...This year we were the only succah downtown at any restaurant, so many people came to take advantage of the restaurant with the succah...mostly men because mostly men work downtown"³⁴

The smaller canvas succah erected every year since 1989 by the owners of Pizza-Pita restaurant in Cote-St-Luc serves a similar function in this respect, to the one at Chabad House. Its raison d'être is to serve a Jewish clientele which would otherwise not eat outside their home or synagogue succot during the holiday of Succot -- a significant

³³Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

number, according to the owners.³⁵

Other activities which constitute dwelling for the largely student community of the Chabad House succah located on a lot adjacent to the campus of McGill University and in close proximity to Concordia University, include prayer services, classes and study groups, singing, and parties.

“We have one person who reserves a day or a lunchtime and he gives his class here. Sometimes he brings an entertainer. He is a rabbi at Chabad Chabanel. He brings his class here for Succot because we have a big succah, which very few people have. This year he had at least twenty people.”³⁶

On the first two days of the festival of Succot in the autumn of 1996, the Rabbis and the staff of Chabad House hosted two community festival meals, both of which were well attended despite heavy autumn rains which eventually drove all but the most hardy of the participants into the shelter of the restaurant by mid-way through the meal. An estimated total of close to three-hundred people used the Chabad House succah during the eight days it stood in 1996.

Not surprisingly, the act of dwelling in most public succot does not include sleeping. By their nature, institutions have no residents -- they are not houses which one can exchange for a succah during the requisite period. The Chabad group provides another rational for not sleeping in the succah. According to their philosophical tradition, the Divine presence and the sense of the holy within the space of the succah is so strongly felt that sleeping is considered inappropriate .

³⁴Interview #5, Montreal, December 1996.

³⁵Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

“Even if it is nice weather, even if we could, we don’t. It is not a place to sleep...we do eat and drink and be merry...”³⁷

There was no attempt, during my interview with one administrator at Chabad House, to reconcile this notion with the traditional view, based on the Mishna, that one should sleep in the succah. Simply put, the authority of the Lubavitch tradition is placed above that of earlier authorities and their interpretations of the act of dwelling. The owner of the Pizza-Pita restaurant succah in Cote St-Luc joked that the only people who might sleep in his succah were perhaps those street people who had no home of their own:

“ When I go home and close the restaurant, it could be that somebody slept there because he has nowhere else to sleep, because he found himself a shelter. I know that there are alot of Hasidim who sleep in the succah. They even heat it up. It should be like your house.”³⁸

A final example of the public use of the succah in Montreal can witnessed yearly at an event entitled: *Succos Festival/Festival de Succot*, a five-day family fair held every year in Montreal’s Cote-St-Luc area. Inspired by a similar phenomenon in New York City, the owners of Pizza-Pita restaurant organized the fair for the first time in 1992:

“I got in touch with a couple of companies and I have managed to rent a spot and bring them along, there is about twenty rides, we advertise everywhere. We build a succah on the premises. Families come with their kid, they go on the rides, we sell pizza and falafel. Its good for business, its good for the city and its beautiful for the kids. When it is a beautiful day, there are hundreds of people coming.”³⁹

Advertisements for the Succos Festival highlight “amusement, rides, bumper cars, musical entertainment, snack bar, cotton candy, popcorn and much more” as well as a

³⁷Interview #1, Montreal, October 1996.

³⁷ Interview #6. Montreal, December 1996.

³⁸Interview #5, Montreal, December 1996.

“large succah on premises” -- as illustrated mid-page (fig. 4) Not only have the succah and the festival of succot become part of a public fair, but the advertisement further links this Jewish celebration to the world of commerce; below the caption “Plus, lots to do and see in the mall” a list of stores located in the adjacent shopping mall are listed.

The cases of all three public succot show that the idea of dwelling in the succah has been interpreted very broadly in contemporary Jewish life in North America. It encompasses a variety of activities from the purely functional to leisure activities -- in fact, all of the activities which constitute the normal daily functions of the institutions concerned added to the specific ritual requirements of the festival. Just as permanent houses or institutions have become multi-functional, so have the succot attached to them during the festival of Succot. The succot under consideration were flexible in their response to the needs of business people, students, young families and community institutions.

Conclusions

The Jewish literary sources are often perceived as having defined and preserved intact millennia-old holiday rituals, including that of dwelling in the succah. My findings show that, carefully considered, the texts suggest an expansion and development of the meaning of dwelling over time. Although eating seems to be the basis of the ritual of dwelling, a variety of activities came to be included in a definition of dwelling which expanded over time. Certainly, each literary source cannot help but be a product of its own particular time and place; the social, religious and spacial biases of the age were always projected into writings about the succah, and, we can guess, onto the succah

itself.⁴⁰ Contemporary understandings of dwelling in the succah confirm reflect a similar expansion of the definition of dwelling. Succot in Montreal function as both ritual and everyday spaces, sheltering activities from eating to reading as well as celebrations both specific to the holiday and ancillary to it. Although its functions seem highly regulated by codes and laws, the succah is a flexible, human space, and its function open to interpretation and responsive to the needs of its users.

The previous two chapters have focused on how the succah is perceived and on how it is used. My next chapter will investigate how succot are made and what they look like. In the absence of description of historical succot, and of any actual historical succot, I will focus on contemporary succot as I found them in the urban landscape of Montreal in the autumn of 1996.

³⁹ Donin, *To Be A Jew*.

III Contemporary Succot in Montreal

In my first chapter, I explored the succah as ritual space and its relationship to holiness in a Jewish context. In my second chapter, I explored the succah as a dwelling, drawing on both Jewish texts and on oral interviews. This chapter will focus exclusively on succot as they existed in the contemporary urban landscape of Montreal in the autumn of 1996. Most of the evidence for this chapter is drawn from the six interviews discussed in the introduction. In addition, I have drawn upon newspaper articles, photographs, synagogue bulletins, hand-drawn and commercially produced advertisements and a method of participant-observation particular to anthropologists and ethnographers. This last method requires some comment. Because so few real succot had been documented in any form when I began this research, I attempted to document a number of them myself and to witness the construction of as many as possible during the week preceding the holiday in 1996. My presence was an intrusion to some extent made more acceptable by my offer to participate in the process, rather than simply to watch it. Participant-observation has a number of advantages for this type of study, foremost among them that it allowed me to recognize the importance of the relationship between each individual succah and its environment -- a relationship which ultimately defines the physical form of the building. My sources are various, but they have in common that they are all community-based and intimately related to the buildings, the processes and the people I shall discuss. I hope, then, to bring to light for the first time, a rich tradition of ritual building which has shown itself adaptable to as many environments as Jews have lived in and which, after two-thousand years is still vital, creative and continuous.

My examination of succah construction will not be exhaustive; rather the opposite. This

is an initial incursion into the world of the succah. Like the succah itself, my research was bound by time, and the number of succot I could examine in any depth during the less than two weeks during which the buildings were standing, was limited. As with other ethnographic or anthropological studies, my work depended on my acceptance into a number of Jewish sub-communities -- another time-dependant process. Given these limiting factors, some of what I will discuss will be representative of wider practice while other parts of my work will inevitably reflect the personal idiosyncrasies of the people and groups involved in this study. As far as I am able, I shall attempt to distinguish between the two. Ultimately, however, a larger, more in-depth survey will be necessary in order to fully understand the buildings, their context and their place in history.

It is instructive, in analysing real succot, to return to the classical Jewish literary sources, especially the Mishna, as a point of departure, because it is against the construction specifications laid out in these texts that actual succot are measured. Rabbinic authorities declare a succah kosher or non-kosher on the basis of the construction laws originally set down in the Mishna and elaborated in the Talmud. What is interesting about the Mishnaic and Talmudic specifications for succah building is that they regularize construction while leaving a wide margin for individual expression. The multiplicity of succot types in Montreal speaks to the possibilities allowed -- perhaps encouraged -- by the liberalism of Jewish law in this case.

Mishnaic law is strict in setting out height maximums and minimums of twenty cubits and ten handbreadths respectively. In practical terms, this means that the succah must be high and wide enough for at least one person to lay flat in it, and that it can attain a significant maximum height. In other words, it would be possible in theory but difficult in practice to build

a usable succah that defied these regulations. The walls must be at least three; generally, structures with less than three sides have been in the minority. The succah must be prepared specifically for the holiday of Succot; if the succah is permanent, some new element must be added in order to show that it is being prepared for the holiday. The roof must be open to the sky and must be made of a natural product in its natural state, that is to say that it cannot be manufactured or shaped by human methods (such as a pipe or a plank). The variety of materials and arrangements still possible within these parameters is vast. One passage of the Mishna lists a number of extraordinary potential sites for a succah, including the top of a wagon, the deck of a ship, the top of a tree and the back of a camel.(figs. 5,6,7) The explicit provision of these unconventional examples in the text seems to suggest that in practice, a creative solution can be found for almost any construction problem.

Generally, contemporary succot are flat-roofed, four-sided structures. From the exterior, they seem a remarkably homogenous building type. This is true not only of succot in Montreal, but of the type worldwide. Cube or rectangular shaped wooden succot like those perched on Montreal balconies can be seen in the streets of Jerusalem, Brooklyn or Fez. (fig. 8) To an extent, the specifications of Mishnaic law are responsible for this standardization, since all builders must work within its limits. More interestingly and more importantly, however, are those aspects of the succah that Mishnaic law cannot regulate. It is these that make each succah a unique expression of its own place and time, of the people who built it and of the society in which it was built. My study of real succot in Montreal will begin with an examination of the process of building and the concomitant process of handing down the knowledge of how to build.

Process and Transmission

It is important to discuss the design and building process for the succah together with the process of the transmission of this knowledge together. They are inseparable from each other. My research suggests that succah builders learn how to build succot through experience, oral tradition, observation and replication, that is to say, by doing it. Further, it seems to be by this method that younger generation is taught to build a succah. It is appropriate here to borrow Thomas Hubka's characterization of the folk-designer as a "bricoleur" or handyman, a concept itself borrowed from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. A bricoleur, or folk-designer "operates within a finite world of ideas and signs structured by the physical world and pre-constrained by the local building tradition." ¹ So do succah builders. The crucial difference between succah builders and other folk designers is that in addition to being bound by an architectural grammar based on precedent, succah builders are bound by an ancient literary tradition. It may be that the Jewish literary tradition is responsible for the fact that the succah still exists today, more than two thousand years after literary references to it first appeared in the Torah, but we do not possess the tools with which to answer this question. What we can attempt to investigate is the role of the texts in contemporary succah construction.

Given the number and the complexity of the specifications for the succah, one might reasonably expect that the text of the Mishna is used as a kind of instruction manual by succah builders, followed closely in order to ensure that the correct measurements and material requirements are met. Initial research on succot construction shows that this is not the case. Among those surveyed in this study, the texts seem almost peripheral to the construction of the

¹Hubka, *Just Folks.*, 430.

succah. Experience, oral traditions, family customs, community rituals, rabbis, formal education, and income level all contributed more to contemporary succot building than the legal texts, even though the parameters within which people worked were set by these.

So independent is the building process of the texts that many Orthodox Jews hire non-Jewish handymen to build their succot. Presumably, the design submitted to the handyman falls within the legal boundaries set by the texts, but the handymen who are hired every autumn likely have little knowledge of Jewish law. Such a situation is permissible under Jewish law, although not ideal, since it is generally agreed that the users of succot should build their own if possible. In reality, people who are employed full-time, as are several people interviewed for this study, do not have the time to erect their own succot. It is easier to engage professional help.

Said one succah owner:

"This year it was not the family. It was the handyman and one of his friends. In recent years, since my husband has less time, it has devolved to the handyman... There were years when we had young boys who were learning in the Yeshiva a few blocks away who used to regularly eat at our house and the night after Rosh Ha Shanah they would come over and help my husband and myself put up the succah and polish off all the leftover food in the refrigerator. Now they have moved on...so we rely on the handyman.²

Another succah owner went so far as to say that most succot in Quebec were built by non-Jews. This was true of his succah. Although he stated that he was always present to participate in the laying of the roof, the demands of his business during the holiday season meant that a handyman had been hired for at least the last two years (fig. 9).

Even those who built their own succot relied little on the texts during the process. One contemporary succah builder emphasized the combination of textual knowledge with practical

²Interview #4, Montreal, November 1996.

experience:

"Basically, you learn the generalities from the Mishna and you will consult the codes -- the *Shulchan Aruch*, the *Mishna Torah*, the condensed or *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*. These are basically codes that you can consult for the practicalities of it. Either that or you consult a Rabbi. But once you have built them year after year, you know to avoid whatever pitfalls are mentioned there."³

Three succah owners learned about succah building by observation and oral tradition. By first watching their parents build a succah and then participating in the process themselves during their childhood, they acquired a reserve of techniques which they deployed in adulthood when they established residences and succot of their own.⁴ Succah builders were modest about their knowledge and rather than seeing it as crucial to the succah tradition, the succah building techniques learnt in youth are considered in adulthood to be natural or second-nature. In the words of one woman:

"I suppose a lot of the knowledge you have accumulated over the years. A lot of knowledge you just generally acquire and the kids learn it from a reasonably young age...so you know what is ok and what's not and how the initial construction is. I guess we have a lot more knowledge that you might realize or than other people might realize. You just know it after awhile."⁵

While some succah builders had grown up in Montreal and lived out the traditions taught by their parents in the neighbourhoods where they grew up, others creatively transplanted succah traditions learned in other countries. One succah builder, originally from Morocco now builds a succah on a back porch in Cote St-Luc (fig.10):

"As far as I can remember when I was a child, I grew up with a succah in the house, every year. So I saw my father, uncles, brothers my cousins build a succah.

³Interview #4, Montreal, December 1996.

⁴Interviews #2, 3, and 6, Montreal, November and December 1996.

⁵Interview #3, Montreal, November 1996.

whatever the requirements for building a succah and we built our own succah...[so I learned partly]by watching. ⁶

Precedent, then, seems an important factor in the design process. When other succah owners decided to cut windows into the walls of their succah, they assumed it was "kosher" because their observant parents had done so before them (fig. 9).

Learning from example is not possible for all contemporary succah owners, especially. for those newly observant of Jewish law, of which there is a large and growing number, and for those who grew up without a succah because they lived in apartments or houses without yards. Two of those interviewed celebrated succot communally, one in a large succah built adjacent their apartment building, the other in the succah belonging to the local synagogue. In his words:

" I grew up in a very tight knit neighbourhood from a housing point of view. I lived in an apartment for the first twenty-five years of my life. We had a small, tiny balcony -- nobody even thought of building a succah...We used the succah at the synagogues we prayed at, or the ones we had at school."⁷

This man, now the owner of a private succah, described with pride the highly individualized process by which his succah was created. He incorporated knowledge from household experience, from other succot he had seen, and from his school days (fig. 11).

"It is my own personal thing. I have a brother who works in a wholesale hardware firm, so you grow up learning about nuts and bolts and saws and wood and the properties of building materials and every guy has to be a handyman in one way or another, especially if you own your own house. You do minor electrical work and minor plumbing work so you see the new material and you incorporate them into your succah... I took my ideas from those pre-fabricated succot that came on the market. That goes back about a quarter of a century...And what I remember from

⁶Interview #6, Montreal, December 1996.

⁷Interview#4, Montreal, December 1996.

what I remember from my Talmud Torah days..."⁸

This man was among three other succah owners who reported that they had learned the laws of succah construction in school -- the maintenance staff had built the succah in his case -- and that their children now acquired this knowledge in school as part of an Orthodox Jewish education.⁹ One woman remembered learning the laws in primary school in New York, while another man said that he now teaches the laws to his boys in the local religious school.¹⁰

Schools and other community institutions in Montreal seem to have an important role to play in teaching about contemporary succah building. The Shaar Ha Shomayim synagogue took an activist approach to succah construction among its congregants this year. Less complex than building an entire succah, the process at Shaar Ha Shomayim involved hanging canvas "walls" from permanent beams, laying down the bamboo and cedar roof, and decorating the interior (fig. 12). This year, as in previous years, the congregation was invited to participate in a "Succah Hang-In", targeted at families, which took place on the Wednesday evening before the holiday began.¹¹ Not only were congregants invited to participate in the decoration of the shul-succah, but teams of congregant-volunteers were recruited to travel from house to house to help owners erect the pre-fabricated succot they had ordered through the synagogue. In these cases, neither owners nor those who helped erect the succot needed knowledge of Jewish law or experience in erecting succot. The design of these succot was pre-determined, and the instructions came from

⁸Ibid.

⁹Interview #s 3, 4, 6, Montreal, November and December 1996.

¹⁰Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

¹¹Synagogue Bulletin, Vol. 71, No. 1, September 13th, 1996.

the New York manufacturers manual rather than from the Mishna (fig.13).¹² One woman remarked on the project:

"This brings back memories of when I was a little girl and we had a succah. When I was married, this was lost and now my daughter and son-in law, with their three young children are bringing this tradition back into our lives. How special a feeling this is for me."

What is interesting about these comments is that they indicate that at least in this case, an institution had taken responsibility for ensuring the transmission of the succah building tradition, where individuals have failed to do so. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the ritual demands on Jews within Conservative Judaism (Shaar Ha Shomayim is one of Montreal's largest Conservative synagogues) are lesser than in Orthodox Judaism, so that some traditions, the succah among them, are bound to be let go.

The staff of Chabad House engage actively in teaching about succah construction by having students participate in the process, and by focussing weekly Mishna and Talmud classes on the subject. The succah at Chabad House was pre-fabricated, so that no text-based learning was needed for its construction. Familiarity with the workings of nuts and bolts and the ability to lift and manipulate large wooden panels proved far more useful skills, in this case, than a knowledge of the laws the succah.(fig. 14)¹³

All of the above examples suggest that, at least with contemporary succot, neither the construction process nor the way in which the process is learned or passed on is text-dependant. Having established the boundaries, owners proceed by a variety of methods to create a ritual

¹²Synagogue Bulletin, Vol 71, No.3, October 25th, 1996.

¹³Interview #1, Montreal, October, 1996.

dwelling that ultimately reflects their tastes, the experience and education of the builders, and the constraints imposed by the site. These traditions are passed on orally and experientially to those who participate in the process. My next step is to examine the products of these processes.

Four Walls

What do contemporary succot look like? As stated earlier, the site and the building to which it is related are fundamental in determining the form, size and location of the succah. Single family homes with large properties in middle-class areas like Westmount, West Outremont, Hampstead and Cote-St-Luc, tend to have larger, well proportioned succot located in a back, side or front yard, or a sun-deck (fig. 9). In Lower Outremont and Mile End, the balcony-succah is ubiquitous. Constrained by the size of the balconies, these are generally small succot, able to accommodate no more than six people (fig.15). Succot in these neighbourhoods built in small back lots or on the ground between row-houses tend to be somewhat larger. Wherever succot are built, owners try to position the succah doorway conveniently close to the doorway of the house, to facilitate comings and goings and the transportation of food during festive meals. Two of the private succot studied for this thesis shared a door with the kitchen of the house. Most succot do not have windows, but many have raisable, coloured canvas, plywood or corrugated plastic roofs to cover the *schach* (fig.9). The roofs must be raised, usually by means of a pulley, whenever the succah is being used, so that passers-by can easily tell when one is occupied, despite not being able to see into it. It would be impossible to say what material dominates among succot in Montreal, but the two most popular types are wooden and canvas hung on aluminum framing (figs.15 and 16). Many are pre-fabricated in standard sizes of eight-by-ten or ten-by twelve. An average height for succot seems to be approximately ten feet.

