

## **Claire Golomb**

- B.A. in Psychology (1954) Hebrew University, M.A. in Psychology (1959) New School of Social Research, Ph.D. in Psychology (1969) Brandeis University

### **Major Employment**

- Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts at Boston: 2002-present
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### **Major Areas of Work**

- Symbol formation in child art and play, child aesthetics

### **SRCD Affiliation**

- Reviewer for *Child Development*

## **SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

### **Claire Golomb**

Emeritus Professor of Psychology  
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Interviewed by Carol Smith  
In Newton, Massachusetts  
September 24, 2008

**Smith:** So this is the SRCD Oral History interview with Claire Golomb, who is an Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Carol Smith, also in the Department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston is doing the interview, so we have been long time faculty colleagues. I'm interviewing Claire at her home in Newton, Massachusetts. This is September 24th, 2008. So Claire, it's good to see you.

**Golomb:** Yes.

**Smith:** We haven't seen each other in a while. We're going to begin by my asking you a bit about your general intellectual history just describing a little bit about your family background. Where were you born?

**Golomb:** Well, I was born in Germany of Jewish parents, and some of my most vivid kind of experiences from my childhood years concerned the Nazi persecution of the Jews, my father's arrest. You're asking actually about some of the background and what kind of effect it might have had on my development, my choice of career. Perhaps it does. So these are very early, very profound kind of experiences, especially, the events of the Kristallnacht. You may know what that is. That is the night of the broken glass, November 9, 1938, when all the synagogues in Germany were being burned, destroyed, people arrested and so on. It was certainly a precursor--

**Smith:** So how old were you at that time?

**Golomb:** I was ten.

**Smith:** What year was that now?

**Golomb:** 1938. And a few days after that event of the Kristallnacht I left Germany, actually illegally, and went to Holland where relatives of my mother lived. Now about my schooling -- it's actually an incomplete kind of record I would say. I completed the first four years of elementary grade school in

Germany. Thereafter, two years of the six elementary grades in Holland, two years of academic high school and that's about the end of it. In the meantime, the war had broken out, Holland was occupied by Nazi Germany, and the persecution of Jews followed. My education was interrupted and I went into hiding. In terms of the continuation of my education, I went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and did entrance examinations, because I didn't have a high school diploma.

**Smith: Now how did you get to Jerusalem from Holland? What led you?**

Golomb: Well, I went to Holland.

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: I didn't go far enough, so Germany occupied Holland in 1940. I finished the fifth and sixth of elementary grades, then attended, for about two years, high school, which also was actually already very atypical, because Jews were forbidden to attend public schools. So I attended a hastily organized Lyceum, as it was called, which was a combination of the academic high school, the gymnasium and so on for Jewish children. Then in the beginning of 1943 I went into hiding--

**Smith: And where were you in hiding?**

Golomb: --in Holland, in Holland--

**Smith: In Holland?**

Golomb: --in various places.

**Smith: What part of Holland, do you know?**

Golomb: Holland is a very small country, but the truth is that I wandered to about nine or ten different addresses from the north, which is the province of Friesland, to the south, which is Limburg.

**Smith: And were your parents with you?**

Golomb: No, each one of us went separately, and my father actually was caught and sent to a concentration camp and did not return. My mother and my sister survived. So after the end of the war - - that was 1945 -- I became very much involved in working for the Zionist Youth Organization, especially devoting time to youngsters who had lost their parents and were in various institutions. And then in 1948 -- yes, when the war in Israel broke out, I went to Israel illegally and served in the army for about one year. And after that one year I went to a kibbutz for one year and experienced collective life and work. And at the end of that year I decided that it's time to go to study, because while I liked, you could say the philosophy of the collective enterprise of the kibbutz, I felt that in terms of my kind of occupational self, I would need more stimulation. And so I decided -- actually with a heavy heart -- to leave the kibbutz and to go to the Hebrew University. Now I didn't have a high school diploma, so for about two months, with the help of various friends, I prepared for the entrance examinations, and passed, and so I became a student.

**Smith: When you were on the kibbutz did you work on the--**

Golomb: Of course.

**Smith: --so--**

Golomb: Yes, most of the time I worked in the fields. I liked that actually.

**Smith: In the fields? Yes.**

Golomb: I did have a romantic side to myself and the idea of -- it was a kibbutz of very young people in the southern part of Israel, near Beer Sheva, a risky environment, occasional attacks by Arab Bedouins. So it was a very exciting, interesting period establishing something that wasn't there before. The problem was water: how to have enough water to irrigate the fields, vineyard, and actually establishing a community with very young people. I was then 21. The others were the same age, maybe one or two years older, and they were running an enterprise--

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: --agricultural, social, political. It was a very exciting period.

**Smith: Just before getting on to that later part of your life, just to push back about when you were young, were you scared growing up? What were your emotions you felt? It's a very unusual set of experiences that you had.**

Golomb: As a child you mean?

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: I think--

**Smith: Do you remember?**

Golomb: Of course I remember. Well, I think growing up in Germany as a Jew and experiencing anti-Semitism from a fairly early age clearly marks me to some extent. I remember distinctly events such as being at a resort in the summertime with my family and there was a swimming pool, and suddenly sort of a bunch of uniformed -- probably brown shirts -- Nazis entered and ordered everybody out of the pool, and to empty the pool of water because it was contaminated by Jews. Now, if you're seven or eight and this happens, of course it's not something you forget. But I would say that the most deeply disturbing events were certainly around the Kristallnacht, as I mentioned to you--

**Smith: Yes, when you were ten.**

Golomb: --and my father's arrest shortly before that time, etc. So that left definitely a permanent imprint. Was I afraid? On the one hand I was. You could say that I woke up with a bang during these years. You know, that's the end of my childhood I would say, around the age of ten, and I had a very realistic assessment of what the conditions were. Was I afraid? I would say that I did have some symptoms of the trauma, of course, because for many months thereafter in Holland whenever there were loud noises, loud voices, it reminded me of the morning I woke up at 5:00 in the morning, when they came to arrest my father and the infamous knock at 5:00 in the morning, the bang on the door. Yes, but I must have been very resilient in some ways.

**Smith: Well, I was just going to say, did you like school or did you -- and later you went on to study artistic development. Did you -- were there certain kinds of--**

Golomb: Did I like school?