Two of the succot studied in this paper stood out from the forest of wooden-lean-tos typical of Montreal succot, for their unusual construction methods, materials and decorations, and are worth dwelling on here. The first was built on the first floor back balcony of a row-house (fig. 17). Between neighbouring houses, two decks had been built, now separated by a high wood-plank wall. This wall, to which two feet was added temporarily to accommodate the roof of the succah during the holiday, formed one wall of the succah. The other three walls, one of which contained sliding doors leading into the kitchen of the house, were borrowed from the house and formed a U shape. A small balcony on the second floor created an overhang, making that part of the succah beneath it ritually unfit for use (fig. 18). From the interior, this succah gave the impression of being a room like any other in the house or perhaps like a sun-room recently added (fig. 19).

The owner of the second unusual succah described the production of his succah this way:

"I tried to avoid using heavy plywood or wood panels that have to be lifted by more than one person. That is why I used a frame of angled steel that we used for shelving units -- a thing called Hopkins shelving. We were using Hopkins shelving in the library on a temporary basis until we got the proper library shelving. I had a meccano set like alot of other kids and said that I could put together these uprights with half-inch bolts and nuts -- I would just build a cube. You would have four top pieces, four at the bottom of the base and four uprights. Maybe a fifth one some place to build the door. When you bought the shelving you got the braces -- little triangular pieces that had holes in each corner to brace them in each corner so the stuff doesn't sway. You put your corrugated plastic on there, at maybe three or four dollars a unit and you bolt that in as well -- I drilled holes and the bolts fit in. You use two by fours or one-by-threes as cross-beams atop to put your *schach* on. You have a little ledge because of the angle irons, to put those cross-beams on.

A combination of pre-fab, childhood meccano memories and the local hardware stores, this succah is well known in Montreal and has been the object of journalistic features and photo-documentaries (figs. 11 and 20).

Inside the Succah: Furniture and Decorations

While the exterior construction of the two succot described above was unusual, their interiors were even more surprising. In the former, the owner draped white sheets over the wood and brick walls. On the sheet-walls were hung store-bought, laminated posters depicting the different types of succot described in the Talmud, the *Ushpizin* (ritual guests, the seven forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David) and various wise men revered by the Hasidic group to which this family belonged. The children had also contributed decorations made at school to the family succah -- paper chains, drawings, and their own versions of the *Ushpizin*. From the *schach*, fruit were hung at halachically correct length, as were reflective decorations and coloured string lights (fig. 21).

The latterly described succah was the most colourful of those surveyed in this study. Its interior was draped with several pieces of brightly coloured fabric, and was vaguely reminiscent of middle-Eastern bazaars. The woman who decorated it was a Sephardi Jew, raised in Morocco who had adapted the traditions of her native country to her Canadian succah (fig.10). In her own words:

"We put Sephardi decorations...I used to put blankets and sheets. One day there was a bazaar of a Jewish organization. And they had this beautiful material they used for tapestry or upholstery and its was very nice. It had a nice border. My mother, who knows how to sew, she sat and we put all the pieces together so we had enough material to go around all the walls. Over the years, we had some posters that we got from friends...And every year we made sure there was one new decoration. We try sometimes if we have time on boxing day we go buy decorations and for Christmas decorations. All kinds of streamers and lights and lamps. This is as very nicely decorated succah. We try because its your home and its going to be your home for eight days. You are supposed to make it as nice as possible."¹⁴

¹⁴Interview #6, Montreal, December 1996.

Although both of the interiors described above were unique, elements of their decoration and their furniture are to be found within the larger local succah tradition. All three private succah owners surveyed shop on Boxing Day for Christmas lights and decorations with which they decorate their succah each year. Electric heaters were used in two of these succot and are a common feature of Canadian succot, in which the temperature can dip to sub-zero degrees in mid-October (fig. 22). Folding tables and chairs with protective plastic covers, as well as plastic plates and cutlery were used in all of the succot under consideration.

The descriptions of electric heaters, Christmas lights, plastic utensils and laminated, store-bought decorations commonly found inside Montreal succot suggest that the contemporary succah has become part of the late twentieth-century succah commercial economy. As the holiday of Succot approached in the autumn of 1996, simple hand-drawn advertisements began to appear in local Jewish restaurants, grocery stores and bookstores. The signs proffered either goods or services such as *schach* (natural roofing), canvas succot, and construction or installation help (figs. 23 and 24). These business people are not necessarily members of the Jewish community. Handyman and carpenters in the non-Jewish population prepare themselves for hire as the Jewish community moves into building-mode around the time of the autumn Jewish holy days.¹⁵ Local Judaica shops and synagogues sell pre-fabricated succot, succah decorations and literature, and the ritual *lulavim* and *etrogim* used on each day of eight days of the holiday. One owner, quoted above, reminiscing over her childhood succot in Morocco complained that:

"Here, it is very commercialized. Everything you do...so many Judaica

¹⁵Interview #2, November 1996. Also see Interview #3, November 1996.

stores, where many things are sold and of course everything here is done for business. So people know that they have to decorate the succah, so there is all kinds of things being manufactured and imported if you go to these Judaica stores, you find plastic fruits, plastic birdies. For succot, you find succot decorations with Hebrew printing, all kinds of succot decorations and when you look, you see it is made in China. But all the people who are looking for business, they pick on it and they try to work on that. Here, you go to the stores, you buy what you need and you hang it up and you use whatever technology."¹⁶

Nostalgia notwithstanding, if succot are products of their own place and time, it is only to be expected that owners will take advantage of goods and services which can simplify a time and energy consuming process. Surely few people would argue for a return to the days when candles had to be brought into the succah for use as both light and heat.

And a Roof: The *Schach*

All those interviewed for this study made clear that the most important part of the succah was the roof. One can see why this would be the case, for on symbolic level, the succah represents impermanence, and the roof its most impermanent component. Even the roofs of succot, however, known as *schach*, which are stringently limited by Jewish law to being natural, non-manufactured products, are best characterized by their variety. The determining factors in the type of roof which will cover the succah, in the six case studies under consideration, seem to be personal preference and commercial availability. Few succah builders have trees in their yards from which they can cut sufficient *schach* to cover the entire roof of the succah. One resourceful family cooperates with a non-Jewish neighbour, who cuts his hedges every year before the holiday, providing cedar for *schach* (fig. 11). He described the process of roof- building this way:

¹⁶Interview #6, Montreal, December 1996.

plants...if you dry them out, you could pile them on. You could use hay if you wanted to, though it is not very comfortable. So I remembered that they used these wooden slats that they bought at a lumber yard that they used as lath behind a plaster wall up until the 1940s and 50s. They looked like yard-sticks. They were one yard by one inch wide by maybe an eight or a quarter inch thick. I went to the lumber yard, and I bought several bundles of those and I have used them ever since. Of course, you lose some by attrition every year. I keep on replacing them. You don't find them that often -- you have to go to a specialty shop. But I still use the same material. I lay it on one next to the other. You have to have space so that you can see that it is not completely covered so that the weather can reach in and you can see the stars at night, theoretically. So you space these accordingly. And just for special effect, I would go to a neighbour who would harvest his cedar branches that he didn't need any more in the fall and give me a dozen or two dozen of those and I would sprinkle those on that to give a bit more of a festive effect although that wasn't really necessary. And that was the *schach* for my succah and I have used it ever since.¹⁷

The above example is exceptional in that most succah builders order their *schach* from local "schach dealers". The owner of Pizza-Pita Restaurant and the administrators at Chabad House, as busy professional entrepreneurs and educators, need the convenience of *schach* that could be ordered and delivered to the site of the succah. They therefore purchased their evergreen *schach* through "schach dealers" (fig. 14).¹⁸ For families short of time and without a neighbour-supplier, the *schach* dealers are the most convenient option. Price and aesthetics also enter into the decision of the type of roof with which succot are covered. The owner quoted above found bamboo prohibitively expensive. A second succah owner stated his reasons for "converting" from evergreen to bamboo:

"We used to use only evergreen. It is very nice. For the smell, the look. It looks green with the white wall above. She loves it, I like it very much, but

¹⁷Interview #4, Montreal, December 1996.

¹⁸Interviews # 1 and 5, Montreal, October and December 1996.

looks green with the white wall above. She loves it, I like it very much, but when you eat, it always drops, and things fall in. The floor is always dirty and you have to sweep it up. You shake the door, it falls down. But it is a succah smell. My father used to use bamboos. They are very clean. Another thing. It is cheaper. You buy it one year and you can use it forever. With the evergreen, you can't keep. It is harder to put on and not every year the branches are the same. It is nice, but it is a harder thing to do. So I bought bamboos."¹⁹

A third family uses bamboo because family members dislike cedar in their soup (fig. 9).

Site

The site of the succah is one factor not able to be controlled by Jewish law. The actual building process begins long before the physical fabric of the booth itself is assembled and put together, with the selection of a site. This always involves another building -- the permanent dwelling -- with which the succah will have an intimate relationship during the festival. Each succah has its own unique relationship with a permanent dwelling -- whether institutional or private -- which it symbolically replaces during the festival. One of the insights yielded by close case study of actual succot is that the replacement of the permanent dwelling by the succah is mainly symbolic and not actual, as the texts would imply. The relationship between the succah and the permanent dwelling is symbiotic and characterized by mutual dependance, rather than by replacement of one building by the other. As the following examples will show, the succah accommodates the ritual requirements of its dwellers while their permanent dwelling lends its comforts and conveniences -- food, light and heat -- to the more frail ritual structure.

¹⁹Interview #3, Montreal, November 1996.

Like many synagogues, the Shaar Ha Shomayim synagogue in Westmount has a permanent succah incorporated into the overall plan of the synagogue (fig. 3). In fact, the succah "borrows" two of the permanent exterior walls of the synagogue. The area covered by the succah takes up a significant portion of the West side of the synagogue property. The succah can be entered either from an outside entrance on its West side, or from the basement hallways of the synagogue. The synagogue's kitchens are located along these basement hallways, a strategic arrangement on the part of the architect, as this succah is used mainly for social and community events involving meals in some capacity, which must be delivered from the kitchen via the hall-ways. The succah is large enough to accommodate between two and three hundred dwellers at one time and appropriately so. The synagogue's mandate is to foster participation in Jewish festivals on a community level, and the congregation of Shaar Ha Shomayim is of considerable size.

Congregations in which the synagogues have no permanent or built-in succah erect a temporary succah in whatever space is available on the synagogue property. Often, these succot take the exterior wall of the synagogue for one of their walls and, if possible, are entered through a doorway from the synagogue, rather than from the outside. Examples of this type of synagogue-succah relationship can be seen at Temple Beth Emanu-El in Westmount, the Belz Congregation in Mile End and the Vishnitzer Congregation in Outremont (fig. 25).²⁰ Another type of arrangement -- that of a free-standing succah to its attendant dwelling -- can be seen at Chabad House on Peel St.

²⁰See Appendix A. for some examples including Temple Beth Emanu-El, Sherbrooke St., Westmount, Congregation Belz, Jeanne-Mance St, Montreal, and Vishnitzer Shtibl, Outremont.

(fig. 26). Chabad House is located in one of many renovated turn of the century, four-storey row houses on the street. It has neither yard nor balcony. For the past twenty years, the Chabad House succah has been built in the small parking lot located behind the building and abutting the alley which runs between city blocks. In 1996, the administrators of Chabad House requested and received permission from their neighbours to erect the succah on the empty lot behind the neighbouring building. This allowed the succah to be positioned conveniently close to the kitchen of the Kotel Restaurant located in the basement of Chabad House, from which the meals to be eaten in the succah would be served.²¹ Another example of a free-standing succah was found at Pizza-Pita Restaurant in Cote-St-Luc. Here, the typically close relationship between the permanent building and the succah was missing. Restaurant customers had to leave the restaurant by the front door and descend concrete stairs from the second storey restaurant in order to access the succah, which is located at street level next to the sidewalk. Passers-by could easily observe all succah activity, adding further to the meaning of this "public" succah.

Where private succot are concerned, my initial research suggests that site for a succah is an important consideration for Orthodox Jews when choosing a residence. Two families interviewed for this research cited succah space as having been a factor in the choice of their house.

"Well, basically, yes [every family would make sure that they had a space in which to build a succah]. There are very few people who rent a house and they cannot make this -- like in the middle floor. So they have parents, they have to

²¹Interview #1, Montreal, October 1996.

figure out where they will be for Succas, but there is a problem."²²

"That [having space for a succah] was one of the criteria. When we were on Trans-Island we were renting. The balcony, of course, was a tiny little affair, maybe three feet by four feet square, just enough to get steps down to the back yard." ²³

Both families live in town houses with neighbours' houses on either side, but both have backyards in which succot could be built (fig. 27). These two and a third family interviewed chose to build succot on the decks or porches behind their houses.

The micro-view outlined above is part of a larger picture of a yearly urban-architectural event; depending on demographics and on the architectural landscape already in place, certain neighbourhoods in Montreal undergo a significant and more or less visible change every year between mid-August and mid-September. More private succot are built in the concentrated neighbourhoods of Mile End and Lower Outremont than in any other area of Montreal. Both areas are largely residential in character. Architecturally, they are characterized by red-brick or stone row houses built close to the sidewalk, many of them fronted by tiny balconies and narrow metal staircases (fig. 15). Most were built in the early twentieth-century to house the influx of immigrant workers. Beginning in the late 1960s, the areas began to undergo "gentrification" and renovation and to witness an influx of fashionable residents, but their population today remains a mixture of ethnic groups. These areas have the highest percentage of Hasidic Jews in the city, highly visible themselves in their *capotes* (long black coats) and *shtreimels* or *spodiks* (fur

²²Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

²³Interview #4, Montreal, December 1996.

hats).²⁴ For these Jews, closely observant of all aspects of Jewish law, owning a succah is of great importance and each family tries to do so. During the weeks leading up to the festival of Succot, small, plain wooden huts begin to appear on front and back balconies, in tiny front yards or in otherwise empty back-alley lots across Mile End and Outremont.

In other areas of Montreal inhabited by succah-building Jews, the change is less visible. Lots and houses in Westmount are generally large. Most families have a back yard or a back balcony on which to erect a succah. Although the Shaar Ha Shomayim Synagogue Sisterhood sold nineteen succot to congregation members in 1996 (mostly residents of Westmount), a higher number than ever before, their presence in this neighbourhood was much less visible and certainly less public, as a whole, than that of the succot in Mile End and Lower Outremont (fig. 28). The same can be said of the middle-class areas of Hampstead and Cote-St-Luc areas, where larger houses and properties allow for the privacy of a backyard succah. Still, both of these neighbourhoods have higher concentrations of Jews, and consequently, of succot, than Westmount.

Timing

As stated in the introduction, the process of succah-building is part of the rhythm of the Jewish calendar and holiday cycle. The Jewish literary tradition states that ideally, succah building should begin no earlier than thirty days before the festival and no later than a week before the holiday, the evening after Yom Kippur (the major fast day ending five days before Succot begins). In reality, the construction of the succah begins whenever the schedule of

²⁴See Gary Beitel, *Bonjour-Shalom*, 1989, and J. Cousineau. "The Shtibl", 1996).

individuals or institutions involved can accommodate the activity. Even so, it is unusual for construction to fall outside the time limits specified in the literature, which are broad.

As one private succah owner put it:

"That [starting immediately after Yom Kippur] is a *mitzvah*...to show that right when Yom Kippur finishes we start right away to put the...It doesn't have to be completely built, but to do something to the succah it will show that we right away want to do a *mitzvah* right after Yom Kippur."²⁵

The holiday of Succot is part of the autumn cycle of the Jewish calendar year. It is the third of the three major autumn holy days. The first, *Rosh Ha Shanah* (New Year), falls on the first day of the Jewish month of Tishrei, followed by *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) on the tenth of Tishrei and Succot from the fifteenth to the twenty-second of Tishrei. The placement of the festival of Succot at the end of this cycle has a significant effect of the construction process of the succah if for no other reason than that succah-building Jews are extremely busy for weeks before succah building begins.

The construction of Chabad House succah has not, in the recent memory of one presiding rabbi, begun earlier than the week before the holiday, although an early start has been a goal for several years. As one of the downtown Montreal centres of student Jewish life, Chabad House runs a busy schedule of weekly classes and a programme of services and festival meals for the autumn high holidays, among numerous other activities. With a small staff of two rabbis, a *mashkiach* (person who oversees kosher food preparation) and a secretary, it is no surprise that succah building is left to the last minute. This year, as in other years, the process began with the re-calling of the succah from a warehouse located in another part of the city where the succah

²⁵Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

was stored. The succah was delivered to Peel St on the Wednesday before the Friday on which Succot was to begin. A rabbi and four student volunteers assembled the succah over the two days left until the festival, finalizing the process with the addition of the roof late Friday afternoon (fig. 26).

In the case of Shaar Ha Shomayim, where the skeleton of the succah is a permanent part of the synagogue structure, construction of the succah also began the week before the holiday. Since a structure was already in place at the synagogue, organizers did not worry about ordering parts, with the exception of the greenery for the roof. The same can be said for private, permanent, indoor succot. Families whose succah doubles as a dining-room or sun-room need only decorate the space appropriately, slide back the roof, and add wooden two-by-fours, bamboo and/or evergreen, as Jewish law demands. In these cases, the construction specifications set out in Jewish law must be dealt with long before the holiday, when the succah is first built into the house or institution in question.²⁶

Two of the families interviewed, both owners of outdoor succot, initiated the construction process weeks before the holiday began on September 27th, 1996. In one case, the process begins with a call to the handyman:

"I would say [I begin building the succah] about three weeks before Succas. We allow for the handyman not to show up once or twice and for bad weather. You never know what the weather is going to be like and it is much more pleasant to put it up when the weather is nice instead of rainy like today."²⁷

In the second case, the process began before the first holiday of the autumn cycle, *Rosh Ha*

²⁶*The Montreal Gazette*, September 1992, D1.

²⁷Interview #3, Montreal, November 1996.

Shanah:

"I might start even a week or two before *Rosh Ha Shanah*, when the weather is still nice. I will just get my daughter and son together and take it out of the garage and he will put up some at his convenience and I'll put up the rest at my convenience and I would say that in a matter of three or four hours all the walls and the door and everything is up and that's it.

A third family living in Mile End waited for the return of their teenaged son from Israel before beginning the construction process. In Montreal's Jewish neighbourhoods the afternoon before Succot begins -- especially in Mile End and Outremont, where back-alleys are used as public walk and drive-ways -- it is possible to see families and individuals rushing to finish the construction and decoration of their succot before the sundown. The above examples show that although the holiday and its attendant construction needs imposes a time-frame, succah construction is still subject to the vagaries of human behaviour, to work schedules and to institutional needs.

Conclusions

My investigation of real succot in Montreal reveals several interesting things. In terms of method, the anthropological-oral history methods I have chosen are particularly well suited to the ritual-dwellings which I have chosen for this thesis. Succot are not present for most of the Jewish calendar year, and when they are, they must be documented as closely and as quickly as possible. Because the construction process is part of their ritual aspect, participant-observation during the process is particular useful as a method.