**Smith: Did you like drama, play, drawing?**

Golomb: As a child I was a very playful child, very playful. I wasn't a particularly good student in the elementary grades in Germany, because I was kind of too playful, not interested. There were a couple of topics I liked and to those I did pay attention, and to the rest I didn't. But when I came to Holland these things changed, because somehow that period of unqualified and uncritical acceptance by my mother, who was a very tolerant person, was gone. She herself was very academic in orientation and

learning came to her very easily. She couldn't quite understand why one child was a very good student (my sister) and the other one was not.

**Smith: Do you have brother and sisters?**

Golomb: --particularly -- I have one sister.

**Smith: One, all right. One sister.**

Golomb: And she was four years older. But my mother was very tolerant and maybe too much so.

**Smith: Okay. So we're resuming after a phone ringing.**

Golomb: Yes.

**Smith: The educational or occupational characteristics of your parents, did--**

Golomb: My father was a businessman, but his heart was in scholarship.

**Smith: What kind of scholarship or what--**

Golomb: Predominantly Judaica. He was quite an expert on modern Hebrew literature, on the language, but also on Talmudic studies, very ancient and traditional Jewish studies.

**Smith: And your mother you said also--**

Golomb: My mother was a housewife, but she was a very intelligent and interested person, so she did a lot of reading. And what were the expectations? That the children would do well. We went to private school. And as I said, I was actually -- until I came to Holland, I didn't particularly care for school, not that I didn't like it, but there was nothing -- yes, except maybe literature, and again some subjects -- I wasn't particularly ambitious I must say. Coming to Holland, it was -- as I said, I woke up with a bang and it was a big difference. I didn't know the language, of course, and suddenly I was in a class with about 45 kids in a public school and left much to my own devices. The teacher didn't quite know what to do with me, so he asked me to copy pages. And indeed, at the end of the school year I was the best speller in the class. It was his system, but also I think he liked me a lot, and so I made an effort on his behalf.

**Smith: Any favorite subjects?**

Golomb: During that period? I don't remember really. I can't say that there was -- maybe history, maybe history, but how much history was there in the elementary school grades? In high school I think it was predominantly history, social sciences. It was a very traditional program otherwise. So that is it in terms of my educational background.

**Smith: Well, you were starting to talk when I moved you back again--**

Golomb: That's right.

**Smith: --about being at the Hebrew University.**

Golomb: I went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. That's right.

**Smith: And you were starting--**

Golomb: And I chose psychology as my major and history as my minor. The minor there was equivalent in its demands to a major. Yes, it was a very good period, very interesting. I enjoyed both subjects, even though I would say in psychology we did not have the best teachers. We had some outstanding people in history. Psychology, we had lost -- during the war of independence -- I think three tenured full professors of psychology who died on the way up to Mt Scopus, where the University was. And so the department was -- you could say was staffed by part time people who came for a semester from the States and some younger faculty. They did their best.

**Smith: So you were a major in psychology?**

Golomb: I majored in psychology. And after that, what then? Since we didn't have a graduate program and I was interested in mental health and clinical work, that was my main interest, I was fortunate to get a position as an intern at the largest mental hospital in Israel, in Acre. And this was actually one of the most interesting periods of my life, I must say. I found the work with patients -- well, actually, it was a hospital that mostly served chronic patients, but of course, also some acutely ill patients and under very primitive conditions. I won't spend the time describing it to you. But the director of the hospital, whose name was Shlomo Kulcsar, and his chief psychologist, Shoshana Erdely, who later got academic appointments at the Tel Aviv University, were incredibly interesting mentors. And I was all eagerness, and it was a whole new world to observe. And they gave me a tremendous amount of freedom to interview patients. I got supervision in testing, participated in diagnostic meetings, and then in the design of interventions, therapeutic interventions. So you can imagine, here I am basically with very limited knowledge about clinical psychology and on the spot getting this kind of training by some very competent individuals. So that was extremely exciting. Of course, it elicited all kinds of questions about development, about the range of normal behavior, of atypicality, of treatment, of continuities or discontinuities between childhood and adulthood. And given my kind of theoretical inclinations and reading on the side, it was a very stimulating period.

**Smith: Now you mentioned given your theoretic inclinations. You haven't said much about what those were at that point.**

Golomb: Well, I've always--

**Smith: Or is it--**

Golomb: --had -- I think I always had a tremendous interest in you would say in the humanistic subjects. So even though I didn't mention it earlier, for example, during the time that I was in hiding, which was at different places of course, the first nine months I was basically left to my own devices most of the time. I did a lot of reading: literature, philosophy, history, art history, sociology. And this probably -- I would say a bent towards intellectualizing probably characterized me very much during that period. And of course, being concerned about the state of the world, and what can a 14, 15 year old think about a world that you don't want to grow up in? So clearly you have in mind that constant and all kinds of thoughts about what the political system might or might not be that would foster a more humane existence. I think that was predominantly the trend of my thoughts during those years I was in hiding. And I did, for some time, have a diary in which I didn't write very personal things, but it was all this kind of philosophizing stuff. And of course, it was lost later on, which is just as well. But I mean, my inclinations were always to find a more theoretical explanation for events that you observe. Of course, I didn't have much of a scientific education at that point, but I think for the subject that I was interested in it probably was adequate.

**Smith: Now had you encountered Piaget or--**

Golomb: Not at that point. That came--

**Smith: --Freud?**

Golomb: --during -- remember now we are talking about the time that I was in hiding.

**Smith: Oh, not in hiding. I meant--**

Golomb: Oh, when I came to the University? Of course.

**Smith: Yes, yes.**

Golomb: Yes. When I came to the University -- although I must say Piaget wasn't much in the forefront. I did read Piaget on my own actually, but I don't remember taking a developmental course at that point.

**Smith: As an undergraduate?**

Golomb: As an undergraduate I don't remember that I ought to check that out, but I do remember we had a very good maybe educational psychology course. But I was interested myself in Piaget, and so I picked it up while I was in the hospital, because I was interested in what does normal development have to contribute to an understanding of psychopathology, if anything? So I spent one year in the hospital. It was very intense. And then I transferred to a mental health clinic in Tel Aviv. I worked with children and with adults, but mostly with adults, for about three years. So really it's during that period of time that my clinical interests were dominant. And I think I was a pretty good clinician, and I found it very, very gratifying I must say. And given that--

**Smith: And what were your responsibilities with the patients at that point, or what were you trying to do?**

Golomb: What are clinical psychologists supposed to do?