Throughout this thesis, I have emphasized the link between the classical Jewish texts and the succah. A closer look at the building process reveals a more ambiguous relationship than one might expect, given the extent and the nature of the literature on succot. Although the texts

outline construction specifications that ensure a certain standardization, they allow for variation according to personal taste and family tradition, the influence of local culture and urban geography, and to the specific demands of the sites upon which succot are built. This allowance also applies to time; as part of the cycle of Jewish festivals, the succah must be built within a specific time frame. Even here, construction is subordinated to the needs of the individuals and groups which build. The texts are not the only repository of this building tradition. Oral history, learning-by-doing, replication and personal invention have as much to do with transmitting knowledge about contemporary succah building as the texts. Each individual Jew who transmits their knowledge to the next generation, as much as the rabbinic sages who wrote the Mishna, shares some of the responsibility for the continuity of this living folk-tradition.

Conclusions

While further study of the succah, both historic and contemporary, is necessary in order to fully understand this type, some conclusions can be drawn from my research.

As a building unique to Jewish culture, the nature of the succah can only be understood using referents from that culture and the language specific to it. My exploration of the concept of kedusha showed that the holiness of the succah is not intrinsic, but is related to the concepts of separation and dependant on the repetitive rhythm of the Jewish calendar. It is holy by virtue of the separation and devotion of otherwise mundane materials and space for the eight days of the festival of Succot. The responsibility for this separation does not devolve on architectural experts or rabbis within the Jewish community; rather, each individual Jew has a role to play in the creation of holy space.

The succah is also a dwelling in the mundane sense of the word. My investigations into Jewish texts showed that while eating and sleeping have remained the defining actions involved in dwelling, over time, the meaning of dwelling has evolved and changed. Different authors writing in different periods, have revealed to us the biases of their own times and places. Contemporary succah dwellers have added their own meanings to the injunction to dwell. We can conclude that succah owners try to use the building as much as possible during the holiday, and that whatever mundane acts are carried over to the succah become more holy through their unfolding in that space. It is important to note that contemporary succah dwellers include both women and men. Although not called upon in the text to dwell in the succah, women have made themselves part of the succah ritual on a number of levels. This may have been the case in earlier periods, but without documentation, it is impossible to know for certain whether this so.

The contemporary succah is unusual in that, unlike most folk-building traditions, it is rooted in a literary tradition. What I have found is that although Jewish literature has a critical role to play in defining the tradition, it is important to keep in mind that the succah, after two millennia, exists outside of the texts as a living tradition, and must be studied as such. Though texts, both ancient and modern, relating to and defining all aspects of the succah abound, and though they provide something of an historical context for contemporary building, they do not describe how these buildings come into being and how they function in the real world. This must be discovered through personal contact with the buildings and with those who build and use them. This method is particularly relevant to a structure whose primary function is ritual and the meaning of which comes from use. Only through the detailing of experience by a user is it possible to access the primary meaning of the succah. From this perspective, it is obvious that an approach to the succah based on form would have captured only part of the meaning of this building type.

This paper has implications for the future study of other Jewish buildings, vernacular and non-vernacular. Structures such as the *mikveh* (ritual bath), the *shtibl* (house of prayer), *matzah* bakeries, and the *heder* (school room) have not been studied. They, like the succah, are critical to the rituals and the practice of Judaism and some are, like the succah, bound by construction specifications laid out in the classical Jewish literary sources. Issues and questions about holy and profane space also come to bear on these structures.

My research also has implications for the study temporary structures outside of Judaism such as the Igloo, the cage-dwellings of Hong-Kong, native American tent-dwellings. These buildings might also be studied effectively using participant-observation and oral history. It

would also be important for the researcher to have an understanding of the language and culture from which these structures spring.

Remember never to make the sukkah overly comfortable. It should shake in the wind. One last thing—once you build it, use it. Eat every meal there (including breakfast). Sleep in it if you can. Invite guests to your sukkah and share it with all who have none. Always invite the guest of the day according to the ushpizin ritual. When you finally break it down, store the material for next year's festival with the understanding and hope that you may not need it again. For if the Messiah comes before next Sukkot, we will all sit together under the Sukkah of Shalom and partake of the Great Feast of Leviathan.

Illustrations

across the middle and the top. Stretch cloth (or nail 1/4-inch plywood, if you can afford it) over the frame and one wall is complete. One wall can serve as the entrance if covered with cloth on a wire track. Place some 1 x 1's running in both directions on the roof and cover that with rushes or pine boughs. The entire roof must be made of organic material. Remember to let the stars shine through! A sample sukkah might be a 7-foot cube, for which the following materials would be necessary:

- 12 cement blocks
- 4 pieces of 2" x 2" x 7½'
- 7 pieces of 1" x 2" x 7½'
- 8 pieces of 1" x 1" x 8'
- enough cloth or plywood to cover 3 walls
- cloth drape for entrance wall
- nails
- binding twine
- greens for roofing

You might want the challenge of not using nails, and binding with rope at all joints. It can be done and a fine binding is a beautiful thing to see.

DECORATIONS Here you can do as you please. Everything's possible from traditional fruit hanging to ushpizin posters to printed murals to strung macaroni, gourds, origami, paper chains, etc. Some way should be found not to waste too much fruit in these days of hungry nations. People with families should perhaps divide the sukkah into areas, with one person decorating each area. Put in a carpet—that adds a lot of class. An electric light can be installed. Use a garage-style rubber-insulated socket.

(fig. 1) Sukkah Plan from *The Jewish Catalogue: a do-it-yourself guide*, 1976.

(fig. 2) Succah at the Jewish Family Services building, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 3) Succah at Shaar Ha Shomayim Synagogue, Westmount, 1996.

העושה סבתו בראש העגלה בשרה

(fig. 5) Illustration from the Mishna on a poster bought in a Montreal Judaica shop, 1996.

היתה גבוהה מעשרים אמה ובא למעטה בכרים ובסתות
לא רר מיעוט סבה גו

(fig. 6) Illustration from the Mishna on a poster bought at Montreal Judaica shop, 1996.

שנים באיזן ואחת בידי אדם כשרה ואין עולין לה ביר"ט

(fig. 7) Illustration from the Mishna on poster bought at Montreal Judaica shop, 1996.

(fig. 8) Succah, Jerusalem, 1996

(fig. 9) Succah, Outremont, 1996.

(fig. 10) Succah interior, Cote-St-Luc, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 11) Succah exterior, Cote-St-Luc, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 12) Succah interior, Shaar Ha Shomayim Synagogue, 1996.

Canvas Sukkah

This traditional Sukkah is completely pre-fabricated and pre-packaged with Bamboo poles or mats for shipping or storage.

The frame is made of an alloy of aluminum and magnesium, sturdy and lightweight. They will not rust or corrode.

Our slip-on fittings are strong and durable, with hardened set screws for quick and easy assembly and dismantling. A hexagon key which we provide is the only tool that is necessary.

- Our Sukkahs are made of two-tone yellow/blue or gray/blue canvas, and are beautifully silkscreened with Brochos, Ushpizin, Kiddush and pictures.

- We supply you with a simple to follow, detailed assembly and instruction sheet. Your Sukkah can be up in about 30 minutes.

- All Sukkahs are equipped with a zippered door which can be partially or completely closed for your comfort and wind protection.

- Custom fitted canvas, reinforced corners, and durable heavy fittings for extra support.

Sizes: • 6 ft. x 8 ft. x 7 1/4 ft. • 8 ft. x 10 ft. x 7 1/4 ft. • 8 ft. x 12 ft. x 7 1/4 ft.
• 10 ft. x 12 ft. x 7 1/4 ft. • 10 ft. x 15 ft. x 7 1/4 ft.

Actual sizes vary due to manufacturing requirements.

Also available in
GRAY and BLUE

(fig. 13) Advertisement for a pre-fabricated sukkah sold in Montreal, 1996

(fig. 14) Chabad House Succah, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 15) Balcony succah in Mile-End, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 16) Canvas and aluminium succah sold in Montreal, 1996 and erected at Pizza-Pita.

(fig. 17) Succah exterior, Outremont, 1996.

(fig. 18) Balcony overhanging succah, Outremont, 1996.

(fig. 19) Succah interior, Outremont, 1996.

Huit jours de réjouissances chez les Juifs

Les familles juives du monde entier ont dressé hier, en plein air, la Souccah ou tente au toit fait de branchages dans laquelle se prendront les repas durant les huit jours de Souccoth. La Souccah rappelle les « Nuées de Gloire » qui protégeaient les Juifs durant leur 40 années de pérégrination dans le désert en direction de la Terre Promise. Chez les Finegold, à Montréal, l'heure était à la joie et la tente, dressée au balcon pour

abriter la table familiale, scintillait de dizaines de lumières multicolores. Hier, veille de la fête, se prenait le premier repas avec, de g. à d., Mme Esther Dahan, en visite chez sa fille Coty Finegold, assise à côté d'elle, M. Ronald Finegold, bénissant le vin traditionnel, son fils Aviel, sept ans, M. Nino Malka, un étudiant invité, la petite Hadassa, trois ans et demi, et enfin sa soeur aînée Anya, âgée de neuf ans.

photo René Picard, LA PRESSE

(fig. 20) Succah celebration published in La Presse, 1988.

(fig. 21) Succah interior, Outremont, 1996.

(fig. 22) Heater inside succah in Outremont, 1996.

סכך

כה

לדקה

חג
שמח

MEYER

מאיר

PLEASE ORDER EARLY!!!

Tel.: 737-6321
395-2228

(fig. 23) Advertisement for schach, found in local store, Montreal, 1996.

KOSHER LAMEHADRI
SOUCCAH WITH ALL THE BENEFITS

- * NO MORE HAMMER AND NAILS
- * EASY TO INSTALL IN JUST ABOUT ONE HOUR
- * MINIMAL STORAGE SPACE
- * 10 YEARS WARRANTY
- * STANDARD SOUCCAH SIZE: 8' X 10'
SIZE MAY BE MODIFIED TO YOUR PERSONAL ORDER

חג שמח
לכל בני
ישראל

THE PORTABLE SOUCCAH QUALITY, PRICE AND INGENUITY
BEATS ALL OTHER SOUCCAH ON THE MARKET GUARANTEED

TO ORDER CALL
LES CONSTRUCTIONS SOUCA INC
514 485-4910

(fig. 24) Advertisement for succah, found in local restaurant, Montreal, 1996

(fig. 25) Succah exterior, Congregation Belz, Mile-End, Montreal, 1996

(fig. 26) Chabad House back lot, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 27) Row house, Cote-St-Luc, Montreal, 1996.

(fig. 28) Half-hidden succah, Outremont, 1996.

Interviews

Interview #1, Montreal, October, 1996.

Q Briefly outline the function of Chabad House in Montreal and a little bit of its history here.

A Chabad House in Montreal on Peel Street used to be the out-post of Chabad in Montreal. Meaning to say that the activities that Chabad does, that it is known for everywhere in the world, servicing the general population, Chabad House was the focus for that. Over the years, they branched out to different communities in Montreal -- different parts of the Jewish community and they opened Chabad Houses in each area. The Chabad House on Peel Street became the Chabad for the Students and young adults. It is until this day, with CEGEP, university students, graduate students and young adults. That is the focus. In the last five years, we have branched into two other programs. We have branched into our drug programs. We are part of a network which spans across the United States and Canada. We have a program for children in school, for people in elementary school and high school, preparing them so that they can resist the social forces which would bring a person to take drugs. Even more so, due to the need, we opened a few blocks from here, a drop-in centre for people with drug problems, which is very busy and has success...

The third thing we have is the Jewish Business Network.

I personally work with the student-young adult side of things.

Q Who would you say, or what would you say is the community of this Chabad House?

A The community of this Chabad House is primarily students and people who live in the immediate area.

Q Students from where?

A From McGill and Concordia. We have from UQAM and Universite de Montreal and Dawson. Those are primarily the students who come here. I mean, McGill -- we are basically on McGill campus, so in certain ways, we are closest there.

Q For how many years has there been a succah in this location?

A Since it opened -- it must be twenty years ago. Same succah -- its the same succah every year for twenty-years.

Q When do you generally start building your succah?

A The first thing we have to do is arrange to have the pieces brought here from the warehouse. Unfortunately, we usually do that late -- last minute in the days immediately preceding the holiday. Next year, I'm going to get it here far in advance -- especially now with the expanded area, I'm going to try to get it done maybe a month in advance. If I try for a month, I'll get it done two weeks in advance.

Q What about the injunction in the Shulchan Aruch that you should start the day after Yom Kippur?

A It says you could go from Yom Kippur immediately to building the succah, and so we could immediately after Yom Kippur we can start putting it up or calling people to come and put it up.

Q Where did you get you Succah and the component parts, meaning the schach?

A Since I'm not the originator of it, I'm not sure, but the way it looks, they went to a lumber yard, they had the pieces cut and they nailed them together. That's it. The schach is also from the lumber yard. The green schach they have to buy every year. In the Jewish community, there are people always selling schach, so he gets it from one of them.

Q So everything comes from Montreal then?

A Yes, its a local, Quebequois succah.

Q Briefly describe it.

A Yes. Its a very practical succah. We have panels and each panel has holes in it, so we can put a bolt through the hole and we close the bolt on both sides, so it goes together pretty well. The only problem is that the pieces are big and heavy, and sometimes, since the ground is not level, last years holes might not be facing each other this year, so we have to work and push to get it together. So its alot of work, but, that's what it is.

So you have panels, that's the sides bolted together. Then you have cross-beams which are at the roof level, which help to give it more form and sturdiness. Then we have the reusable schach -- plain pieces of wood, one by twos -- which get thrown on top of the frame. and then we have the green stuff which we throw on top of the roof, which we buy every year, which we throw on top of that.

Q Is there any particular reason for having this type of succah over any other kind?

A The first thing about the succah is that it is practical, that it comes apart and get put back together fairly easily. So that's one reason -- we have to take it apart every year and ship it off to the warehouses because we don't have the space here. The only other thing that has any reason that it is a very simple succah -- not much decoration -- is because that is the Chabad tradition.

Q So why this type as opposed to a canvas succah?

A You might think it would be easier to have a canvas succah. At Chabad, we prefer to have solid walls. I'm not sure of the exact reason. I am not an expert on building Succot, but I think its better if the walls are sturdier. Canvas is a little bit flimsy and I think Halachically a little bit easier.

Q What about the local climate as an influence?

A Well, yeah. The truth is we stay fairly warm and dry in our succah, even if its cold and raining. If its really raining, as you say, the rain does get through, but still its nice. It blocks the wind, if its windy. Its solid wood. So we do pretty good.

Q How do you know that this succah is kosher?

A It goes top to bottom. One this is the schach -- the cover. It has to be material which grows out of the ground, that has not been made into a type of utensil. So that is not a problem -- this stuff is all wood that grows out of the ground and it hasn't been carved into any type of a spoon or whatever. That's the rule. Then we have the walls. So of course, the schach cannot be attached to the walls. So ours is not, its just lain on top of the succah. The walls have to fit a certain criteria of size. The minimum criteria is very small -- smaller even than a washing machine box. So its certainly bigger -- that is not a problem. We have four walls, so there is no problem with how many walls. Sometimes

you can put three walls against a house, or two walls... We have four walls. There is no problem with the walls. That does it.

Q If you had any question that it was kosher, where would you go or what you refer to?

A If it was something simple that I could look up, I would look it up. Then I would ask an expert Rabbi in Montreal.

If it was something simple, I would look in the Shulchan Aruch and other books. We'd look in the Shulchan Aruch for halacha.

Q Is that specific to Chabad, or would most Jews look to the Shulchan Aruch?

A No, if we have a practical question we look in the Shulchan Aruch. If you want to understand the general topic and if you learn it for the sake of learning and understanding all the details, you look to the Mishna and the Gemara and all that. If you have a question on hand, and you need to find out relatively quickly, so you look in the Shulchan Aruch.

Q Who built your succah this year and who generally builds it.

A We try to have people from our community -- as we said, the students -- we try to have them build the succah.

Q Why?

A Well, two reasons. One -- its a help, its hours and hours of work. You need a few people to work at a time, because one person cannot do it alone. So first of all, its just help for us. Secondly, of course, if they build it, they feel more apart of it, they feel that they are participating. That it is their attachment to it

Q So it's a kind of community building project?

A Right -- group bonding.

Q How important is the building process in terms of Jewish law. I know the Shulchan Aruch stresses that you should build your own succah

A The truth is like this. I know it says it positive to build your own succah, but I don't think it means that you be the one to build it. I think it means that you should have your own and not have to go to your neighbour. But the actually constructing, the most important thing is putting up the Schach, the roof. Putting up the walls is not as important, meaning technically, you could get somebody else to do it for you, or they could be there from the year before. The walls could stay up all year. Nonetheless, people do try to build it themselves, because its a happy mitzvah, its a mitzvah, its a happy thing. Its not a mitzvah so much that you say a bracha on it, cause the real mitzvah is sitting in the succah, that's when you say the bracha. Nevertheless, its part of a mitzvah, its preparation for a mitzvah, its part of the whole holiday thing, cause people like to live with it.

Q Why is the schach the most important part of the succah? What it is that makes the schach the most important part?

A Well, the word succah is grammatically and etymologically related to the word schach. The root in Hebrew is the same. So the whole point of the succah is the schach. The schach has all sorts of

symbolism, God being above us and coming down. The idea of the desert -- the whole idea of the Succot is remembering the desert where the clouds of glory -- some sort of spiritual phenomena was surrounding us and protecting us and guarding us. And so on Succot, we go outside to remember this. That there is some sort of spiritual things surrounding us and protecting us and guarding us and that is with us. Generally when we discuss it, geographically it might not be accurate -- we think of God as being above us. But in absolute terms there is really no up and down. But that is the way we perceive things. We look at the sky, we look at the stars and all that stuff. So the schach is above us. It's kind of like the sky fell down...That the sky which is way out comes down to the top of our succah.

Q Does it have to do with protection in the desert?

A The whole succah has to do this that. The schach is like the sky coming down -- its closer.

Q What do the natural elements have to do with this?

A Why it has to be so natural? I think it would be...The aspect that it has to be grown, that its not a utensil means that it is not something we made. If we would be taking chairs or tables or different utensils that are man-made things, then we would relate to this phenomenon as being man-made -- the protection and all these different things. Then we would say " we are the source" and obviously we are not. So we take things which it is readily visible that the source is from God. The question is why it has to be something that grows? Why can't it be boulders or rocks? Let's say plastic? I guess because if it grows, you can see life in it -- its something that is alive.

Q Can you describe any traditions in succah building or succah decoration that you follow here?

A That's what I mentioned briefly before. At Chabad, we don't decorate the succah, because the succah itself is so spiritual and so high and so pure that the succah itself is the decoration.

Q So anything more would be adding to the mitzvah?

A Right, it would be cheapening it. It would be like if you have a person putting on too much make-up. So they have an inherent beauty and they just put finger paint all over themselves. Its silly. That is the decoration. Now with the schach, with hanging things from the schach, we don't need it because the schach itself is the point, and not different type of things you might hang from it. The schach itself is the point, not a banana. Many hasidim do this. In a hasidic place, they try to put alot of schach, as much as possible, loads and loads of schach, preferably green schach. Now we don't do it because of budgetary constraints, so we only have a little bit, but we do have a quite alot of schach. Again, the idea that the schach is the point.