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: So we had extensive tests, the standard tests of intelligence, personality and the clinical tests Rorschach, TAT, Bender Gestalt, all of those tests. But then, of course, seeing the patient and trying to develop a therapeutic program, and, remember, this is a time when Israel was still young professionally speaking. And so the fact that I didn't have a graduate degree didn't seem to matter at that point. It mattered to me.

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: I did mention before that I would have gone on to a graduate degree right away, but we didn't have a graduate program--

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: --given that these faculty members had been killed during the war. So I knew that eventually I'd want to go to the States and complete a degree, and I was interested in clinical psychology--

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: --at that point.

**Smith: Now, your mother and sister were in--**

Golomb: In Israel. They came to Israel too, yes, at different times.

**Smith: Any grandparents or--**

Golomb: I did actually have a grandmother in Israel on my father's side. On my mother's side they were all killed during the war; it was a large family and they all died. Now let me see, where were we?

**Smith: So you've -- I guess you're--**

Golomb: Yes, actually--

**Smith: --getting toward getting to graduate school--**

Golomb: --you asked me about -- before -- let me back up for a moment.

**Smith: Yes, I can always meander. Yes.**

Golomb: During my time in Acre in the mental hospital, it was not only interesting from the point of view that I just described to you. The director of the hospital was very interested in psychotic art, so he established a studio there. And again, it was extremely interesting to see what chronically ill patients can do and how to account for the disparity between their inability to produce a coherent sentence and their capacity to create paintings, sometimes of exceptional organization and beauty. So these were very interesting things and, in fact, we organized the first exhibit of the art of mental patients at the Tel Aviv Museum, approximately at the end of the year that I spent there. The director had very diverse interests. And so he read a new book that had just been published in Switzerland about a tree test that presumably had some diagnostic validity. So he asked me, "Would you be interested in doing such a study?" Well, he released me from maybe testing, whatever it was, and I said, "Sure." And so actually the first developmental study that I designed and worked at dates from that period. So I tested -- I designed a study and collected tree drawings and drawings of the family from children of all the elementary school grades, from the first grade to the sixth grade. And then, because I was of course interested in establishing to what extent there was some diagnostic significance to it, I interviewed and collected data from mental patients, predominantly schizophrenics, and matched those to normally functioning individuals of similar social and ethnic background. In a way it was a pretty well designed study, and that's the first study I ever presented at the annual meeting of the Israeli Psychological Association, at the end of the year. It was actually a very nice study, come to think of it.

**Smith: And what did you find?**

Golomb: Of course, it didn't have any diagnostic significance. When I read the book I had my doubts, because I have never -- even at that point, I was very doubtful that there are simple things that you can read of--

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: --diagnosis. You know? It just didn't fit in with my way of assessing people for their mental complexity and so on. So I wasn't surprised that there was absolutely no relationship.

**Smith: So the person had presented this without having such systematic data as you gathered?**

Golomb: That's right. I wish I could recall who it was. It was published by Hans Huber Verlag, I think by a very decent publisher. But that's also the period -- listen, the same is true with the Kinetic Family Drawing Tests that are very widespread. Almost every clinical psychologist when he or she tests children, assessing their intellectual status as well as their personality, they include the Kinetic Family Drawing Test, which really has very little support empirically. So it wasn't so surprising that this so called test on tree drawings became fashionable, because of course, trees have certain anthropomorphic characteristics and people identify very often in language and in imagery with trees

as an aspect of the self. It's not so surprising. However, literally speaking, when people draw trees with or without flowers, or with or without leaves--

**Smith: Yes, it doesn't mean anything.**

Golomb: It does not really tell you whether they're deeply depressed or schizophrenic. Of course it doesn't.

**Smith: So, in general, what early adult experiences were important to your intellectual development? You were starting to say this experience with the clinic was certainly one.**

Golomb: Yes.

**Smith: Collegiate experiences? You've already mentioned some of the background. And I guess maybe the next thing is the origins of your interest in child development. You're starting to get there too, I guess, right?**

Golomb: Well, I think some of it you can date back to, well, it probably predates even the clinical work. Because after the war I did work with children, and particularly children who had been traumatized by the war, and so clearly I had an interest in human development at some level which became much more marked, because when you're confronted with mental patients the issue of development becomes very pronounced. I mean, how do you get to that point? What other factors, other than biological ones, may or may not have contributed to it? And when you do treatment with schizophrenic patients and you see that some of them really can respond, and that some of them are able to make a productive life with the help of both medication and psychotherapy supports, clearly it's a source of endless questions.

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: What is normality? What are the ranges of normal behavior? It clearly happens when you see young patients at an interview, an intake interview, and you're very inexperienced. There's a lot of identification going on. You say to yourself, "Well, is that patient so sick? Doesn't he or she remind me of some aspect of myself?" So all of these questions are activated once you are really involved in the assessment and treatment of mental patients. So, now coming back to what may or may not have had a direct influence on my interest in child development, you can see the developmental questions have been there almost from the beginning of my professional life, let me say, if I date my professional life to the first year that I worked as an intern in a mental hospital. Clearly when I went to graduate school I chose, for example, in some seminar we had on the history of psychology with Frank Manuel, who was a very distinguished professor of history, to work on Piaget. So I took all his early books and wrote a review of it, and even then you see it intrigued me that on the one hand I thought that he underestimated the intelligence of young children, and on the other hand, that he overestimated the intelligence of the average adult.

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: So again, you could say this is a developmental perspective or lifespan developmental perspective, which I tended to bring to bear, and a deep interest in development per se.

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: You may also say -- I may add that when I think back on the kind of criticism or critical view that I brought to bear on all kinds of very established figures, whether it was the tree test or something else or Piaget, I think it had a lot to do with my experiences during the war, because I became -- I certainly learned how to rely on my own critical judgment. I was very skeptical of any orthodoxy whether it was religious or political or otherwise. And so this kind of orientation towards life, towards

culture, towards science, that is of a somewhat critical nature I think I brought along from that period of time. And I think it sort of characterizes some of my work.

**Smith: Now you got to -- we were talking about doing your first paper.**

Golomb: Yes.

**Smith: When did you decide to go to graduate school and come to America?**

Golomb: Well, I told you that I would have continued almost immediately after I finished my bachelor's degree. I would have continued towards a graduate degree, but they didn't have one.

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: And so that is when I actually looked for a position in the clinical field. It interested me anyhow, and I was fortunate enough, because I had just the bachelor's, to find outstanding people who took me in, who trained me, and who treated me basically as an equal, which is very nice. And then when I came to the mental health clinic I was indeed one of the clinical psychologists with all the duties and obligations, and maybe privileges, of a professional. But I knew that I wanted to continue my education, so I waited till Dan, my husband, finished his PhD, and was willing to go abroad. So this is how I came to the United States. And first I did apply to different universities and in the end I went to the New School for Social Research the Graduate Faculty in New York because my husband got some postdoctoral fellowship at Rutgers, so it was not too far. And then again--

**Smith: Now he was in physics?**

Golomb: No, he's a physical chemist.

**Smith: Physical chemist? Okay.**

Golomb: Physical chemist. And let me see -- at the New School--

**Smith: So you went to New York first? Yes.**

Golomb: --at the New School--

**Smith: What year was that that you went to New York?**

Golomb: --1958. In '54 I got my bachelor's.

**Smith: Okay.**

Golomb: '58, that was 1958.

**Smith: Oh, so it was four years just working in the clinic and then--**

Golomb: That's right.

**Smith: --okay.**

Golomb: That's right, yeah. So the New School had a very good faculty. Of course, it was very different from the kind of orientation I had developed early on. I was much more psychodynamically oriented, psychoanalytic and psychodynamic, in line with neo-Freudians such as Erikson and others. This was in general the orientation that I had adopted in my approach to human development. Okay? Now the New School did have faculty that were very committed to a Gestalt psychology orientation. And for the first

time I read, of course, Koffka, Koehler, Wertheimer, and Kurt Lewin, and their emphasis on productive thinking had a profound impact on my own orientation. Not that I discounted the psychodynamic position, but it broadened my interests in developmental questions of a different order, I would say. And I think that this kind of an influence is quite noticeable in my own work and approach, even though their work on development was limited to Kurt Lewin, right. My own interest in development was influenced by this kind of optimism about cognition, you might say, this kind of assumption that there is meaning at different levels of development. And I think this is what I brought to much of my work, and it has to do with my criticism of Piaget, that he underestimated the kind of productive thinking that is going on at much earlier levels.

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: And you can say that this is perhaps what has influenced some of my work on child art and imaginative development in general.

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: So you can see the influence of the Gestalt orientation, maybe not in all its details, of course, but an implicit assumption that there is a lot more reasoning going on and that perhaps childhood doesn't mean some kind of egocentric universe, as seen both from the Piagetian and Freudian point of view, that the younger child is locked into some kind of egocentric universe. And both my experience with my own children and, of course, you could say my orientation as it developed over time, has been always to look for, at a much earlier level, problem solving and a productive approach to whatever they are doing.

**Smith: Now, is the New School where you got your degree?**

Golomb: Yes, I got my master's degree at the New School.

**Smith: Okay.**

Golomb: Then we left, because my husband left. I could have continued for a doctorate, because in fact, I did a comprehensive exam there. They demanded it and said, "Oops, yours is at the level of accepting students to the doctoral program. You can continue with us." But we left and I came to Boston with him and he got a position. And then I had children and it's only when my youngest was three years old and could go to the nursery school that I decided to go back to graduate school.

**Smith: So you had two daughters--**

Golomb: Two daughters--

**Smith: --who were how many, two years apart?**

Golomb: --with a year and a half in between. At that time we didn't have early preschool centers. My youngest was three years of age and you could go to nursery school at three. And it's then I applied to Brandeis, partially because I thought, well, I can go to a clinical program perhaps at BU, but of course, what can I learn in clinical? I've had enough training. Of course, that's not true, but at that point I thought, what I really don't know enough of is general psychology and developmental psychology. So I applied to Brandeis and was fortunate enough to get in and that is where I did my dissertation work.

**Smith: Did you like Brandeis?**

Golomb: It was very -- it was interesting. You know?

**Smith: So this was in the mid '60s?**

Golomb: A great mix of people, a great mix of people. There was Maslow, of course, and Neisser at the time and--

**Smith: Eric Neisser?**

Golomb: For a short time, yes. It was an interesting group of people. But I was at that point extremely focused on doing the work and getting out of graduate school. Of course, I had a master's, but I don't think it made much of a difference. So I finished in about four years. And by that time I still had a great interest in clinical psychology, but I think in terms of research I was much more interested in developmental work, and I have continued actually with this kind of interest.

**Smith: Is that when you started your studies of artistic development, at Brandeis?**

Golomb: Yes, that was my dissertation, yes.

**Smith: --get into your book and--**

Golomb: That's right. That was my dissertation, yes.

**Smith: Okay.**

Golomb: Yes. And in a way, as you can see, I've always had an interest in artistic productions if you think of the work at the hospital with mental patients and so on, but part of it is also due to chance. We graduate students had to teach a course at Brandeis, and so my advisor said, "You know what, Claire? You're good with kids and with students" -- I don't know why she assumed that -- "Why don't you teach the course Field Course in Child Development?" And so she absented herself. I got this group of maybe 12 students and we did have a nursery school there. And I was thinking what kind of studies am I going to design for them that will be interesting to them? And I looked at all kinds of subjects and I decided let's do some work on children's drawings. And it's at that point that I read the literature and I was kind of amazed at what was considered the standard assumption of drawings as a reflection, a direct kind of imprint of the cognitive status of the child, the conceptual status of the child. I was very amazed, and that actually encouraged me to start giving them all kinds of projects and sorting these things out.

**Smith: Did your advisor -- who was your advisor?**

Golomb: Marianne Simmel. She went along with that.