Q Has Chabad House, or you every had any problems with the City of Montreal or neighbours with respect to your succah?

A We have never had problems here. Of course, we build it in our parking lot. This year we built it in our neighbours parking lot, but they gave us permission. So we haven't had problems, because its entirely in our property. The only problem was once we built one on McGill campus once, and some people knocked it over one night. Not McGill's, but just some vandalous students.

Q What kind of a space is the succah -- sacred or profane?

A A very interesting point about another tradition. Some people have a tradition that if possible they sleep in the succah. In Chabad, and not just Chabad, but among many Chassidim, we do not sleep in the succah. Even if its nice weather, even if we could, we don't. The relating to this is that for us, we realize that it is a very sacred space and its serious. Its not a place to go to sleep. You don't go to sleep in the presence of somebody serious, right? If you have your thesis supervisor, or someone whom you feel is super important, you don't lie down on the couch to go to sleep. Therefore, we do recognize it as a kind of sacred space. On the other hand we do eat and drink and be merry, then again we also do that in a synagogue also.

Q And dwell -- the mitzvah is to dwell.

A Yeah. So what does dwell mean? Dwell means eating. As Napoleon says, an army goes on its stomach. The stomach is, for whatever reasons, the stomach tells us where we are.

Q So Chabad and some hasidim don't interpret "dwell" as sleeping, right?

A Yeah. One of the ways we see this is the bracha that everybody, when they say their blessing for the holiday of Succot, they say it when they eat in the succah.

Q And there is no blessing for sleeping?

A Right. If you were to come to a succah to go to sleep, you wouldn't say a blessing, you wouldn't say a blessing, but if you come in to eat some cake, you do say a blessing.

Q Sacred space in other religious is interpreted as being a space where God is, as opposed to a space where God is not.

A OK. There is a very important concept, which I can't say I understand one hundred percent, but I am working on it and will continue to work on it. It is that of course "God is here, God is there, God is truly everywhere. Up, Down, Right, Left and All around. So he is certainly in the synagogue, outside the synagogue, everywhere, basically. No matter how becoming or unbecoming a place may be, God is there. So what does it mean "a holy place"? We have a synagogue that is different from outside a synagogue. The answer has to do with revelation and revelation again has two angles to it. There is the generation of revelation and there is the perception of revelation. Right here we are being beaten over the head by radio waves and we don't even notice. If we turned on our radio we would hear them, but we don't even know that we are being beaten up by them right now... They are here right now with us in this room and we don't even perceive them, but they are here. So in a holy space, there is great revelation, that is to say that God is accessible there, is readily accessible there. Its like, you can be in a room with a person you don't know and you don't pay attention to each other. Or you're on the same bus with someone you don't know, and there's no communication. You are both there, right next to each other, but there is nothing going on. Or you can be sitting next to a person -- you go into a store and you have a cashier. You're speaking to them. You are both in the same place but there is a communication. Or you're with your friend having a coffee, in which case you have two people in the same space, but there is a greater interrelation going on, a greater connection between the two people. So that is similar to what we have. Wherever we are, Hashem is with us, right there next to us. How much are we relating to him, how much is he relating to us, how much is she relating to us...That is the question. Of course the truth is that it is our job to relate to Hashem. Hashem is there and ready, we just have to think a bit, as the Rebbe said, open up our

eyes a bit. Now in a synagogue, it is more easily done. In a synagogue, it is a more opportune moment, he is more easily accessible. The truth is, it is not only with space.. but also in time. There are times of the day, times of the week, times of the year which are more opportune, less opportune. Now what's with the succah? A succah is also a radiation, in cabalistic terms its called the "Makifim of bina" which means the infinite aspect of understanding or the infinite aspect of connecting details or connecting concepts, or applying concepts. That is what happens in a succah. A tremendous revelation, this infinite light of the Makifim of Bina. Makif implies that something surrounds you like a succah surrounds you. You eating something, it goes inside you. Clothing or a house or a succah is around you. So a succah is around like a Makif, so at a cabalistic level, there is a tremendous level of revelation, so that makes it a holy space. A certain type of relationship, a certain type of rapport with God is accessible in the succah. Do we tune in is another question. Just like in a synagogue. If people go to a synagogue and talk about a business deal or something, they don't pay attention to what is going on. They are there, but they are not tuned in. So a succah is like that. It is a holy space, and it is just upon us to tune in.

Q The origins of the succah are biblical and agriculture. Is its significance limited to those two ideas, or can it mean anything different to Jews today.

A Succahs are a kind of mitzvah called a " " that relates to an historical event. We know about leaving Egypt, and it says we lived in succot. Were they identical to the succahs we have today? Certainly not, because the material were different then. Different types of wood, different types of things. Maybe they didn't have two by fours, maybe they didn't have particle boards. But the general idea is the same, the general construction is more or less the same. I am sure they didn't have the types of bolts that I'm using, but a similar type of phenomenon. It sure is historical that it makes us think of an historical event. Like here they have in the US and I think they copied in Canada this Thanksgiving dinner, they get together they think about pilgrims people with funny hats, who came to America and they were happy that Indians gave them dried fish so that they could not starve to death. So we dit in a succah like on Passover to remember "Gee, we left Egypt and we were stuck outside in these shacks but nonetheless, despite the elements and whatever else might have been around us, Hashem, God protected us". So that is certainly historical. The history of the construction -- in specifics it is not. How long have lumber yards existed? How long has lumber existed?...

In different countries they make them differently. In European countries they have one type of wood and they made them one way. In Mediterranean countries they used palm branches. They could make a whole wall out of palm branches...It means history, this concept of being out in the wild, out in the elements... Fiddler on the roof, and nevertheless, God protecting us.

Q Is there any relationship to more contemporary events such as the idea that Jews are still in exile and that God is still in fact protecting them?

A Going out of Egypt was like an exile until we arrived in the land of Israel where we have permanent homes. It is similar, actually in the prayer, in the blessings we make on the fruit in birkat hamazon at the end we say the prayer for Succot... the line for Succot is that God should raise up the fallen succah of David, which implies the Messianic age. So until that time when we have the holiday of Succot, even in Israel -- people in Israel are physically back in their homeland -- nonetheless they have a succah because until Mashiach comes, we are not completely at home yet.

Q So in a sense there is a feeling of contemporary exile.

A Yes

Q How do Jews in Israel see Succos, if they are physically in Israel.

A If a person would say " I am at home, I am already in Israel", so the person in Israel wants to say that, they why do they want a succah? The answer of course would be " nostalgia". We used to be stuck in exile, and we have to remember it, but we are not any more. But like I said, when you get to the symbolic level, it can have different nuances for different people.

Q Could you describe briefly how the succah was used during the rest of the week.

A As you know, we have here a kosher cafeteria. We also service people downtown. There are people who live downtown who are interested in our services, and there are people who work downtown. Many of these people come for lunch here because there are basically two kosher restaurants, maybe three, and they like to come here. It is good food, the service isn't so quick, but that is because everything is made fresh so it takes a couple of extra minutes. We also have a prayer service everyday at lunchtime, people come on their lunch-break. At Succot, they have to eat in the succah. This year we were they only succah downtown at any restaurant, maybe there is one other. So many people came to take advantage of the restaurant with the succah. They come to the restaurant with the succah. We tried to have a party or two during Chol Ha Moed. A few people came, it was very nice. It could have been better, but everything can always be better. So the succah was used during the week by people who worked downtown and needed a succah. And we had different occasion here. We had Shabbat in the succah.

Q Was it mostly men who used the succah?

A Men and women both came. Who came more is a good question. Probably men, because mostly men work downtown. I think there is more men commuting to downtown to work than women.

Q Is the mitzvah incumbent on only men or both men and women?

A No, I think that the difference is who's downtown. Men have a more strict obligation to eat in the succah, as is for the other Mitzvot, men are more obligated in that particular mitzvah. Women are more obligated in more general mitzvot demanding of their time and space, therefore, the mitzvah is more on the man.

Q Is the succah used for anything other than traditional activities?

A The succah is supposed to be as your home. In the same way that you do a variety of things in your home, so you do a variety of things in the succah.

Q Did you every learn in it or give classes there?

A Yeah, sure. We have a class or two. We have one person who every year during Succot he reserves a day or a lunchtime and he gives his class here. Sometimes he brings an entertainer. He is Rabbi in Chabad Chabanel. He brings his class here for Succot because we have a big succah, which very few people have. This year he had at least twenty people.

Q Can you give a rough estimate of how many people used the Succah this year.

A Two hundred or three hundred.

Q How is this succah different from a succah in a family home?

A The main difference is that it is bigger heavier. It is more sturdy and thicker.

Q How would you compare the attendance this Succot to attendance on other Jewish holidays?

A The first night went very well. The second night it was raining, so I think that held people back. Rosh Hoshana and Yom Kippur you get the most.

Interview #2, Montreal, November 1996.

Q How long have you lived in this location?

A Five years.

Q Have you always had the same succah?

A No

Q Can you briefly describe the evolution of your succah

A We didn't have the porch, so we had to go downstairs. The stairs were about four inches wide.

The succah is a temporary house. According to Halacha, it has to be set up with two walls, and the third one should be only four inches wide. The Schach should be something which is growing, something like leaves, flowers, branches or wood that is not finished. And when we put it on it is not allowed to be connected to...you can't take a plant which is still growing. This is totally, 100% not kosher. You are not allowed to put your succah under a growing tree. It is not kosher. Now, this is the basis of what the succah is. Every country, every generation has a different way. The way they were living, that's the way they were making it. In Israel there is more. You have alot of people living outside in their succah. Right now, most people live in high-rise apartment buildings. By the Orthodox community, the buildings are built in order that each house should be able to have a succah. That they shouldn't be one on top of the other. Every house is figured out so that one balcony should be open. Their succah's are very small because of that but you have alot of shuls and big community succahs, where the Rabbis are -- real big ones.

Q Do succah's in Canada tend to be bigger?

A In the houses, personally, I would say yes. It depends on how you live. It depends on the kind of porch you have. My mother had a very narrow one. Someone who lives on top makes a small one. Who lives downstairs makes it in the yard and makes it bigger. Now, when you build a house on your own and you buy a house, most people today have a bigger succah when they have their own house. Either they build it outside -- succah is part of the structure of the house -- you need a dining room, you need a succah. Now, some people have the porch and they like it this way because this way its unlike going out of the house. Some people don't want to be so traditional because its cold and you can't sit properly and you are nervous. So they like to have it built into the house, meaning to say they have an opening, they opening, they open it up, they put the Schach and that is the succah. Its a room all year round. Now they have all kinds of builders, they have all kinds of fancy things, brand new, like glass windows all year round. Its like a sun-room. You open it up come

succahs and its very good because when it rains you just close it and you are in the house.

Q When you bought this house, did you make sure that you had somewhere to put the succah?

A Well, we had the yard.

Q Would every family absolutely make sure that you have a yard or a balcony and if not, no house?

A Well, basically Yes. There are very few people who rent a house and they cannot make this -- like in the middle floor. So they have parents, they have to figure out where they will be for Succos, but there is a problem. We had somebody living upstairs, not any more. They made the succah in our yard, then on our porch. But this year they weren't here any more. WE were sharing a porch. I made half and he made half and -----because its pretty hard to sit and feel comfortable in one family. You have your own family and you sit there with your kids and this way it is much easier. When we came first we lived on Hutchison. The first one, we lived in an apartment on Outremont and Bloomfield, we didn't have a succah. We were in Israel that year, the next we were by our parents. After we moved to Hutchison we had a succah, we started slow. The second year, I built it. I had somebody build it and had still when I lived there and when I came here I used the same wood. Just made it differently -- the shape. That was before we had the porch. It was just a small alley with mud on the floor. And we had to go downstairs

Q And you mentioned that it was less comfortable than here.

A Of course Here, you open the door and you are out. Almost part of the house.

Q Was it the same wood, or did you throw that out?

A No, we have still the wood. Last year, when we shared the succah, we had the wood. This year, we incorporated our walls as part of the succah. The fence -- the brick wall.

Q You mentioned that you had someone to build it for you. Is that Halakhically permissible, to hire someone else.

A The walls are no problem. It doesn't make a difference at all.

Q So even a non-Jew could build it.

A Anything. Most succahs here in Quebec are built by non-Jews. But you only had it built by somebody the first year, when you had it made. That's it, because you bought the ply-wood and you set it up custom made and he made it with hooks. And once it was set up, then the year after we set it up ourselves. Every year I put it up(husband). This year I also had somebody who came to help me build the frame and this and that. But only the Schach to cover, that is where the main part of the mitzvah is. This has to be done obviously by a Jew and it has to be done thirty days before Succas. If you have done it before, you have to say that you make it for Sukkas. If I leave it from one year to the other, it is not kosher. What do you have to do? You have to shake it out.

Q Does it have to be the person whose succah it is who puts the Schach one?

A Absolutely not. It is a mitzvah. Probably everybody wants to participate in the mitzvah...but no, its kosher anyway.

Q Who usually builds your succah. Does the entire family help?

A I (husband) made the design, he (handyman) made the frame and we finished it. The night before Sukkas. But last year, he built it all himself. But to put the schach, I am always here with them and to hand up the nice things, I am here with the smaller kids. They are bothered alot, but that is their part of the gang, for decoration.

Q How long does it take to build the succah. I read in the Shulchan Aruch that one should start the day after Yom Kippur.

A That is a mitzvah. This is only a mitzvah because to show that right when Yom Kippur finishes we start right away to put the... It doesn't have to be completely built, but to do something to the succah it will show that we right away want to do a mitzvah right after Yom Kippur.

Q SO you can start before.

A Ninety percent of people start before because depending on the schedule, timing, the work and the nature of the thing. You do something. Even just to go out and cover something, to show that you are preparing for the mitzvah.

Q Where did you get the materials for the succah?

A Anywhere. We went into a fabric store on Parc avenue. The wood you bought at any...The Schach, we buy by.. there is someone who sells it.

Q Is it someone in the community?

A In the larger Montreal community.

Q And they deliver it to the house?

A Some deliver, some you pick up. It depends on what kinds you want or what you buy. There is about four or five. They have all kinds that they are making now because of the rain in our country -- North America. In Israel they don't have that problem, because there is no problem. But here... There is evergreen, there is bamboo sticks, there is these thin long ones that corn grows on.

Q SO they try to make things to prevent the rain from getting in.

A Some, yes. But here in Montreal, it really hasn't arrived yet. It is expensive and besides the Halachic side of it because once its cut you have done something to it, its... some people are sceptical. Even though this Rabbi says its kosher.

Q Your Rabbi?

A No. There is rabbis...everybody does it under supervision, otherwise, it wouldn't be sold but people are scared to change traditions, like a statement, you can't just change all of a sudden. I changed this year. We used to used only evergreen. It is very nice. For the smell, the look. It looks green with the white wall above. She loves it, I like it very much, but when you eat it always drops, and things fall in. The floor is always dirty and you have to sweep it up. You shake the door, it falls down. But it is a succah smell. My father used, started to use bamboos. They are very clean. Another thing, its cheaper. You buy it one year and you can use it forever. With the evergreen, you can't keep. Its harder to put on and not every year the branches are the same. It is harder. It is nice, but

it is a harder thing to do. So, I bought bamboos. You can see in the picture that it is not green.

Q Is evergreen expensive?

A For eight bundles, seventy-five bundles. They take it in the yard. The bamboo is very expensive, but you just buy it once.

Q Where do you buy it?

A At Kotel, Rodal.

Q If you were not sure that your succah was kosher, where would you go? Would you ask a Rabbi, or would you look in the Mishna, would you look in the Shulchan Aruch?

A No. The basics, I know. We learn to know them when there is a question. If you don't learn, you don't know what is yes and not. We learn to know the basics. Then, if you have a question or a doubt, you go to the Rabbi because they learn longer and they go through all the small things and its all discussed and they have a Smicha on it. So that is why this year I asked because I made metal bars to hold the succah and I just wanted to make sure that its ok. And now we know that it is perfectly alright.

Q So when you learn, do you learn Mishna and Gemara?

A No. This is to learn when you learn, but to know the Halakha today, in this age you learn the Shulchan Aruch. It gives you the short script right out. In the Mishna, you have all kinds. One says yes, one says no. Its not so clarified, you go further and further. IN this one its more the short script, the outcome, the total. You make it this, because most say you do it like this and there is also certain kinds of differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Because we have to go according to Ashkenazim, and they have to go.. So that's why its easier for us.

Q What was the book that you mentioned that has the outcome?

A The Mishna Berurah or Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. Kitzur, you know what Kitzur means? Short. There is English too. That is not for learning. You look it up.

Q So what do the kids learn in school?

A I learn with them the Mishna, the first thing. We start with the Mishna. Some go to the Gemara, depending on time. I wouldn't have time to know everything you do in a shul around Succas because my working hours are much longer then. I barely have time to look at anything because the nature of my job.

Q Is the succah a sacred space?

A It is part of your house, but it is... If you look into the Hasidishe Schinah, you can see that alot of them are mentioning the Schinah is there in the succah and we shouldn't talk... You should be more like you are in the Synagogue which is the house of Hashem. It is dedicate to praying and to do... but, still it is mentioned that you should live as you live in a house. So there are certain places where it is written that if you want to talk you want to make business go to the succah to because it is a mitzvah every minute you are in the succah. It is like you live there. So it is like a house and in certain ways its like aholy you should watch what you talk about. So there is both versions

of the thing.

Q So it is both?

A Yeah, no question about it. It is the only time when a Jewish person can be all in the Mitzvah. When you make esrog and lulav you do it with your hands. When you eat Matzah, its only with your mouth. Here you go completely in the mitzvah.

Q What about sleeping in the succah. I spoke to a Chabad Rabbi today who said that in Chabad they don't sleep in the succah because they consider it too holy?

A That is accepted very strongly in Chabad, but in every other Hasidus the Halacha wants us... there is a difference of opinion between the just a few years ago. Between the Chassidim and the head of the Litvisher world.... Since Chabad said you shouldn't sleep in the succah, he was very mad because according to Halacha it is written clearly that you have to sleep in the succah.

Q In the Mishna?

A In the Mishna, according to Shulchan Aruch. There is one way.. the reason why we don't sleep is because it has to be comfortable and since its cold, its narrow, you have to shlep a bed in a bed out, it is not really comfortable, or for certain other reasons. Then that is why we are more lenient. But the basis Halacha is that you have to sleep in it.

Q So, who sleeps in the succah here?

A My boys. This year they moved out when you came the next morning...

Q You said that the kids decorate the succah, or does everyone do it together?

A Together. Everyone does it together but the kids bring home things that they have done in school.

Q Can you describe some of the things?

A Most of them are either a picture of a succah or the Ushpizin. Something related to the succah. Sometimes there are stars when they get older.

Q What about lighting and heating. Did you have any extra heating?

A We didn't have this year.

Q Is it ok to have it?

A Sure. Well, if you have it in the house, you can have anything you want. As comfortable as you feel you need it.

Q And the materials, as long as they are natural can be anything?

A The walls doesn't even matter. Just has to be a certain height. Not allowed to be too high or too short. It can't be less than approximately four inches. If you want to sleep, a succah only for sleeping, it has to be this high, minimum. If it is lower, it is not kosher. If it is higher than about twenty yards, then it is not kosher. Very high. It could be in between.

And it has to be a certain width. That means to say it must be 7 centimetres in depth. It has to be...

Basically, the Mishna and the Gemara said it has to be able to fit your head, most parts of your body and a small table. That is the basic Halacha. So they figured it out how many inches is it allowed to be.

Q The decorations, are they a Belzer tradition, or an Ashkenazi?

A I would say more Ashkenazi, hasidim.

Q There is also a question of things hanging down.

A Yes. It shouldn't be too wide, to big because it makes a separation between you and the succah, or a cover.

Q Can you briefly describe how it was used during the first two days.

A First we light the candles in the succah. I light the succah and the whole family is there. And then, when they come home from shul we basically spend our time there. When you come home from shul you prepare the meal, you say the blessing. You make kiddish and you wash and you make the 'Layshayv b'succah' and there is a special prayer which we say....

But if you learn, you learn in the succah. Whatever you do, you do in the succah. If I have guests, I bring them into the succah, I don't bring them into the dining room unless it is raining hard. This time it was hard because it was raining alot, so we tried to shorten up the seudah -- the meal. Then we close the retractable roof from the outside and then we just spent time in it. We just sat. And when we are all just come in so it shouldn't rain.

Q So what happened on Shabbes? It started what time?

A It started at seven. We light candles fifteen minutes before sunset. We go to shul and we come back approximately an hour and a half after sunset. But the second day, Yontov, I light the candles when they come home from shul. You cannot light the candles before sunset because before sunset it is still Shabbes. So seventy-two minutes after sunset that's when we are allowed. We take seventy two, depending on which tradition you follow.

So before we go, Shabbes is Shabbes, the kids who want to eat something before they go to shul they do that in the succah

Q What about guests?

A According to Halacha it is very important, but according to reality it is very hard, because everyone has to be home by his family. We are talking guests, we are talking about poor people -- that is the real mitzvah. But it is very hard to pick up someone who has nowhere to go. First there is not in shul. And

We had many times...Someone who was alone. Two years ago we had someone who was here from the states. He was Jewish. He wasn't so religious, but I invited him. Who ever feels like coming comes. He came, but not everybody comes.

Q The lulav and the esrog don't happen in the succah?

A Depending on what tradition? We say every morning two parts. Before, you say the Bracha and you just do the shaking. Say the blessing then a special prayer. After there is Hallel and Shames. We go to the succah and say the bracha there except when its cold and raining but under normal

circumstances that is our tradition because it is one mitzvah, you do it together, you daven but afterward in the shul you just pray the Hallel and Shames but you are not in the succah then.

Q Would you ever daven in the succah?

A No.

Q How does women's role differ from men's in the succah.

A I don't have the mitzvah of eating in the succah. I can eat anywhere. But we do sit down for the meal, so we do end up eating there. Some people that don't have place, they only have a small succah, so only the men eat there. I don't have that mitzvah, the girls don't have that mitzvah. But if they come in to eat, they are allowed to make the bracha which is special, depending. There is also a tradition by us, that when we try the women should at least eat something in the succah and say the Bracha. The first bite of the Challah. But there are certain Hasidim which, since women are not obliged to eat in the succah, they wouldn't have them make the bracha. But by us, we do.

Q Do the girls ever want to do that mitzvah like the boys?

A For the main meal, sure. Everybody is there. If everybody wants to eat in the succah, my girls are there. They don't really have the concept of "I am a girl, I am not obliged"

Q How many people fit in the succah?

A This is the first time we had such a big one. Ten people now problem.

Q How big is it?

A Fifteen feet -- that is the whole balcony, but there is missing a piece which is not kosher underneath the overhang. It is kosher enough for the women.

Q Have you ever had any problems with neighbours or the municipality.

A Yes. The building? Here in Outremont there is an understanding right now in the city of Outremont that two weeks after Yontov, the succah has to be demolished, down. But they give you two weeks after Yontov. A few years ago, we had problems with the city -- they sent us letters and warnings but this is settled right now. They had other problems because they were scared that people were going to keep them up all winter, like a shed or something like that -- a fire hazard. They didn't have the concept of what this building was about but we... their were people involved -- clarifiers -- but two weeks after, we take down. This is, with them, no problem. But, neighbours? When we sing, which we do in the succah, we have a problem. They sent the police and the police explained to us that the law in Quebec, in Canada, in Montreal that you are not allowed to disturb your neighbour at any time of the day. Not only eleven o'clock at night, so I wondered where this came from. They were very nice. He didn't stop calling. If he picked up to call twenty-five times, the least he could do is come out, but they were nice But that was all the problems. Here, we had a neighbour last year yelling and laughing and screaming. She opened up the tape recorder and started playing her piano. They were high -- it was Saturday night. It was not raining -- it was warmer. But, nothing serious. On the whole, they respect. My next door neighbour, she has her neighbour who says, "When is the day that everybody sits outside and sings because my friends want to come over to hear it" and she had a party that night because everybody was sitting

outside. Here we were downstairs singing and everybody upstairs was watching. It was very nice.

Q Aside from the schach, is there any difference between Canadian succahs and Israeli succahs?

A It is more solid in Israel. In New York, you have to make it solid because it is very windy. There were times everybody remembers it, there it was very windy, like hurricane style and eighty-percent of the outside succahs were destroyed. If you don't build them structurally well. It happened about twenty-year ago (in Montreal) everybody's succah fell in. That is why we try to make it strong. In Israel, they have ...

Q Some people have canvas here too.

A Yeah but here if you put a canvas, you get cold and it gets wet and in the wind it shakes and wiggles.

Q I heard that it was supposed to shake.

A Absolutely not. When people have it in the house, that can't shake. According to Halacha, it could be as strong as anything. In the ---- it is mentioned this discussion about making it from a steel wall. It shouldn't be. The whole idea should be a temporary house -- if you make it from steel it is not temporary. But the walls don't make it -- in the end, the walls don't make the house.

Q So I think that what you are saying is that the schach is the most important part.

A This is hard to discuss and say. It is written in the Torah clearly that the reason why we go to the succah is to commemorate our forefathers who went out of Egypt and were covered with clouds -- real clouds. Anana Kuvah (clouds of glory). And when they moved, it moved with them. And the whole mitzvah is only to commemorate, so they learn it.

Q Someone mentioned that the schach is natural because it to symbolize something that God made and not man.

A That's the reason?

Q That is one interpretation

A Yeah, there is a million...(reading from Yiddish text) I want...

Q Do you think that the succah might also be a sign of contemporary exile. In a sense, the Jews are still in a temporary home.

A Is it your own theory.

Q Yes.

A I don't think we should go that far because the mitzvah was given before we went to Israel. Before everything started. Its not that we made the mitzvah to commemorate after we were exiled. This is clearly written in the Torah, (that we do this) to commemorate that. When something is written clearly, there is no grey area. The basic rule is rule.

Q It also has an agricultural significance. These are the booths used by farmers in Israel when they went out to gather the harvest.

A But the name is the same name -- the succah -- it is not only Israel, but the whole middle-east, the

whole ancient world. They used to have a little hut where they use to watch the fields and the sheep and shade themselves from the sun. You don't see it so much in our days.

Q So it is very much a reminder of Jewish history, or a reenactment.

A To relive? Yes, every Yontov. It is by Succas and Passover, same story, we eat the matzah because of this...

Q So it is a way to remember and to teach?

A And in Pesach we have the mitzvah to speak about it, which we don't have at Succas.

And the children have in the succah. So they do go through it, why this is not good and why that is not good. They do talk about it. But that is part of the Mitzvah also, to read and to remember.

But my husband also tells them that now you have to eat in the succah, the first piece of bread is to remember. He tells his own version of why "the mitzvah of Succas is the three hundred and twenty-fifth mitzvah in the bible...the mitzvah of succah which was told by us to sit in the succah 7 days. He brings down the first day which is the first day of the month of Tishrei, you should not work. The root of the mitzvah is, as explained, to remember the big miracles which God did to our fore-fathers in the desert when they went out from Mitzraim, which covered with the cloud of glory. The reason they were covered was that so the sun should not be too hot nor too cold at night. Because in the desert it is very cold at night. There is an explanation that when the Jews were in exile they really did make huts and to remember this, that is why we do this. That is why the mitzvah was given to us. Shouldn't be higher than twenty, shorter than ten. Wider than seven tzfuchan(four inches). It needs three walls. Now when you cover up the schach, when the sun shines in their has to be more shade than sun, or else its not kosher. It can't be too lightly covered that the sun should be more than the shade. The shade must be more than the sun. Even though it is as thick as a house, if you want to cover it, it is kosher. Even the schach can be as thick as a house. You can use trees for the walls, you can use a house, you can make it on a wagon, you can make it on a ship, you can make it on a balcony.

Q Those are the posters you have on the balcony

A Yes, exactly. Now the main thing which the schach is supposed to be. It has to be done, it has to come from the thing that is not impure. Anything which can contain, if you put something in there which is not purified, it gets unpurified. It has to do two things: it has to be natural and it should not contain anything. Like fruits can get unpurified. If an unpure man or woman touches it, it can get unpurified, so with these things you cannot cover the succah, although it is natural as it is. You cannot take grapes and cover the succah.... Now it says there is different versions if it is this wide open in one place, if it is not more than twelve inches its ok. A stone succah. Everything is written here. So what else would you like to know.

Q Is there anything else you think I should know that I haven't asked about?

A Yes, there are lots of Hokim[Torah laws for which no rational is given]. We have mentioned why we don't sleep in the succah. There is one basic Halacha. If someone has pain or is very irritable, he does not have to be in the succah because the Torah told us that to sit as you live and once you are not comfortable in your house, you go out. So if it not comfortable in the succah, you go in. Especially if somebody is sick, he doesn't have to sit in the succah. The people who are tending the

sick person do not have to sit in the succah either. The person who is flying somewhere or going by wagon these days, can eat without a succah because he is on a deed -- let say he has to do a mitzvah for a special occasion or something.

Interview #3, Montreal, November, 1996.

Q How long have you lived in this house?

A Thirteen years.

Q Have you had the same succah every year?

A Basically, yes. We have expanded it over the years.

Q Briefly describe the changes that have occurred over the years.

A This succah is actually -- we have had the succah for ten of the thirteen years. We must have had something else before hand because I remember the year that it was being built. Its a wood panel succah, the inside is wood, the inside is finished with(wood), cheap wood covering. It is very easy to put up because its panelling. The first year that we built it, we had our handyman cut out some window so we would have a little more daylight and he finished it very nicely and we assemble it with the help of friends or now, the handyman usually comes and does it.

Q When do you usually begin building the succah?

A When I remember. I would say about three weeks before Succos. We allow for the handyman not to show up once or twice and for bad weather. You never know what the weather is going to be like and its much more pleasant to put it up when the weather is nice instead of a rainy day like today.

Q So it can take anywhere from..

A The assembly doesn't usually take long. What takes very long is that we have a wood trellis above the succah and we have to take off all of the wood from on top in order to be able to raise and lower the roof, which is the most time consuming thing. There were years when we had young boys who were learning in the Yeshiva a few blocks away who used to regularly eat at our house and the night after Rosh Hashana they would come over and help my husband and myself put up the succah and polish off all the leftover food in the refrigerator. Now they have moved on -- we don't have these boys any more coming to our house so we rely on the handyman. But that's...

Q Where did you get your succah? You said your handyman. Did he make it from the beginning?

A No he didn't make it from the beginning. We bought the panels from a store here in the area -- Kotel on Victoria -- though this year now that we have got the expanded panels to extend it, is from the man who actually does the.. makes these panels. And he lives in the area.

Q Did he originally sell them to Kotel?

A I believe so, caus we actually had a discussion about that. The owner of Kotel and I, she was wondering if I actually did buy them from here or if I went to directly to the man who constructed them. So I am pretty sure we bought them from her originally.

Q So he is a Montrealler?

A He is a Montrealler.

Q So this was a prefabricated design that they sell?

A Yes

Q Who puts it up every year? The family?

A This year it was not the family. It was the handyman and one of his friends, though my son, we usually do the succah ourselves -- the roofing of us. In recent years, since my husband has less time, it has devolved to the handyman.

Q Was it a family activity before?

A More or less, yes.

Q Where did the schach come from?

A Not an exciting answer. The lumber yard.

Q Is that a service that is offered every year.

A No. I go to Villeneuve on Saint-Laurent and I get the lumber and we save it from year to year, though of course it deteriorates and we replace it. We used to have bamboo in our original succah. When we built this succah of ours ten years ago, we couldn't get the right length of bamboo so we started using narrow strips of lumber. That is what we have been using ever since.

Q Do you also use branches, cedar branches?

A No, absolutely not. My husband doesn't like cedar in his soup. Neither do we, as a matter of fact. Yeah, it gets in the soup after a few days. So, we don't. We used to. At home we had cedar covering. Growing up in the States.

Q When you went looking for a succah ten years ago, were there specific things that you were looking for in the design?

A No, sorry to disappoint you. We didn't want canvas, we wanted wood. We felt that it wouldn't let in the wind as much and even though canvas is easier to put up, it is not really a structure, so we went for wood. The previous owner we bought this house from were Jewish also and they did have a canvas one, a large canvas succah in the back.

Q What about other factors. You mentioned you wanted something more solid. Perhaps the climate influence that?

A Probably. It was what my husband was used to, in terms of at home. We always lived in apartment buildings, so our succah was whatever the people who owned the building put up, so we didn't have much choice in it, but I guess it's what you are used to and what you are comfortable with.

Q What about size?

A We expanded it recently because we have a lot of guests. The only thing that was a determinant of the size was that we couldn't have anything more than eight feet wide because we have a roof that

goes up and down and that we raise on a pulley and that is on hinges, so we couldn't get any of this very light corrugated material? Plastic. The largest length was eight feet wide so that dictated the width of the succah, but it didn't dictate the length.

Q Did the plastic come with the succah?

A No, we bought it and the carpenter framed it and put on the hinges and put on the rope and the pulleys and over the years it has gotten refined.

Q How did you know the succah was kosher when you bought it?

A What do you mean?

Q Well, you need three walls and there would be certain things that would disqualify it.

A That is not actually the materials of the succah itself. I don't know if there is anything that you can't use for the walls. But the overhand is.. you check the trees overhead every year. My sister in law had the tree-trimmer over twice to cut down branches twice before she was satisfied.

Q If you had a question about it being kosher for whatever reason, where would you go to consult?

A I would call the Rabbi.

Q What about looking in the Mishna?

A Well, I suppose alot of the knowledge you have accumulated over the years, you would know what was serious enough to call if you had a problems, to call the Rabbi. Alot of knowledge you just generally acquire and the kids learn it from a reasonably young age in school.. that it has to have three walls and a door -- actually three and a half -- so you sort of know what is ok and what's not and how the initial construction is, like, you might have to ask about the screws and nails go. I guess we have alot more knowledge than you might realise or that other people realize. You just know it after awhile.

Q It is a kind of oral tradition that is passed from parent to child?

A It is an oral but it is also a written tradition. The kids would, I would have learned it in school, I definitely learned it in school and you incorporate it.

Q So it is a standard part of an Orthodox Jewish child's education?

A Yeah. They would learn. No how to physically build the succah, but the requirements, but how high the walls have to be, how many walls their has to be and the openings. Yes, definitely.

Q About the decoration? How is the succah decorated?

A That is a family activity which I avoid. The kids have to do it. They make decorations in school. Sometimes we buy posters. My son once came home from camp with this beautiful collage. Figures and different people in Jewish history which we covered with plastic which we had in the succah for many years. It covered alot of room and made it very easy. But he brought that home from camp. Sometimes we get pictures at the sales. The kids used to make chains, all these great chains to hang in the succah. I and our parents succah and the kids still do it. Other things in their art classes, sometimes they are put in the succah box and saved from year to year and also they go to some

stores, sometimes to buy streamers and chains and different things to use and hang from the roof. Last summer I went to a bazaar in Ste-Agathe and I bought some really shiny Christmas decorations that were being sold. A woman came over and said "Can I ask you a question?" and I said " Sure". " What is an Orthodox woman like you doing buying Christmas decorations for?"...I said " to decorate the succah" and she said that was a really good idea.

Q So there is no problem using Christmas decorations?

A Well, I wouldn't use anything that has "Merry Christmas" or "praise be the Lord" but just these very pretty chains they have, very shiny. I don't necessarily buy red and green ones, but they come in lots of colours. It reflects the light very nicely.

Q So what about the light, then?

A Oh, its and old fixture that we took down from this house when we moved in and we use it every year for Succos.

Q Is it just one light?

A There are a few light bulbs in it, and it is just fine for the succah, you really don't see too much. We used to have a beautiful one, but it was too small. In our first succah, my mother in law had bought us a crystal one and we used it for many years but we don't get enough light in this house. We still have it in the basement.

Q Is it generally the smaller kids who help decorate?

A Everybody, as long as it is not me. Right, and I like to buy these fruits and corn that we hang from it. I just think it gives it a more harvesty kind of flavour, to have all these corns. The first year I bought them, the kids went " its not Halloween" and its been incorporated. Of course, they always argue who made it and who didn't make it over the years.

Q Do the decorations reflect a family tradition?

A I think it reflects... I think in all the succahs the kids do the decorations -- their handiwork and things that they make specifically for Succas. We used to do it, Sidney use to do it. We have things for many years. As long as they last, as durable as they are, that is how long we keep them. And then of course the kids decide that they want to use this one this year, the next year something else. It can vary slightly the decoration.

Q Is there anything particularly Canadian about this succah?

A The heater. You don't have them in Florida and in Israel. We have two heaters. One is on a timer, the other I don't know. The succah couldn't handle the timer. This way we try to set it for when we are eating in the succah. There are some years where we don't need it, but we never know about that beforehand. We never needed it in New York. It just makes it a little more comfortable -- alot more comfortable. They are, you know, the kind of heaters you pick up at Canadian Tire or Club price. Nothing fancy although I have a friend who has one of these industrial heaters that you used to do a warehouse, or a power failure. Her husband wired it up to her house. He says he is not freezing any more.

Q Could you describe in detail the way the succah was used for the first two days of the holiday.

A We eat all our meals together there. We don't go to work or travel. At night we eat in the succah. In the morning after services we have lunch there. In the afternoon if the kids or my husband are going to have anything, if any of us are going to have anything that we have to wash or say grace for, or if we want to have cake, then we will go into the succah there. If we have company and the weather is good, we sit in the succah. It keeps the house clean. We use it for meals. Some years, depending on the weather and the friend situation, my nine year old son will sleep in the succah one night or two. It depends, sometimes Eric's succah, his cousin's succah. It varies. During the week during the rest of Succas we also, the men eat all their meals in the succah. I don't eat all my meals in the succah with my girls. It depends partly on the weather and partly on if I am there to remind them. At night we eat supper in the succah altogether, even if my husbands not home at that time, because I don't want Naphtali to eat by himself and its much nicer in there. So everyone takes in their plate, prepares their plate in the kitchen and then we take it out and then we go back in. Salt, ketchup, juice and the phone. So its nice. We turn on the heat and sometimes we have to sit in ski jackets, but not too often.

Q What would make you go in?