**Smith: Was she in the area of artistic development or were you completely on your own?**

Golomb: I was on my own,

**Smith: Did you like drawing yourself?**

Golomb: No. I mean, I don't have any talents. I have always liked the arts and I go to museums, but no, I don't have a talent in that direction. No. I wish I did, but I don't. Yeah.

**Smith: Neither do I.**

Golomb: No, I regret I don't.

**Smith: Well, looking over here I think we've -- were there other things from the general intellectual history you wanted to -- there are questions that you've touched on about the political and social events that influenced your research.**

Golomb: Well, let me say that one of the questions asks who were my research mentors. Right?

**Smith: Yes, right.**

Golomb: And I would say I have had very good teachers along the way. I would think of Mary Henle, who was--

**Smith: At the New School?**

Golomb: --a very well -- she recently - yes. She recently actually passed away I read.

**Smith: Did she?**

Golomb: A very fine mind. Solomon Asch, Genia Hanfmann, Abe Maslow. But the person who actually had the most lasting impact, I would say, on my theoretical orientation to development and to my research was Rudolf Arnheim. You know who he is, right?

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: Now--

**Smith: Do you want to describe for the people who might be interested--**

Golomb: How did I meet him?

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: Given that I had designed this kind of representational study for my dissertation that nobody at Brandeis was really terribly interested in. That's okay, but they let me do what I did and so then my advisor -- yes, she was my advisor -- she personally knew Arnheim and said, "You know what? You should go meet Arnheim."

**Smith: Where was he?**

Golomb: Arnheim was at Harvard at the time.

**Smith: He was at Harvard?**

Golomb: At the time they had established -- he became the first Professor of the Psychology of Art at Harvard and he was there, so I went to see him. And I told him about my work and what impressed me most about him -- I was very interested in his work, I'd read his books, or some of his books -- at how flexible he was, because I told him -- here I was, just a graduate student who felt very insecure vis-à-vis the authority, and I said, "You know, one of my findings doesn't really seem to fit in with your predictions about sculpture." He said, "Really? That's very interesting. Tell me more about it." So of course, that was very nice. And then later on he served as the outside reader on my dissertation. Afterwards I stayed in contact with him professionally and we had very productive interactions over the years as I tried to extend some of his insights into the realm of development. He did not deal with child development and I was interested in developmental aspects, so I tried to work with some of his conceptions and see how they might apply, what inferences I could draw from a developmental point of view.

**Smith: So which aspects of his conceptions most interested you in terms of trying to find developmental applications?**

Golomb: Well, look. If your basic assumption is that art is not a copy, it's not copying and it isn't a simple imprint of some conceptions that human beings have, and that artistic development can take very many forms, and there isn't a single -- if you look at broad cultural events you can see that there isn't a single route that leads from, let's say, early childhood to an adult form of art. It is one of the major assumptions of Arnheim that art is based on equivalence formation. Right? It's creating equivalences in a particular medium. So I was interested in the issue of media. I was interested in the issue of -- in other words, you suddenly have a different perspective on what children are doing. If children are not copying per se -- and of course they are not copying, there is no model out there that looks like a global human or that looks like a tadpole figure, right, and if you said, "Is this your mom?" if they saw their mom walking down the street as a tadpole they would be horrified, of course. So drawing is a very abstract form of thinking. If you think about child art from that perspective you say, "Well, what other rules, what other laws underlie it?" rather than saying how defective is it. So once you get rid of the notion it must be a defect--

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: --and of course, I remember it from my work with adults that many actually don't draw very differently from children. And being myself very limited in what I can do I certainly didn't think that it is a sign of a deficit. Right? So then, given that some of his emphases were on media, clearly if you change media in children, if you change the nature of the task and instructions, what is going on? And of course, if you do that, if you change media, task, and instructions you recognize that children have a vast repertoire of responses to what is presumably the same task, and that not one of them can be seen as the output of a particular mental image. Right? So in a way I found his general ideas about art and artistic development and of the nature of the artistic process very helpful in terms of thinking about what children want to do, can do, and how. And then of course, once I started collecting data I recognized how diverse children's artwork is.

**Smith: Yes.**

Golomb: It really isn't one stereotype. It's not a fixed stereotype. Okay. So it's a try out, a discovery.

**Smith: Very good, very ahead of the time. I mean, today everything is into recognizing a lot of the power of the diversity, that for a long time developmental psychologists, when they were trying to have monolithic approaches--**

Golomb: That's right.

**Smith: --should have shut down. There's a couple of questions here and then maybe we can take a pause for a minute, but you've mentioned political and social events that have influenced your research or not yet? This number four, what political and social events have influenced your research, writing, teaching or other professional activities? You've mentioned political and social events that affected your life. And is there anything else you wanted to mention about that?**

Golomb: No. I would only say what I actually said before when I mentioned that the events of the Holocaust and its effect on my family and my community no doubt influenced my decision to choose a career of service, a desire to improve upon the world in some ways. So I thought that both teaching and maybe finding therapeutic avenues would be something that I could do, that I could contribute somehow. Because clearly I had to find meaning in my life and I had to make the fact that I survived sort of a response, a positive response to what had happened in some ways. I couldn't just go back to existing, certainly not with the kind of mindset that I had in terms of looking for meaning and for change. Of course, these days "change" has a very peculiar sound to it. But I would say that all of these events not only influenced the choice of a career that I tried to map out for myself as a 15 year old, but that it had a much deeper effect in terms of questioning authority, and this is what you might say I have done in my professional life.

**Smith: Yes, which we'll get into in a moment about all the details.**

Golomb: Yes, I mean, just in general the kind of non-believing attitude, the willingness to question authority, even authority that I myself found imposing or impressive. And I think it's that critical attitude which probably underlies some of my work I would say.

**Smith: And then one of the last questions in this opening section is about your characterization of the development of your ideas in the field of child development. Would you see them as evolving in a straightforward fashion or in a way that involved sharp turns in theoretical views or research styles? Is that a question you can relate to at all, or do you want to--**

Golomb: I would say that the change in terms of orientation, maybe not such a radical change, came at the New School for Social Research because, I told you before in broad outlines, I looked at development from a psychodynamic perspective, and I think that my interest in cognition and in looking at problem solving in childhood as important an aspect as emotions, for example, and attachment theories, probably dates back to that period. Perhaps to some extent it's even a certain bias, you can say that in general I look for continuities in development and underestimate perhaps discontinuities. I don't look for very sharp discontinuities. They may be there. So if I have a bias I think it's in that direction and I have a feeling that it has a lot to do with this kind of Gestalt orientation to thinking and even to ethics.