A A lot of rain or cold. The first two nights it is a problem if it is raining. Oh, snow would make you go in because you can't eat in the succah in the snow. It makes it not kosher with snow on the roof. It happened to my brother in law when he was a prisoner of war. As prisoners of war they made their own succah and on one of the days it snowed. They did not have heating either under those conditions. So if there is really hurricane weather and high weather that you really can't eat in the succah. The first two night you are required to wait a lot longer time before you go in to eat. But if you know it is hurricane season very often during Succas time. Sometimes weather is very bad and it keeps raining for hours and hours, then we wait for awhile. How long the while is varies from family to family. Growing up in New York we got hit by Hurricanes. I can remember one Succas we just waited and waited the first night. We were eating at friends who had a succah because we didn't at that time We waited for hours and hours for the rain to stop so we could at least make kiddish at least in the succah and wash and have some bread. We usually don't wait. We haven't had such bad weather that we couldn't eat in the Succah with the roof up or at least part of it. And that we have a roof that comes down, we can always make kiddish in the succah and wash and make hamotzi then put it down and then open it for bentshing.

Q Compare the children's activity compared to the adults? Is it a big deal for them to sleep out there?

A No. Very funny. My girls never wanted to sleep in the succah. It is a male activity. They have usually done it for one night. Some years they have done it for two nights. It depends on how he gets his act together. They move out foam mattresses and sleeping bags and sometimes during Chol Ha Moed there are alarm clocks. They camp out. They make sure we leave the back door open so they can go to the bathroom or if they get cold they make themselves a tea during the night.

Q Do they keep the roof down?

A This year they did. I guess it is very weather dependant.

Q Comment on men's use of the succah vs women's use of the succah.

A Well, I don't know if it is a law. A custom as opposed to a commandment. There are people with different interpretations. The men are definitely required to eat there. Women are not obligated in certain commandments where they have a set time because of the conflicts with other activities that they have with house and children. However, if there is not conflict, they, we still tend to do that. So, if there is not enough room, there are families where the women will eat in the house, or just adjoining the succah, or in the dining room. But if there is room, we generally sit in the succah. We can fit a lot of people in the succah. Jael had a birthday on Succas, so in past years we have always had a family birthday party on Succos on one of the days of Chol Ha Moed. So her grandparents would come, my sister and brother in law and their kids and married kids and who ever had guests from out of town. So we could be twenty-five or thirty people in there. We can fit everybody in the succah but it is very crowded with little kids who want to run around. So what generally happens in this situation for us is that we brought the cake in the kitchen or the dining room and we cut a piece of cake and the men go outside and they have their party there and we set the table there and we set the table in the dining room and we get segregated along the lines of sex, but that is the way it works out.

Q For the children, does this mean that the girls don't really try to sleep in the succah?

A On Succos you are supposed to dwell in a succah like you would in the house. The girls, I can't think of any of them who have ever wanted to. I can think of a lot of male things over the years that they have wanted to do, but this has not been one of them...I can't think of any of my girls or any of their friends who have wanted to. If they did, it would be ok with me.

Q How has your succah changed over the years?

A I grew up in New York, in apartment buildings. So the first several years of my life, we didn't have a succah, so we used to go to family friends and we were there for Succos for the meal and I would imagine that my father ate there during the week. Our congregation also had two very large succahs which they build and they maintain every year. Two maybe three at one point. It was only apartment building there, it was an immigrant area and everybody was in the same boat. One succah was catered for the first two days of Succos and we could arrange to go there if we wanted to. The other succah, you bring your own food. I think my father must have gone there in the morning after shul. He worked in a Jewish district, so there were Succos that were built in downtown Manhattan and at night he probably went back to the community succah to eat. Then we moved to a different apartment building when I was six years old. We still ate at the friends. However, as more Jewish people moved into the building, they built a succah at ground level. We lived on the fifth floor. That meant that we would go there after shul. My mother would organize everything. Pack it and we would take it down with dishes and the cutlery. After awhile we got smart and used paper and plastic -- that wasn't very common in the fifties. And we would take it down, so of course, you wouldn't invite anybody because there was so much to take down. And we would eat second shift, so the men who would eat by themselves without their families, they would get out of their way because there were too many people to eat altogether in the succah and we always ate together. We didn't have to rush and feel that anyone was breathing down our neck. And that is the way we did it. That was a lot of flights of stairs on the first two days when you can't use the elevator. During the week it became easier. As soon as we got married and had our own succah on the balcony, my parents always came here for Succos. Ah, but we also use to go to my aunt and uncles in Toronto for Succos. They had

their own. Before we were married....
So we did go very often away for Succos.

Q Now you stay here most of the time?

A Yes, all the time. Well, since my mother died I didn't go back to New York for Succos, my father would come here. Now he is not well...We somehow always end up here. I invite them. Last year, my kids came with their baby and my nephew came from New York with three kids so we were quite full. And then my kids bring home friends from university for Succos. So we had seventeen people and only sixteen beds, so when Naphtali wanted to sleep in the succah, I was just fine.

Q How important is it to have guests or community?

A We always have guests. How important? We consider it always important to have guests. Succos I find, as compared to other Jewish holidays is less well known. People know about Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Passover, but Succos is not so well know. I have always had trouble with the university with that. My daughter was born on Chol Ha Moed and when I said I couldn't go home on those last two days, they had never heard of it...A lot of my kids generally bring home friends from university and for some it is the first time they have seen a succah. Some sleep here, some just come for a meal or two. It is also a good holiday for visiting, especially in the Canadian context. There is no snow yet and it is a nice time of the year to travel. We always have guests. I wouldn't say it is more or less important than any other holiday. It is very easy for me because when we eat in the succah, I use paper and plastic so we don't have extra dishes to wash, which my kids really love about it. We can have as many guests as we like and there is not extra work to do.

Q Are there any traditional foods associated with Succos?

A No, I make more soups. I make a soup everyday for lunch because it keeps you warm. Very often I will have a warm desert as opposed to something cold. I would never serve ice-cream in the succah. I avoid sweet foods at lunchtime because of the bees. The only traditional food I can think of for Succos is on Hoshanah Rabbah they usually make stuffed cabbage and kreplach a kind of dumpling in soup.

Q Are these traditional to your family?

A No. Traditional Jewish food. I am not sure what the reason is. Not that you can't have kreplach or cabbage the rest of the year, but those foods are specific to the last days of Succos.

Q You mentioned the bees.

A Lunchtime. Nighttimes are not a problem because they are not nocturnal. Some days seem worse than others and they just fly in and zoom around. There is always some kids or adult that get hysterical about it and we try and trap them under a glass and let them go afterward or take them out. But it is much smarter to keep them trapped because they just come back in. Until Hoshana Rabbah we have honey on the table for a sweet new year which even attracts more of them. So we generally at lunchtime dip the bread in honey and then we try to get it off the table as fast as possible.

Q Is that something that is particularly Canadian?

A Its climate, I think don't recall New York. We probably didn't have bees. I don't know what their

cycle is in Israel. We were actually thinking one year, but I think there was a problem with putting a screen in between the Schach, on the support and see if we could work it like that, if we could put a screen like you have on a window. But we never got past the imagining stage, talking about it.

Q What role do the succah's play in the community?

A Well, some of the shuls have had succahs over the years -- the Young Israel still has a very large succah. This year the Rabbi and his wife from our shul invited everybody for kiddish in their succah. So that was nice, everybody went after shul services and we went there for cake, coffee and soft drinks. If there is a bris (circumcision), the bris takes place indoors, but the meal afterwards is held in the succah. An engagement party which we were invited to was held on Succos and they had it in the Young Israel with its very large succah. Otherwise people don't schedule things on Chol Ha Moed because it is just not feasible to feed all your guests in a succah, even just the men.

Q Have you every had any problems with neighbours or the city about succah building?

A We haven't. You hear cases from time to time. We once had a succah come down on us because of the wind, That was pretty scary in the middle of the meal. It was very windy. It is worrisome. In fact, this year, we put an extra beam on the outside to reduce the sway. Neighbours, you hear of people. I mean, we have had a few people from Outremont itself in local politics who have come to see our Succah who have never been on the inside of one, or haven't seen too much of the outside. Just to show them what it was. Non-Jewish people and Jewish people too. But you hear of eggs being thrown... There are always random acts of vandalism.

Q I wondered whether their might have been problems with the ones built on balconies.

A No. They like to make trouble in terms of "oh, its got to be taken down, it disturbs the architectural integrity of the area..." What can I tell you? I guess Christmas decorations don't.

Q What is the purpose of the succah?

A The religious? The meaning is that it is one of the commandments that we were given. Because it is reminiscent of the Jews lived when they went out of Egypt in the desert. This is what they lived in -- I mean we don't have pictures -- and that is the reason. It is also done in the fall time of the year when most people would be living inside and it is not like it is summertime or springtime when people are naturally inclined to go outside, but we do because that is the time of the year when we were commanded to do it.

Q Is there anything else that you would like to add?

A When we got engaged, we came up here for the first time officially with my parents Succos time. So we had an engagement party that was half in the Succah half in my in-laws house. And I met alot of Sidney's friends. The old people at the time... we left them in the house and we all sat around in the Succah and had a great time. It was fun. My in-laws' succah is beautiful. She has the inside panels wallpapered. She has pictures that are framed and that she hangs up every year. She has always had it. I am hear twenty-seven year and it has always been like that. This is the first year they didn't put their succah up because they are not well?

Q Have you seen any architect built succah?

A No. We have seen solarium succahs or succahs that or dining areas that are designed to incorporate a succah at the appropriate time of the year where they have a sunroof or a retractable roof. Some people have a motorized things. There must be a hand way to do it. Alot of people have leakage problems, though.

Q I read that it is a mitzvah to build you own succah. How does that fall out?

A Putting on the roof is considered sufficient, which is why we do the slats ourselves. If someone who is not using the succah does it, it is not considered sufficient. You have to do at least part of it, a bit of the roofing yourself. I think that it is the roof as opposed to the walls that is important in the building process to make it kosher.

Q What about windows. Would you have to check with a Rabbi?

A No, I don't think so. My in-laws have them, so I just assumed it was ok.

Q Is there a problem with a non-Jew building a succah?

A No, as long as you do the roof. Neither of my handymen are Jewish.

Q But they couldn't touch the roof?

A No, they can touch the roof, its not considered a fault, it doesn't take away from the succah. Its just that you are required to do part of the roof yourself. The schach. Someone in the family who is obligated to keep the mitzvah of Succah. Somebody who is obligated is required to do it?

Q Do you think that the succah is a sacred space?

A No. Maybe because we do so many things there -- we have birthday parties there. I don't know if it is sacred -- I don't consider it sacred. Maybe "special" or "set aside" perhaps unique. Sacred...I think that is a Christian concept. Because if you look at the whole concept of kedusha, or "holiness" that also means that it is separate or special.

Interview #4, Montreal, December 1996.

Q What is a succah? What is its purpose and meaning for you?

A To my mind, the succah is built as a mitzvah for the holiday of succot.

Q What does it symbolize?

A It symbolizes the Israelites sojourn in the desert and the temporariness and ephemeral condition of our lives. And it is a mitzvah that envelopes our whole body for eight days. It is basically what we put into it that counts and how we perform the mitzvah to its utmost degree and in all its aspects(Mrs Finegold) It also represents the fragility of our lives. It takes us out of the comfort of our homes into a temporary dwelling which is very fragile, and if you look at your lives, there is always something...you can be sitting at home comfortably and there is always something that is going to strike, some situation that is not always sturdy as the home.

Q So it is a reminder of Jewish history, but it is also a symbol of contemporary fragility?

A Yes. No, but it is also when the Israelites were walking in the desert. They had a certain comfort, a certain rules established for what they were doing. But when they built a succah, they remembered that their life wasn't as comfortable as they thought it was. (Mr Finegold) Listen, Succot is the paradigm of all Thanksgiving festivals for the western world. When the pilgrims came to these shores, they used it as a model for their Thanksgiving as well. And when we gives thanks after an abundant harvest, etc, we also have to think about all of these benefits and that the goodness that comes to us at that time of the year is really through the good lord, Hashem. So we not only have to be thankful, but we have to put ourselves in a less favourable position and realize that all this is only passing. It doesn't matter what kind of castles we build ourselves, the succah is the place where we came from -- the conditions that we used to live in, and don't forget it.

Q Where did you learn about succah construction?

A Basically I learned it in elementary school, in Talmud Torah. We always had a succah at school. We had succahs in every synagogue we prayed in as a child, but we never had one in my parents house, but we still had a succah in these two communal settings.

Q And that was here in Montreal?

A Yes. (Mrs Finegold) As far as I can remember when I was a child, I grew up with a succah in the house, every year. So I saw my father, my uncles, brothers, my cousins build a succah. When we got married, we built our succah. We had the conditions, the space and whatever the requirements for building a succah and we built our own succah.

Q So your learned partly by watching.

A By watching. But the thing is, in the Mishna Succah, there are very specific about what materials to use, what not to use, the measurements, the size, the location where you can have a succah. You have all the answers. A person who doesn't have any knowledge about succah reads or studies in depth the Mishna, it gives you all the answers.

Q Did either of you study the Mishna?

A My son did.

Q So you studied that part of the Mishna?

A (son)Yea.

Q Is that standard for Montreal?

A Well, it is standard to learn Talmud. It depends. In some years you would end up doing that. I happened to be in the one that did. My year fell in that slot.

Q You mentioned from watching you learned how to build your succah?

A (Mr Finegold) No -- learned from watching it, witnessing it being built year after year in elementary school. And also other people are doing it -- you learn from other people. It gives you ideas. You experiment different methods, you experiment different materials, whether wood, corrugated plastic or tarpaulin. Rabbinic authorities. Different people use different materials and you experiment every year and you figures out which one it the best.

Q How would you know it was kosher? If you had a question, how are you sure.

A Mrs Finegold. You know from the past. If you have studied the Mishna succah, you know that. CYLOR -- consult your local orthodox Rabbi. (Mr. Finegold) Or if you have any question, you consult your rabbi. Same as any other mitzvah.

Q Have you ever consulted a rabbi?

A Yes. If you make a change to it, as about the roof, what you use for the roof. If for instance, it rains the first or second night, could you eat there or can't you eat there. So we have had to ask a rabbi over the years.

Q Do you ever consult the Shulchan Aruch?

A Basically, you'll learn the generalities from the Mishna and you will consult the codes -- the Shulchan Aruch, the Mishneh Torah, the condensed or Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. These are basically codes that you can consult for the practicalities of it. Either that, or you consult a Rabbi. But once you have built them year after year, you know to avoid whatever pitfalls are mentioned there.

Basically, the succah and the schach, which is the roof, the materials used to build the roof, are from the same root in Hebrew. So that really, the definition of the succah is what you use for the roof. The walls, whether you have four walls, or three or three and a half -- of course the rules are put out in the Shulchan Aruch -- but what makes a succah a succah is the roofing materials.

Q How long have you lived in this location?

A Since 1979.

Q Have you had the succah that I photographed here for that length of time?

A Exactly. And I had one for five years previous to that on Trans-Island Avenue, we had a little duplex and a backyard there. So I was to build the first succah. But the construction was similar in both cases. I tried to avoid using heavy plywood or wood panels that have to be lifted by more than one person. I tried to keep construction to my son and myself as he was growing up. That is why I used a frame of angled steel that we use for shelving units -- a thing called Hopkins shelving. I use the up-right for them. They had holes every two inches. It's really like a meccano set. We use nuts and bolt to build a cube and from that cube I attach corrugated sheets two feet by seven or eight feet for the walls, and a panel of plastic for the door to the back yard. We also have the door from the kitchen leading into it, which gives us two doors -- one inside and outside of the succah. And basically I have used that construction for the last twenty-two year, since I'm married. When the corrugated panels started getting a bit frayed at the edges, I used these new plastic tarpaulins that you pick up at Canadian tire or the hardware stores. They come in various sizes. There are grommets all around the perimeter of it, so you just attach it to the holes in the frame to get the same effect.

Q Did you choose this house based on having a space for a succah?

A That is one of the criteria. When we were on Trans-Island, we were renting. The balcony, of course, was a tiny little affair, maybe three feet by four feet square, just enough to get steps down to the back yard....

[Tape stopped]

A The most unimportant part of the succah are the walls. Because basically, the mitzvah is sitting under a kosher schach. That is the definition of succah. That is the temporariness, the ephemeral part. Here about the story of the three little piggies with the straw house that blows away? That is what the mitzvah is all about. For instance, wealthy people, like the Reichmans, would have a room in their house with a sky-light that you could just clear out the glass that the skylight is made out of, and leave a complete open area where you can put schach on top. And you have a succah. Outside of the minimum sizes of the length and height of walls and how many walls you have, it is the schach that really makes the succah what it is.

Q Why do you think that is?

A That is the definition. With all mitzvahs, that is how the sages, over the generations come to define it. This is the essence of the mitzvah. The Halacha just developed over the centuries by different groups of sages who wrote glosses on the original Mishnah involved. This is what you can do and that is it -- these are the parameters of it and that is all there is to it.

Q Do you think that is it the sky because it symbolizes something above?

A It could be anything. We don't think of these things in western terms. We have to think of it in Halachic terms, in its own world. Every mitzvah works in that similar fashion. You make your own reasons, you rationalize on the benefits you derive, but the mitzvah itself is way above what you think about it in human terms and the value that you attach to it. For example, the question that you asked about the reason for succot. This would be called Tamei ha Mitzvot -- the reasons, the rational in human terms. But you don't do the mitzvah for that. You do it because you are commanded to do it at this time, at this place. Like all the other 613 mitzvot. IT is just one of them. It is a special one when that time of the year comes around, but the succah has no value at any other time of the year.

Q You mentioned there wasn't a succah during your childhood. Tell me about Montreal in the years you were growing up?-

A Basically, I grew up in a very tightly knit area from a housing point of view. I lived in an apartment for the first twenty-five years of my life. In my parents' apartment for the first quarter of a century, corner of Parc and Laurier. We had a small, tiny balcony -- nobody even thought of building a succah. Some of the hasidic immigrants after the war put up a little tiny succah on their balcony. We never thought about that 'cause we used the succah at the synagogues that we prayed at, or the ones that we had at school.

Q So the schools all built them?

A We spent a portion of each day -- maybe half an hour each day during Chol Ha Moed, in the succah. And the rest, for the Chol--, we'd go to the synagogue for kiddish, or whatever. So it never occurred to me personally to build my own succah, or my father to build his own succah. We were just, it wasn't in the cultural milieu.

Q And that was common to everyone living in that neighbourhood?

A Who were not considered hasidic or ultra-orthodox -- who were plain, ordinary folks.

Q Was it similar for Jews in Westmount?

A Depending on the degree of orthodoxy in practice. If they lived in areas like this, or in more sumptuous and if they were orthodox, which was very unusual for them to be orthodox and to live in this kind of area. We tend toward more lesser practices amongst the mitzvot, there might be the odd succah up. It wasn't done, so, as a rule. I can think of synagogues and Jewish schools that put them up.

Q So what do you think would be the primary factors leading to the recent proliferation of succahs?

A I think that it has a lot to do with the Baal Tshuvah movement today, over the last quarter century and again, with the ease that you could put up a succah. There are a lot of commercially built, pre-fabricated succot that are available from the states and some people here will put them up. And most people in the orthodox world today don't live in apartments, condos or apartments. I think that one of the reasons that they choose not to have that kind of lifestyle is because of the Jewish holidays and succot and whatnot. If you live in a high-rise, you have problems with elevators during Shabbat and Yomtov and that is another factor.