**Smith: Shall we take a pause?**

Golomb: Sure.

**Smith: So we're going to restart. I'm continuing with Claire Golomb, her reflections on her personal research contributions. And so, Claire, what were your primary interests in child development at the very beginning of your career?**

Golomb: I think from the beginning I was interested predominantly in two domains, that of child art and pretense play or imaginative behavior. I also did some work on gender, which is of some interest, but the major points were child play, pretense play and child art. And of course, they do have some characteristics in common, because in both cases you're dealing with a duality that the child seems to intuitively understand, namely, that the marks that he makes on paper are very concrete and literally there, but what they represent, of course, is not an imitation of an object, of a person, and he intuitively seems to understand these dual characteristics that a piece of art, of drawing that he makes represents. And the same is true when you think about imaginative behavior in terms of pretense play. The child adopts a role, substitutes objects one for another and, despite these kinds of major transformations, he or she never seems to confuse those transformations with the real thing. There is an understanding of duality, an awareness of what life in the real world amounts to, what the nature of objects and of relations is and what the transformation is. And this is a very striking kind of phenomenon, which I find is unique to human beings, which is the same also for child art, of course. A child who draws a circle and puts in some dots and says, "This is my mom," clearly has no intention of telling you that this is a literal copy of what mom looks like. This ability to make equivalences of this very abstract nature is what engaged me from the very beginning. I found it incredibly interesting. And so in various ways I have pursued these kinds of questions. So when I think about my work on child art what can I say that I have focused on? I've tried to map developmental trends in figural differentiation, in spatial representation, composition, expression and, of course, also the motivation that underlies the artwork of ordinary as well as talented children. And to some extent I have also looked at the work of atypical populations, mentally handicapped children, autistic children and also emotionally disturbed children. I think that my research findings in general have stood the test of time in terms of the findings. But I have to qualify it somewhat by saying that since developmental psychology isn't really a coherent, unified field there are very different schools within psychology and, for example, colleagues who work from the perspective of Piaget or the neo-Piagetians probably don't agree with my interpretation of the findings. They would accept the data themselves, and they quote them often

enough, but in terms of their interpretation they differ from mine. I think that that's a very productive thing. It keeps me going, keeps others going in terms of designing other kinds of studies that may be pertinent to it.

**Smith: Well, what are some of the contributions that you regard as most significant in your work if you look back on your work and some of the findings and interpretations that you think most contributed to the field?**

Golomb: Well, there are two different domains. One is child art, which I just spoke about. The other one is pretense play. I think, in terms of child art, I do think that I have broadened the field. I think before my work it was rare to come across research on composition, maybe something on spatial relations, but again, spatial relations were always tied to Piagetian notions of conceptual development. And I think my efforts to look systematically at many different variables probably counts as one of the contributions that I have made. And I think another major contribution is probably my highlighting the diversity that exists at each age level, there isn't a single prototype that really is characteristic or typical of a four or five or six year old, and that the effects of the media, and of instructions, and the motivation of the child, let alone talent -- incredibly important -- so you can find, for example, talented children who at the age of three, four or five produce drawings of striking realism and competence that many adolescents might in fact be eager to attain, and clearly their cognitive capacities are not that of an adolescent. Vice-versa, most adolescents actually have reached a plateau in their development and they are not able to draw in a realistic fashion or create interesting compositions. Artistic development is a very rich field, of course, and it is something that connects a child to the adult world. Art is going to be significant throughout the whole life cycle. And the very fact that talent and motivation play such an important role in drawing militates against using any single drawing as an index of either the emotional status of the person or the cognitive status. It is, I think, an important warning for us when we come and look at the drawings. On the other hand, it's a very rich field to explore the meaning children attribute to their work. For many children, for example, their artwork is kind of a world they create. It's a world that they are in charge of. It's their autonomy to make and to unmake, to exercise a lot of power and take control of a slice of their life that, otherwise, they don't have vis-à-vis the adults. So I think--

**Smith: And how about in your work on imagination?**

Golomb: --well--

**Smith: What would you consider some of the most important significant contributions?**

Golomb: What are significant contributions there? I think, once again, I looked at imaginative development as a unique human phenomenon that shows a great deal of creativity and intelligence from an early age. When you think about two-year-olds in whose life the manipulation of ordinary materials assumes such an important role, how things function, how they are put together, the answers about the mechanical aspects of the world are so important to them. At the same time they develop this ability to transform the world in imaginative ways that extend beyond the real world characteristics. And they don't confuse one realm with that of another, and I think that's where my contribution was. I think in general both the Piagetian as well as the psychodynamic assumptions implied that the young child has great difficulty escaping from this egocentric, irrational universe in which they live their daily lives. And I think that my work, or some of my work at least, has shown that certainly from the age of two and a half, three they move very easily between both worlds, and they don't confuse the boundaries that exist, and that both of them are very rule governed; both the artistic development is rule governed as well as imaginative development. Children do not arbitrarily substitute one object for another. They look for an optimal substitution, and in a way, once again, you see the impact maybe of Gestalt psychology here, that I look for things that seem to be rule governed. It's not arbitrary. It's not pure chance, not pure conditioning.

**Smith:** And one of the questions here is not only for you to comment on the contributions in your work that you think are most significant, but also on some shifts that occurred as you've been doing the studies.

Golomb: I think the only shifts that I could easily identify would have been the shift from a predominantly psychodynamic point of view to one that makes much more room for cognition and for genuine problem solving.

**Smith:** Right and that occurred very early actually.

Golomb: And that occurred certainly during my -- yes--

**Smith:** Graduate work--

Golomb: Yes, during my graduate years and thereafter. It's when I began to study children's pretense behavior. There wasn't a direct impact, but an indirect one, in that I assumed that we ought to look at the kinds of substitutions they make. So the very question arose because I assumed it's possible that, in fact, some rules governed this kind of behavior.

**Smith:** Right.

Golomb: So it's an indirect impact of Gestalt kind of reasoning.

**Smith:** And when did you start studying pretense?

Golomb: It was almost from the beginning--

**Smith:** Almost from the beginning?

Golomb: After I completed my dissertation I actually worked for -- I taught for a year at Wellesley College and already started some of that research. And then I went on a sabbatical leave my husband had. We went to Israel for a year. That's when I collected, again, work on children's drawing and sculpture. And when I came back I got an appointment at Brandeis University. And that's when I developed this interest in imaginative behavior on the one hand, and in artistic development on the other.

**Smith:** Okay. And some of the ways you were studying artistic development, as I remember, you were doing drawings, you had sculpture--

Golomb: Yes, yes.

**Smith:** --and other media, or the two main were comparing drawing and sculpture?

Golomb: Predominantly, but I used also items like puzzle forms or shapes that I defined as a puzzle for my young subjects. They weren't really puzzles, but designed to sort out what the effect of a medium would be on a representation.

**Smith:** Right.

Golomb: Okay? So--

**Smith:** Of the person, for example?

Golomb: For example, yes. So constantly designing tasks that might show us better this effect of instruction and what this could be, of the nature of the task that you present to the child, and so on.

**Smith:** And some of your earliest studies of pretense, what were some of the kinds of tasks you would give kids? Were you involving them and giving them objects to see and have them make up stories or what kind of--

**Golomb:** Well, we did different things. I think in the first study I wanted to find out to what extent these substitutions children engage in, which is at the heart, of course, of pretense play whether they are arbitrary or not, and so I designed a series of studies with some kind of theme, a pretense theme of "going to the beach", or there's "a hungry baby" and things of that nature. And of course, there comes a moment when the baby happens to be hungry and what are the objects that you can select from the display and, of course, you have a collection of items that range from optimal to less optimal, and you want to see what children will select and how much you can actually pressure them. For example, with "a hungry baby", after you're finished with the selection of all the bottles and with canned food, and there's only one left, let's say a brush or a toy car and so on, it's very interesting to see what children will do, because here's the adult, an authority, and says, "Well, the baby's still hungry. What can you do?" And they under protest will say, "Well, I'll take this car and I'll drive to the supermarket and I'll buy some food." You know? They will not use a car as a medium for food or a bunny that happens to be there. If it is a very neutral object like a block or something, yes, it can serve.

**Smith: Right.**

**Golomb:** Now, that was one section of it. The other part of the study had to do with puzzles, and so I removed one part of the puzzle, let's say the head of a mannequin or a number of other items, and again, I provided a series of substitutions. And what you discover is that on the object substitution tasks children's choices are much more restricted than on the pretense tasks. Okay? The parts have to fit, and if they don't fit, well, the next choice of a part becomes somewhat more humorous. Like, oh, he has a flower basket for a head or something like that. So it gives you an insight in what the natural inclinations are in terms of pretense play, what kind of substitution they will accept, which ones they will not accept even when there's a tremendous pressure because of the authority of the adult. They either outright refuse or give it a humorous twist. It elicits a clownish kind of behavior that can give some insight into humor at that age. So this is one of the earlier studies on substitutions. Others, of course, dealt later on with symbol formation. Some of the better ones, I think, the more interesting ones, have to do with the question of whether pretense, the ability to use pretense in these kinds of imaginary games actually employs a form of pseudo reversibility. Yes? The Piagetian concept of reversible thought operations. It seemed to me, almost from the beginning, that this ability to engage in pretense, to adopt an identity that isn't theirs and to assign one to your partner, to maintain this capacity during a short game or a longer game really employs some kind of reversible mental operation. So given this kind of intuition -- it's nothing better than an intuition -- I designed a series of studies where we selected four year olds, gave them a series of conservation of quantity tasks, which they, of course, failed -- usually they don't succeed, and if they did we didn't use them -- and then engaged them over several days -- actually five days -- in a series of pretense play activities, genuine play episodes where you engage them in pretense, not just you ask them about pretense, which many of the researchers do, but engage them in pretense *actions*. And then after maybe 10, 15 minutes of full engagement you begin to query them: Are you really so and so? Are you really a lion? No, but are you really? And what were you before? What are you after? What will you be when the game is over? So actually a series of simple questions asking children about the nature of their pretense identity, what they were before, what they are now, what will they be when the game is over. And lo and behold, on day five or six you give them conservation of quantity post tests and a large percentage of them become conservers even though you haven't trained them on it.

**Smith: Right.**

**Golomb:** So that was suggesting and providing some evidence for the fact that conservation attainment and the kind of cognition that underlies pretense transformations are very similar. It employs an early or pre reversibility type of thought. So I think that's one of the more interesting studies we did. And

then, of course, this was not enough, so I did half a dozen or more studies sorting this out, this complex set of variables. What happens if you have the child suggest a pretense theme, if you involve the children, well, what happens? How about posttests, not only a week later, but two weeks later, a month later and so on? So I mean, I think these are interesting studies that really show the cognitive underpinnings of pretense play. There are other studies that dealt with boundary crossings, the nature of these boundary crossings. The nature of the child's ability to differentiate between the emotions that are aroused in pretense play and the reality status; their clear distinction between the fact that they can get very scared by thinking there is a lion who's going to eat you, or attack you, and trying to end this theme as quickly as they can, and knowing it's not real. And you can see this in fairly young children, in a way, and they're not very different from adults, you know? If you think about it, adults will go to bed and suddenly they think, well, there's such a creaking sound. You know? Is it in my room? And I'm alone in the house; could there be someone under my bed? And they get scared stiff. And of course, they know the door was locked, it's not likely there's someone under the bed. They are as scared as the child who wants to end a pretense theme, not because they lose the boundary, but because the emotion itself is so powerful at that moment. So I think these are the kind of studies that I found interesting.

**Smith: One of the questions here is to reflect on some of the strengths and weaknesses of your research and theoretical contributions, the impact of your work, what you think its current status is. Any thoughts on that series of questions?**

Golomb: I think I mentioned to you before that, for example, in the field of child art and its development my findings probably have been generally accepted as data that everybody more or less has to kind of--

**Smith: Stood the test of time?**

Golomb: --take account of -- yes, stood the test of time. Their interpretations, as I mentioned before, may be very different. It is very interesting to me how strong the commitment to neo-Piagetian thinking is in that field. Yes? And probably something good could come out of that. So I have made my contributions, and it is also interesting that artists and people interested in the arts are often drawn to this kind of work, to this kind of interpretation. I think they feel they resonate to it while developmental psychologists are perhaps those who are more used to looking for clear correspondences across fields, and find it harder to accept that this is a different domain. Because, for example, look at the artwork of some autistic subjects, not the majority, not a great majority of them -- I did a study on autistic children that don't, by and large, have any greater artistic talent than other children of a similar, shall we say, mental age. However, you do find among some mentally retarded autistic individuals extraordinary talent, artistic talent. And clearly it doesn't provide any support for a simple correspondence to intellectual development.

**Smith: So your interpretation would be what in that case?**

Golomb: It's domain specific.

**Smith: --domain specific.**

Golomb: It's very domain specific, which doesn't mean that in ordinary development we don't have a tremendous degree of overlap across different domains. We do.

**Smith: Right. So you were really one of the earliest domain -- because that's also another very strong theme in a lot of--**

Golomb: Yes. But there's no doubt that, yes, that talent in a particular domain, that talent plays a tremendous role here. And I remember in my early work I read some of the interpretations on the first autistic savant that was being published as a reflection of abnormality. And it just didn't seem to do

justice to Nadia Comin; I just didn't find it convincing, but I had no way of really answering it. But then I discovered the work of a two year old who was extraordinarily talented and was a normal child, so I went out of my way to find him. And when I saw him I said, "Ah, of course. That's the answer to Nadia." Of course, it wasn't per se. But perhaps this is the way I'm functioning, that I have some hunches, and when I find some data that seem to support it, to design a study that more systematically looks at it.

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: So the work on talented children, which I have done, shows also tremendous diversity and the impact of the culture, of course. I haven't said much about that, but that's obvious too. So on the one hand you have, early on in development, certain universals, and maybe in that sense I'm quite aligned with that position, and my work highlights universals in early development as well as the impact of cultural norms.

**Smith: So what are some of the universals?**

Golomb: Well, the early forms that are basically the same across time and space.

**Smith: Right.**

Golomb: And variations on that theme, of course, are significant. While you can see the cultural influence, the peer influence, the basic structural unit is very similar early on. So now in terms of what are my contributions to the field of pretense play, I think perhaps it fits into the trend in developmental psychology where we "rehabilitate" the child. The rehabilitation started in the '60s and '70s to look at the child not only as a defective human--

**Smith: Right, right, right.**

Golomb: --little human, but as actually a very promising human being that begins to -- that has certain characteristics and skills from the very beginning and how they change over time, of course. And again, are my contributions recognized in that field? To some extent. But there are some studies we have done that very clearly support some of the contentions I have made, but I look at the literature -- they will still report earlier findings as if nothing has happened in the meantime.

**Smith: Okay. We're going to stop this for a moment.**

**Alright. So we're continuing with the interview with Claire Golomb and I'm starting a second tape. So Claire, let's just see. What published or unpublished manuscripts do you think best represent your thinking about child development? If you want to give us some favorites of yours.**

Golomb: Yes, I do have some favorites I must say. Let's see. In the domain of child art it's a 1973 publication in *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, which is called "Children's Representation of the Human Figure: The Effects of Models, Media and Instructions." That's certainly one of my earlier works that looked at the effects of media, instruction, and a child's understanding of the nature of the task, and provides good evidence that children do not draw from an internal template, but that the drawing varies significantly. So--

**Smith: With the media?**

Golomb: With the media and with instructions. And--

**Smith: Okay. What were some of those--**

Golomb: --with the nature of the task. For example--

**Smith: What were some of the variations in the instructions?**

Golomb: For example, if you ask a child to dictate to you how you should draw a human being it's going to be very different from what they draw themselves. If you dictate to them it's also different. If you present them, for example, with an incomplete figure, let's say consisting of a circle with dots, they will draw something very different, and so on and so on. So you can demonstrate that the nature of the task and the media -- the media could be two dimensional, three-dimensional, they could be something in between, like with flat cardboard cutouts -- children do different things on the same theme. So if you keep the theme constant you can see the variations, and also the children's interpretations of what they do. For example, they make selections of what they like best about certain figures and sometimes they will select a figure that, for example, consists of a head, facial features and a set of lines that serve both as outline and legs and doesn't have a separately delineated body. And they will say, "Well, I like this best, because it has a slim body." So it's clear the body isn't forgotten, but a kind of artistic or aesthetic judgment is being made.

**Smith: And why was that one of your favorite papers? That was one that you picked and you did a nice job sort of summarizing some of the interesting things. But what made you pick that one?**

Golomb: Well, that's one of the first. Then--

**Smith: Okay. Another?**

Golomb: --let me tell you -- well, then there is a more formal book called *Young Children's Sculpture and Drawing: A Study in Representation Development*, which was published in '74. There is also a book on case studies of artistically gifted children, *The Development of Artistically Gifted Children*. I like that very much. Then there are two -- so I'm talking about books which summarize basically a lot of work.

**Smith: So that book, the second that you mentioned, was the book that was published when?**

Golomb: 1974 by Harvard University Press.

**Smith: Oh, okay.**

Golomb: Yes. The one on artistically gifted children was published in '95 by Lawrence Erlbaum.

**Smith: And that was case studies? A lot of your work has been sort of--**

Golomb: These are selected case studies. Basically I have only two case studies in there myself and an introduction, but I asked different colleagues to make contributions and it's a very nice book. Again, it shows the diversity of the development of artistically gifted children and it is something that was absent at that time. It was really a first in the field.

**Smith: So how long a span of time did the case studies try to cover for each child? Was there--**

Golomb: Well, let me see. Some of them are really very good longitudinal studies, come to think of it, the majority are very extensive longitudinal studies. Yes.

**Smith: Yes, because we don't have as many of those as we need.**

Golomb: That's right. Actually, they're all longitudinal studies. And one of them is a contribution by the author on Nadia, the autistic savant, with a follow up of what has happened to Nadia. So it's a very interesting and challenging case, because of course, in adulthood she lost her previous skills. Then there are two other books -- and I'm talking about books rather than articles because they summarize