Q What about the idea that different religions are more accepted in society in general?

A Personally, in our family, with my wife and my son, I never really considered that a factor in my religious practices. It never really meant that much to me whether I would be accepted or not. We do our own thing and that is it. It is very straightforward. For instance, I go outside and my son goes outside with our kippah on. To ball-games, hockey games, CEGEP, whatever. I wear my head covered with my head covered with a hat of some kind. Summertime I go out to the country in a baseball cap... So it hasn't affected me personally...I don't think we consciously do any of our mitzvot in public with that in mind.

Q Where did you get the materials for your succah?

A I took my ideas from those pre-fabricated succahs that came on the market. That goes back about a quarter of a century when the American scene filters through over here. They were building succahs, or selling them, on a pre-fab basis, eight by eight feet or ten by ten, using aluminum poles with various connectors, aluminium connectors which you bolted together. Aluminum was a very expensive material and also using tarpaulins of various types and corrugated plastic. And for schach they were using bamboo which was very strong and reusable for generations. So I got the idea -- we were using this shelving, this Hopkins shelving in the library on a temporary basis until we got the proper library shelving. I had a meccano set like a lot of other kids had meccano sets and said that I could put together these uprights with half-inch bolts and nuts. This is when I was on Trans-Island -- I would just build a cube. You would have four top pieces, four at the bottom of the base and four uprights. Maybe a fifth one some place to build the door. And this is what I did. When you bought the shelving you got braces, little triangular pieces that had holes in each corner to brace them in each corner so the stuff doesn't sway. Of course, when you put the corrugated plastic on there, at maybe three or four dollars a unit and you bolt that in as well -- I drilled holes and the bolts fit in. IN a couple of hours, you have your succah together. You use two -by fours or one by threes, as cross beams atop to put your schach on. You have a little ledge because of the angle irons, to put those cross-beams on. And what I remembered from my Talmud Torah days, what they use for schach... the definition of schach is anything that grows. You could use palm leaves, you could use

branches, you could use corn plants, after you've harvested your corn and you have all these plants. If you dry them out, you could pile them on. You could use hay if you wanted to, though it is not very comfortable. So, I remembered that they used these wooden slats that they bought at a lumber yard that they used as lath behind a plaster walls up until the 1940s and 50s. They looked like yardsticks. They were one yard by one inch wide by maybe an eighth or a quarter inch thick. I went to the lumber yard, and I bought several bundles of those and I have used them ever since. Of course, you lose some by attrition every year. I keep on replacing them. You don't find them that often -- you have to go to a specialty shop. But I still use the same material. I lay it on one next to the other with you have to have space so that you can see that it is not completely covered, so that the weather can reach in and you can see the stars at night theoretically. So you space these accordingly. And just for special effect, I would go to a neighbour who would harvest his cedar branches that he didn't need any more in the fall and give me a dozen or two dozen of those and I would sprinkle those on top of that to give a bit more of a festive effect although that wasn't really necessary. And that was the schach from my succah and I have used it ever since. Other people use temporary schach. There are several entrepreneurs in the orthodox community who have wood lots in the Laurentians. They bring in truck loads of usually cedar or other evergreens, but the cedar is one because you don't get needles falling down. And they sell them by the bundles either to institutions like synagogues and schools or to individuals. You know, "how many bundles do you need?" And they build up their own phone list and their own customers lists and they go a week or two before succot and everybody places orders and they deliver them at a price. I try to be as economical as possible by having a reusable schach.

Q Did you say that you did take bamboo?

A No, the bamboo is extremely expensive. It takes up alot of space in the garage and they are anywhere to six, seven or eight feet long. MY schach is only about three feet or a metre long and is easier to handle so I can put it up with my son in a number of hours. And I can take it down afterwards when the weather is much more clement.

Q Who builds the succah?

A I start very early for the walls. Because you are not actually building the succah until you put the schach up. Traditionally, you should put the schach up or start on the night ending Yom Kippur. Motzei Yom Kippur you should toss a few branches up and that starts the building of your succah. And you have that interval between the end of Yom Kippur and the day before Succot to put up your schach.

Q How much earlier do you start with the walls.

A Depending on when Rosh Hashana comes out, I might start even a week or two before Rosh ha Shanah when the weather is still nice. I will just get my daughter and son and daughter together and take it out of the garage and he will put up some at his convenience and I'll put up the rest at my convenience and I would say that in a matter of three or four hours all the walls and the door and everything is up and that's it. You have to understand that when I moved here I took the construction and I put a bit of a variant into it. I found an old wooden balcony off of my kitchen. It must have been six or eight feet or so. I called in a welder I found through the classifieds, a European fellow and he built me a balcony of eight feet by twelve feet. Why those measurements? He used three

sheets that was called steel check plate used for decks on boats that has those little ovals on it so you don't slip and slide. He built the balcony with that as the floor. He used the railings that I had from the previous balcony added to it added steel steps, put steel beams in on cement footings about two or three feet as a foundation in my back yard. And I asked him after the balcony was complete to take four of those angle irons that I had, while he still had his welding equipment available, would he weld those four uprights in the four corners. So those are permanent parts of my balcony. So when I built the succah, I didn't have to do it from scratch each time. All I had to do was add four horizontal pieces to the four uprights to support the beams, my wooden beams and the schach. Several years ago, I said well, why take down that part? Why not leave it up the whole year? Its only an armature, doesn't show up. Sometimes I put up a few of the plastic sheets just to ward of the sun in the summertime where the sun is coming through so you get a shady area on the balcony. Although it is translucent, but you don't have direct sunlight coming in. So I left that armature on all year round. All I have to do each year now is put up the plastic tarpaulins that I use, and the door and the schach and the wooden beams.

Q You chose the tarpaulin because it was lighter?

A Much lighter and much easier to put up and take down. And again the corrugated was becoming much more expensive. Instead of 3 or 4 dollars a unit, they are about ten or fifteen dollars a unit. I figured it would only last three or four years. If you get a tarpaulin for three or four dollars it covers the whole wall. And so far it has lasted now five or six years.

Q Is this succah in a Montreal tradition or a North American traditions?

A It is my own personal thing. I have a brother who works in a wholesale hardware firm, so you grow up learning about nuts and bolts and saws and wood and the properties of building materials and every guy has to be a handyman in one way or another, especially if you own your own house. You do minor electrical work and minor plumbing work so you see the new materials and you incorporate them into your succah.

Q Most succahs I have seen in Montreal are wood.

A Basically, in the orthodox community, the traditional orthodox community, what you call frum-by-birth or those who have been orthodox for several generations unless they are in the building trades, they are not as handy as the rest of us ordinary folks who are both orthodox and still live in the real world as well. And many of these people can afford to have their succahs put up by third parties and by handymen, by carpenters who drop everything and just put up succahs for two weeks around Rosh Hashana time. There are individuals, lets say, in the hasidic community who are in the construction business, lets say small contractors who just this time of the year will build succahs for people who don't want to be bothered to build their own. I happen to have that personal pride that I think I am instilling in my son, that we do things ourselves. My neighbours have done more or less the same thing.

Q What about the idea in the Shulchan Aruch that one is obliged to build our own succah?

A Basically, as long as somebody puts up the walls, they will throw on the schach themselves and they have technically built their succah. Everything revolves around the schach. For instance you can't build your succah under a tree. You have sky between the schach and infinity. Nothing should

be covering it. There is a certain height. You have to build as close to the ground as you can...

My balcony is only three or four feet off of the ground, so I am well within the parameters. I have no overhanging balconies. You can't have a succah and have a balcony overhang it. Only a succah that is free and clear is kosher.

Q What about the decoration.

A The only decorating that I do is I string up a couple of strings of what we call boxing day lights, because we buy them on boxing day, which makes it really festive. We also buy alot of boxing day decorations. That is usually done by my wife and the kids. If she goes to a bazaar, she is always on the lookout for cheap textiles, you notice in the photograph, there was some upholstery material that was seconds and she paid a few dollars for five or six yards of the stuff to give it a kind of indoorsy kind of look. This is also an oriental phenomenon, that you shouldn't have the bare walls -- its just like your home. So we have this upholstery material that we hang around the walls of the succah. The kids make paper chains and I pick up stuff from the library. I picked up a whole series of little banners from El-Al's twenty-fifth anniversary. We take old Jewish calenders with beautiful illustrations and laminate or plasticize them, and hang that up as art around the succah walls as well. Every year we add a touch to it. The kids to that part of it. Together with the light strings, that is our own touch to it. Some hasidim do not put one bit of decoration at all. It is not their custom. I think the Sephardim more than the Ashkenazim. They are allowed to decorate their lulav with colourful plants. Which Ashkenazim do not do at all. The women will weave all kinds of designs on the lulav. This is not done in Ashkenazi circles at all. All that is custom. As long as you have the schach up correctly. The succah is fine. Providing that you have the dimensions, the length and the breadth of the succah are within the right parameters Halachically, which you can look up in the Mishna that I showed you and the Shulchan Aruch converts it to western measurements as well

Q What is your wife's idea to bring in that type of decoration?

A All hers. I leave that.. Once the succah is up, it is in her hands. I might help them -- in the early years the kids were younger it was just my wife and myself putting it up. So we would get up on a ladder and do it all ourselves. But as the kids got older, they were the ones who were responsible.

Q Were the succahs you had at school during your childhood decorated as well?

A Yea, the kids would make their own decorations -- basically paper chains and succah scenes and pictures of the sages and whatnot. Different classes put up construction paper stuff.

Q Did the kids build the succah?

A No, it was put up by the maintenance staff who put up the walls and the clergy and the congregants would put up the schach.

Q How did the first two nights of succot unfolded?

A We always have guests. In the succah there is at least a dozen, sometimes fourteen, sometimes fifteen people in our succah, both male and female, although the obligation is basically on the males. But we always have guests from my family and my wife's family. When her brothers were single so we had my mother-in-law, my brothers-in-law. Once they established their own households, of course they would build their own succahs, my mother in law would go from succah to succah each

year. I have some of my cousins, we have friends of ours from the congregations, usually singles. For every meal there is some kind of guest. Not only for the first two nights, but every... maybe not for breakfast or lunch Chol ha Moed. But usually for supper in the succah would be at least half a dozen people. This year, was my cousin and one of her grand-daughters became engaged, so she and her fiance were our guests. There is never a lack of guests.

Q Is it very important to have guests in the succah?

A Since I've been married, there has always been guests, both sleep-over and guests at our table at Shabbat. Either relatives or friends, or people visiting one way or another. And succot is just in the succah -- in our other dining you might say. So that is a matter of rote. That is the usually thing in most orthodox homes.

Q Does anyone ever sleep in the succah?

A No. My son might take a snooze, just to say he slept in the succah. But basically no.

Q What about prayers? Does anyone ever pray in the succah.

A Sometimes we will take the lulav to the succah to do the lulav and the succah at the same time. It is not absolutely necessary, but its a nice thing to do. But we might say, lets say the afternoon prayers in the succah, if you are not davening in the synagogue with a minyan. But basically it is preferably to daven in the minyan. My wife would go do her morning prayers in the succah, but the mitzvah is incumbent upon males, like most of the time bound mitzvot. Women, of course, do go into the succah, but it is on a voluntary basis. When the weather is very inclement and its the first night when your are obliged to, unless it is really, really bad outside from a rain or wind or whatever point of view, you are supposed to wait at least the amount of time which is specified in the Shulchan Aruch to start and if its really really bad, nobody goes to the succah. If there is just a moderate amount of rain or a slight drizzle, the men would go in and make kiddish and stay in the required amount of time and then come in for the rest of the meal, except for the first night where we really try to stay in there as long as we can. The hasidim -- whether rain, snow, sleet or hail, it won't bother them. But they have a different custom and a different view of things... The other nights and days when you're eating things that are baked or an entire meal that you have to bench for, you eat in the succah. IF its really slightly inclement or if its really bad, you have it inside and that is it. All mitzvot, similar to succot and Passover, the first night or the first instance where you can use the facilities...

Q How was it used in the schools?

A The whole class would come in -- boys and girls. The school that I went to was a mixed class. It was a Talmud torah, boys and girls together. It was a Zionist oriented school.

Q What school was it?

A United Talmud Torahs on St-Joseph Blvd. The schools today, even the Beth Jacob school... I don't know if the girls actually go into the succah. I will have to ask my daughters that. I don't know if that school even has a succah. It is not really necessary except for the little congregation that prays there because all those families have succahs at home in the Outremont community. The reason why you had a succah at school was because the administration knew that maybe one or two families might

have their own succah and outside of that the only opportunity for them to see a succah would be at school. It was built in the courtyard.

Q The schools were actually open on Chol ha Moed?

A Yes. Even today, the orthodox community both on Chol ha Moed Pesach and Succos and for the majority of Hanukkah as well. For instance my kids will have school during the so called Christmas vacation period. They might not have secular studies but they have the Jewish studies going on and they have an alternate program in the afternoons. But they would get the time off for Chol ha Moed. The less stringent schools would follow the secular calendar more. So you have school on Chol ha Moed Pesach and succot, and just have the first two and the last two days off.

Q And when you went to school?

A We also went to school on Chol ha Moed.

Q Is the succah a sacred space or a holy space?

A If you consider kedushah or sacredness as being apart from the mundane, it is a sacred space. It is a devoted space. In Judaism, something that is devoted to spiritual ends, let's say like the temple in Jerusalem, or let us say you wanted to give a gift to the temple, it becomes "hekdish", sacred, put aside for God or the priestly class, the Levites. A succah fits into that. For example, I am not allowed to use any of the materials that I use for my succah for mundane purposes. Even the walls and whatnot. They are set aside only for use as a succah because I have used them for that mitzvah. For instance a lulav is in the same category. Even if you have to destroy it, this should be done in a very dignified way. For instance we use the lulav when we burn our homes. So you are burning the lulav together -- you are doing it in connection with another mitzvah and another holiday. So if that is what you mean my sacred, this is sacred. But in Judaism generally, there is no difference between sacred and profane. The profane is what you don't do. There is sacredness, there is kedushah from the moment you get up in the morning till the moment you go to sleep at night, 365 days of the year. Whatever space you happen to be in, you try to make that sacred. If it is your own home, your table is an altar, a miniature altar just like in Jerusalem. So there is not the dichotomy that you find in western culture where you say that the spiritual is for the Lord and the temporal is for Caesar. No, in the political sphere, this is a particular difficulty in Israel today. Secular Jews don't realize that to a religious Jew, quote unquote Orthodox who considers himself spiritual or practising, whatever you want to call it, there is no dichotomy. Whatever you do should be sacred. There should be nothing mundane in your life. This is just another form of it. We make time sacred. We make space sacred. Whether it is in the synagogue, whether it is in the home, whether it is in the succah -- as you are commanded.

Q Then, is there any difference between the space of the succah and the space of the home?

A For that week there is a big difference because you want to do things in the succah to fulfil that mitzvah as much as possible.

Q So there is an extra layer?

A Exactly. When you are hungry you don't just sit down to the table to put some food on it. You say well, I have to prepare my breakfast in the succah. I have to go there myself and be there apart from

my wife, because she doesn't have to go into the succah. I go with my son or I go alone, or he goes himself. And you do your whole activities as if " I am apart". Even reading my newspaper in the succah is doing something sacred. It is apart. I am being made aware that this week is succot. The mitzvah of succot is enveloping me whether I want it or not. Of course, it is being done to encourage your being closer to your creator. And this is why the whole cycle of the Jewish holidays, the whole calender is conducive to this. So when succah comes, we just think " This is the week of succot. We are going to do things a little bit differently. We are going to do things that keep us aware of what we are and who we are and what our purpose in life is." And that is the whole purpose of

Q Related question. This is a space that you live in during the holiday. Why is there not mezuzah?

A The mitzvah mezuzah is given to us in a permanent dwelling. The same reason when I go to a hotel room, I don't have to take a mezuzah with me to a hotel room. It kicks in after one month in a place, which means you are going to be permanently ensconced in that are. Succot by definition is only eight days, so there is not requirement. If I go on vacation, say, to a hotel and I am there for a whole winter, well, I have thirty days to put up a mezuzah. Because after thirty days it means you are permanently dwelling and living in that space and that space requires mezuzahs on the appropriate doors.

Q So it is a symbol of permanence?

A Well, it is a dwelling. The mitzvah says you have to put up mezuzahs on your dwelling. A hotel room is not a dwelling. A succah is not a permanent dwelling. By definition, it is not permanent so a mezuzah is not required.

Q Are there any stories or anecdotes about succot that you would like to add?

A Basically, since we have been married, we have lived in two houses that we tried to make homes out of and both of them, one of the considerations was how would a succah fit into this place before we get into it. And most orthodox families work in that fashion. We try to live near a school or transportation to a school or a car-pool for our kids. We live near a synagogues. We have several synagogues in our area. I have three within five minutes of our front door. Our rabbi lives fifteen minutes away, but all these are alternatives when the weather gets rough. And these are the things you think of when people think it over. Transportation, how central you are. And the succah is one of the things you think about.

Q Would you not have taken the place if..

A If there was not opportunity for a succah? Probably not. This is the way I like to think of it. Usually in this neighbourhood, or this series of neighbourhoods, this shouldn't be a problem. The only problem is that you like to have your succah not too far away from your kitchen. The succah should be part of the area that you are allowed to carry to and from your home. If you have a backyard that is not fenced off, you have to make permissions for fencing off Halachically that yard to include it as part of the succah. A friend of mine bought a home on pine Avenue about the same time as we moved here and he had a common driveway parallel to the homes on his street where part of the driveway is on two property, but it turned off in both directions. It is almost like a kind of walkway. And his backyard was on the other side of that driveway. So his whole backyard became unusable on Shabbat because it wasn't enclosed. It was a common driveway where everybody could

drive up and down that little back lane between your home and your back yard. He couldn't build a succah there. He had to extend an already large balcony which had an overhang because he was on the ground floor and it was a duplex, and there was a balcony overhanging his balcony. He went through terrible expenses. Several thousands of dollars to convert that balcony to make a suitable succah for himself. But he chose that house for other reasons and he knew he was in for these expenses and he lived with it. I was just lucky in this fashion that we saw potential for having a succah there and that was one of the factors that we bought. Of course, other factors entered into it -- price and so on. It was sort of an optional feature, one of the bells and whistles you get with the house, otherwise, you just go to those expenses and that is it.

Q The fence acts as an eruv?

A Exactly. You have to have a fence at least about a metre or so high. As a matter of fact, we had one of my wife's friends living next door to us. He had bought several months before we did and we had a gate going from his backyard to our backyard so that we had a common eruv for his kids and my kids to play on Shabbat through the common gate. And we went through the whole ceremony every year with the matzot and the food which would make it an eruv hatzerot. which is a specific type of eruv between two private individuals or apartment buildings. We go through that every year.

Q Do you think that the succah could be a symbol specifically for the diaspora?

A I don't think orthodox Jewry think of it in those terms at all. Other less orthodox groups might introduce factors like this into their thinking. More secular jews, humanistic jews who try to validate their Judaism other than through the Shulchan Aruch. A succah is a succah for its own sake, for that mitzvah. No extraneous material should be put into it. You could, but it doesn't serve any purpose.

Q What about Israeli Jews, who are not in exile?

A I don't know about that...Even if you live in Israel today, there is a degree of galut even today. Geographically you are there, but it doesn't mean that spiritually you are there. Its like the times during the period of the judges before the temple was built... There was a central point of worship but it wasn't established in Jerusalem until King Solomon's time. The Zionists, the secular Zionists would like to think that everything is accomplished now. But I think that something still isn't done.

Interview #5, Montreal, December 1996.

Q Tell me about Pizza-Pita. How long have you been here?

A Pizza Pita was founded in 1989 by the Spiegelman brothers

Q Are you one of them?

A I am one of them. My name is Chaim and I have a brother by the name of Tzvi. Me and my brother have been operating the pizza shop since 1989.

Q So you would say you own it?

A I would say the bank owns a big part of it, but yes, I own it.

Q Who would you say is your clientele here? Who uses the restaurant most often?

A Mostly Jewish, a mixture of Moroccan and Ashkenaz and a big part of non-Jewish customers.

Q Is it because they live in the area?

A It is because they live in the area, we have a good name. We have a lot of Muslims, which eat kosher, so they come for that and a lot of vegetarian people come for a vegetarian restaurant.

Q What about age-wise -- who are your customers. Families? Singles? Older? Younger?

A Mostly families with young kids but we have a lot of teenagers and young boys that come and even old people. Sometimes we have to help the old people up the stairs.

Q Why does the restaurant have a succah?

A Why? Very simple. First of all, most of the people, not all but most, would not eat -- only inside the succah. So, to give our customer that service, we built that succah at the front so if they like their pizza, their falafel, their sandwich and they hop into the succah.

Q Have you had one every year?

A Every year since 1989.

Q Do all kosher restaurants have a succah? Is this a standard thing?

A I wouldn't say so, even though some of them don't have the opportunity to build because they don't have the location. But I would say that part of them do have a succah.

Q What do you think would happen to your business if you didn't have one?

A I would definitely lose some business.

Q Would you close?

A I wouldn't say I would close, but we would lose some business. It doesn't help

Q Who uses the succah you have up. I know that it is incumbent only upon men to use it, but do you have only men going out there?

A Well, obviously the mitzvah is for men, so the service is provided for men but nevertheless, if you have a couple and they go out to eat, so they don't want to split what they eat, so they go out together to the succah.

Q And the same for families, I suppose?

A I would say so, yes.

Q Do you have a rough estimate of how many people used the succah this year?

A It is very hard, but a very large amount of people. Especially, we have a Saturday night in Succot, we have a big crowd of people trying to squeeze themselves into the succah.

Q Would you say in the hundreds?

A Yes, definitely.

Q Where did you get your succah?

A Actually, I purchased my succah by Rodal book-store a couple of years ago. It is a canvas succah, material. The structure is from metal or aluminium pipes, I am not sure. And it is very easy to install. It takes us about an hour or two and the succah is up.

Q What about the schach?

A You buy it by the schach dealers. They come and they ship it to you a few days before and you just throw it up on top of the succah.

Q How did you find out about the schach dealer?

A They're all over. All over. They don't stop calling you. There is about five or six of them. They call you " are you going to buy by me this year? I'll give you a better rate..." Its very hard sometimes. You don't know where to buy. But you buy by one guy at the end.

Q How much do they charge, generally?

A I believe its about five dollars a bundle. But if you buy in large quantity, you get a better deal.

Q And what kind of schach did you end up getting?

A What is the standard, you call it Christmas tree...pine, so that is the one. I think it was pine.

Q You don't call it Christmas tree?

A No, that is just to make things easier.

Q Why did you choose this type of succah? You could have had a wooden one.

A For the first year or two we did build, but it gets very complicated and there is alot of work and you waste too much time and storage wise, you have to start storing wood. Too messy. This is chick-chack-bingo.

Q Is there any difference in this climate?

A Not really. Look, if its cold, it doesn't really help. I'm not going to put a heater in there if its raining. If its cold, its cold. Its not going to change much. Hey look, people come there for 15 20 minutes. What is the big deal? So they eat faster and make place for other people.

Q It is good for business?

A Yea

Q How do you know that this succah is kosher?

A First of all, the fact that this succah is being sold everywhere throughout the United States, Israel and Canada. If it wouldn't be kosher then it would probably stop. But on top of that, I know for a fact that this is a strictly kosher succah and it has all the necessary Halacha requirements that a succah would need. That makes it kosher.

Q But you do YOU know, specifically?

A Well, I have studied, years and years and that little I know.

Q So what would you check?

A Well, first of all, to make a succah, there is a very simple structure. What is it made out of, first of all. It has to have four corners -- actually three minimum corners. It could be made out of wood, plastic, canvas. The top has to be from trees, from wood, then you put the schach on top of that. You can't have the pipe on top of you and then put the schach. But all around it is a perfectly kosher succah. I mean, there is a whole book of exactly the Halacha that is necessary way of doing it.

Q So you studied that?

A Yes, yes. In school, in yeshiva. There is a part of the Talmud called succah -- fifty pages if I recall. And there is all kinds of agreements and disagreements, and how to build it and what this guy thinks and what doesn't think...Well, I studied most of it. And then there is the traditional Halacha of how you are supposed to build it, so we follow that.

Q If you ever had a problem or a doubt, where would you go to check.

A First of all, I could check in a book. Second of all, I could check with a rabbi. That's it, those are the two options.

Q What book would you check?

A There is the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch which is a summary of all the dinim and the halakhot and many questions. There is the Lubavitch Halacha that you could follow, there is the standard, there is the Sephardim. I would check in Lubavitch.

Q Why would you check Lubavitch?

A Because I am Lubavitch. So I wouldn't change now when it comes to Succos.

Q Do you think that the succah is a sacred or a holy space, or is it a profane space, or is it both?

A Well, actually, the succah is a holy space, but at the same time, the meaning of the succah is that it should be like your house. So, some people actually sleep in the succah.

Q Does anyone here sleep in it?

A No. When I go home and I close the restaurant, it could be that somebody slept there because he has nowhere else to sleep, because he found himself a shelter. I know that there is alot of hasidim that sleep in the succah. They even heat it up. It is supposed to be like a house.

Q So it is holy, but it is also domestic and usable?

A Exactement...

Q What is the importance of the succah in this community?

A Business-wise? Business, as I mentioned before, it helps business. It is a necessity. Just like you want to sell, and you need a fridge to put the drinks. You need a succah to make sure that people eat. And its important. I mean, and its publicity too. This is not something we are embarrassed about. We are proud of it and if you go into where all the hasidim live together you will see tens and alot of those and its beautiful.

Q So it lets people eat out because if it wasn't here, then people wouldn't eat out?

A That's right.

Q Tell me about the event that you held?

A This is something that I actually started about three or four years ago. I was once in New York at the period of Succos and I asked around what is there to do with kids and they said there was a big carnival coming to town. I went with my kids and they had a blast. Simply what they do is in Brooklyn and Borough Park, they close a couple of streets they bring bumping cars, kiddie rides big rides, snack bar, big succah. It was really fine entertainment. So I said " Hey, way can't we do it here? We have a community here?" So I got in touch with a couple of companies and I have managed to rent a spot and bring them along, there is about twenty rides, we advertise everywhere. We build a succah on the premises. Families come with their kids, they go on the rides, we sell pizza and falafel. Its good for business, its good for the city and its beautiful for the kids.

Q How many people do you get for that?

A Its basically a three or four day affair and the first day and the second day... it depends on the weather...don't forget its outside and sometimes during succot it really gets chilly. But when its a beautiful day were busy, there is hundreds of people coming. Its superly great

Q Where is it?

A The first year, we had it in Cote des Neiges Plaza, the second year also at CDN but the other side of the plaza. And two years we had it at Decarie Square.

Q Do you have anything to add?

A The festival is beautiful. Everybody loves it. I get alot of encouragement to do it. I am very happy to see that. Especially my kids can't wait for succahs because they obviously get free rides. Of course, they have to help me clean up the succah there and to clean up the yard. But the wait a whole year and talk about it the whole year. There is alot of maybe that we should get into...bout how to build a succah. Maybe we should one day take a Kitzur. Particularly succah -- how to build a succah. I do have a small story that pops into my mind that happened somewhere in the states, I am not sure where. There was a couple of anti-Semite people that were complaining to the local authorities which was the city inspector about someone building a not permitted building or structure. So the inspector shows up and looks around and fills up his report and gives the guy a fine and says " Look, if you don't destroy it in thirty days, you have to pay the fine" The guy said " OK, I'll take it down before thirty days" And one day after Succos, he took off the succah. So he managed to do the mitzvah of the succah and he didn't get anybody nervous and he didn't pay a fine.

Q Have you had any problems with local authorities here?

A No -- never had a problem... as a matter of fact, the landlord is not even Jewish and he's giving me all the help the first few years when I was building it from wood, he came and he helped me out. He gave me wood that he had in the garage and he never had a problem with that. The second year we built it there was a big winter storm so the succah actually flew.

Q Was anybody in it?

A No -- actually there was somebody in it but the succah flew away and he was still busy eating his french fries. But, the succah actually flew...It was the canvas. It was the first year we built the canvas because we didn't do it right. But the following years we learned already how to do it and we tied it up good and no wind in the world is going to blow that thing off. Can you imagine coming in one morning coming down the stairs with our tray and here you're chasing your succah.

Interview #6, Montreal, December 1996.

Q Just go ahead, we'll talk.

A OK Like I said, my husband, before he got married, he never had a succah and for us, when we first came to Canada, having been brought up with a succah all my life for my mother and my two brothers, it was very hard to be without a succah. But the other Jewish holidays, they have something that represents them, that, you know, for Passover, you eat Matzoh... for Purim and the other Jewish holidays, there is always some kind of symbols that helps you remember its the holiday but for succot, if you don't have a succah, you don't feel anything. So for my mother and my two brothers when we first came here to Canada, not being able to build -- we were living in a building -- the first floor of the building there was tenants but the second and third floors had balconies so you could build a succah on the balcony. So not having a succah, my mother did not feel it was succot. It was very hard for my mother.

Q So what did you do as a family? Did you go to another one?

A Well, she didn't have to. My two brothers went to some friends for one or two meals and that's it. And we just had a meal in the house. And my mother -- I could see on her face -- that not having a succah was very hard for her. It wasn't the holiday. Its like having Christmas without a turkey or a Christmas tree. It was exactly the same thing, I mean, celebrating Christmas without a Christmas tree, its not Christmas. So as soon as I got married and we had a back yard, a big back yard, I said "That's it, I'm making a succah." And that brought back alot of joy to my mother and she was very happy.

Q And you have here for the holiday?

A I have here for the holiday and since then -- now we're married twenty-two years, she always came to us for succot. In the first few years, my brothers weren't married yet, so they came with us and as the years went by, they got married, they brought their wives, they brought their young children. Now, at one point, we sat twenty-two people in my succah. And everybody had their input. My nieces and nephews brought their arts and crafts from school and they hung it up because, look, they were going to be guests for the holidays, so they wouldn't have a succah in their house, so it was their succah. So everybody came here and we had a big succah and it was a big celebration. And that's how, of course, my mother was here and we had to put the Sephardim input into it. We put Sephardim decorations.

Q Your husband said that you had alot to do with the decorating

A The Ashkenazi people in Canada here that I know, they decorate the succah with whatever is ready-made, posters made in arts and crafts and done in school by their children. They also hang some fruit. What I saw in other succah, they hang apples and grapes because that is what they fruit

in season is for the harvest. Which is very strange for me. Why would somebody hang fruit? But for us in Morocco it was a completely different approach to decorating the succah.

Q How were they decorated in Morocco?

A In Morocco there was a corner in the succah that was decorated as a throne for a bride or welcoming a bride because they Torah is compared to a bride. So we made a corner that was for the bride-torah with all kinds of silk embroidered kerchiefs and we'll have a corner for... And lately I had asked somebody who is very well versed in this topic and they said that they believe that if the messiah will not come at the end of Passover there is some belief that he might be coming for succot. Therefore, you are welcoming and hoping for the messiah and you decorate. So we decorate that corner for the bride with beautiful scarves and decorations and cushions and pillows. In Morocco we are able to do that. Here, you never know because of the weather, you never know how you are going to have or weather you are going to end up with rain or snow during October or September whenever the holiday falls, so we can't put as many things but we try to decorate with a lot of nice things.

Q Beside the fruit and the seat, are the succahs any different in Morocco.

A Definitely. The medium that is used for the walls of the succah is completely different in Morocco than it is in here. In Morocco the walls, the frame, the structure is made with iron bars or metal or wood. Here, because of the weather, the walls are made of wood, or corrugated plastic or tarpaulin. In Morocco because of the weather, we did not need such heavy protection against the weather. We used bamboos for the walls. And every fifteen centimetres you had a bamboo, a long bamboo that we bought, and was attached according to the law. You cannot use wire to attach it, so we used rope or cord. We also used a lot of palm leaves, palm leaves from the palm trees -- big big ones -- and for the roof, of course, we had all these palm leaves that we used to put on the top. Then on the inside, we put more decoration. But the walls itself, there was no such thing as a full wall, and opaque wall. It was only these bamboos or thin bamboos, in French you call them roseau. It is a kind of bamboo that you bought. And also you bought palm leaves because they were available in Morocco at that time of the year....Not in the stores. There was always somebody selling them on the street corner. They know... there was people selling seasonal things. So they knew that at this time of the year the Jews -- actually it was the Arabs selling them -- they knew the Jews needed that so they go and they cut them and they bring them to you and you buy them from them. they do with the schach here and like they do with so many other things.

Q And do they also hang fabric at all?

A Yea, well, the building of the succah was always done by the male, but the decoration was always left to the ladies. So the ladies would bring there... they don't have to work so hard. I remember at one point, I must have been a very young girl, six or seven years old, we used to have a joint succah with my uncles who lived in the same building, so we used to bring some heavy blankets, big heavy woolen blankets and we used to hang them. You bring nice bead-spreads, if you have bead-spreads that you don't use. Whatever you have that's good. So the ladies felt that they had to bring their very finest to the decorations.

Q Do you find that that happens here a lot?

A Well, here, its very commercialized. Everything you go to -- of course, so many Judaica stores, where many things are sold and of course everything here is done for business. So people know that they have to decorate the succah, so there is all kinds of things being manufactured and imported if you go to these Judaica stores, you find plastic fruits, plastic birdies. For succot, you find succot decorations with Hebrew printing, all kinds of succot decorations and when you look, you see its made in China. But all the people who are looking for business, they pick on it and they try to work on that. So in Morocco we didn't have such a thing. It was years ago and they might have it now at the end of the twentieth century. In my time in Morocco, you took out your finest from your cupboards and you hang them up. Here, you go to the store, you buy what you need and you hang it up. And you use whatever technology, for instance. My children, as they were going to elementary school, they made all kinds of arts and crafts. All the Jewish schools make arts and crafts for succot decorations. It is something that we save, that we cherish, that we save for the children to make them proud. So we do use technology and we have it laminated so we can use it from year to year. I mean fifty years ago in Morocco, we couldn't do any lamination. There was no such thing, so it wasn't the same thing.

Q Did every family have a succah in Morocco? Was it standard for families who could to have one?

A In Fez, where I was born, almost everybody had a succah because it was very easy to have a succah. It didn't cost money -- it didn't cost too much. Here you have to have a special wood, and you have the special trellis and its rather expensive when you have to have space to store it. As, in Morocco, if you only had the boards for the structure, the four poles, the rest wasn't hard, because the bamboos you buy every year. You just have to go buy a bunch of bamboos and you make your own succah...but after that you give it to the public bakery and they use it for burring wood in the oven.

Q When you made your first succahs in Montreal, did everyone have one?

A No...I could say that for the past twenty-five years, there is a resurgence of people going back to their roots, people discovering religion. There is more and more baalei Tshuvah -- people practising Judaism as it is supposed to be. So people learn more and discovered there was something they never did before. And I live in a duplex, I have a cottage, I have a backyard. It doesn't take much and there is so many possibilities for people to make a succah. There is all these stores selling your ready made succah, so if you have the means you go to these stores, you order which succah you want -- pre-fab succah, there is so many styles to choose from. In terms of decoration you don't have to go for yourself in decorating. Just go to the same store and buy decorations and you have a succah. So now people are more aware of the importance of succah. the necessity of having a succah, that it is important for men to have a succah. You see before succot comes around, you see all kinds of flyers coming in the Jewish mail or I the different Jewish bakeries and all kinds of carpenters or handymen willing to help, or young boys wanting to make a few pennies. Everybody is trying to help you with a succah. So why wouldn't you make a succah at this time.

Q Where did you get your decorations?

A As I said, my mother always wanted a nicely decorated succah because she grew up with one. I used to put blankets and sheets. As a matter of fact, I had bought sheets in Florida quite a few years ago. There were bamboo designs on them and it was off-white and brown. So I used to use those

sheets and it wasn't enough to decorate the whole succah, the four walls. And one day there was a bazaar of a Jewish organization. And they had this beautiful material they used for tapestry or upholstery and it was very nice. It had a nice border. They were end pieces, a misprint. I wanted to buy the whole thing. He asked a lot of money, so we bargained down, we told him it was for a good cause. So we bought that. My mother, who knows how to sew. She sat and we put all the pieces together so we had enough material to go around all the walls. Over the years, as I said, we had some posters that we got from friends or from us. And every year we made sure there was one new decoration. We buy sometimes if we have time on boxing day we go buy decorations and for Christmas decorations are one sale. All kinds of streamers and lights and lamps. So we buy all those decorations and we save them from year to year. Our succah was featured in the Gazette. It was featured in the La Press because people came to the library to my husband and they came to us through my husband and my friends they send us people. They like -- this is a very nicely decorated succah. We try because it's your home, and it's going to be your home for eight days, you are supposed to make it as nice as possible. There is some Jews, the Hasidic Lubavitch, whose custom is not to decorate the succah at all. So they have a succah without decoration. That's whatever their custom is but we try to decorate the succah as much as possible so over the years we keep on using all kinds of decorations.

Q Is it important for you to have guests?

A Yes. Succot is a time when you, when it is right after Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the days of Awe. We have guests then too, but it is harder because you are supposed to concentrate on prayers and whatnot. Succot is a time where you let loose. You are supposed to be happy. You go out, you're on the outside and we always have guests in the succah. Family, friends and there is always someone who doesn't have a succah so you invite them. Succot is a time when you invite people who don't have a succah.

Q Do you spend a lot of time...do you eat in the succah?

A I could say that most of the time I eat in the succah except that over the years, my mother getting older, not feeling so great, so she doesn't always want to sit with us in the succah, especially at night when it's cold and it's raining. So we sit here right next to the succah so we are part of the crowd eating in the succah but we are actually sheltered from the elements.

Q What about foods -- are there any special foods that you make around succot time?

A Not really, nothing specific but there is some food, some meals certain dishes that come every succot because that is the kind of food that they made with the fruits and vegetables that are available at that time of the year. At the harvest time. For instance, there is cabbage at that time of year, you make cabbage soup. There is a lot of yam, so you make some kind of compote with Yam....For Succot, you just eat whatever. It is a festive time of the year, so that is what you are supposed to have.

Q What about sleeping in the succah. Does anyone sleep in it?

A In Morocco yes.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved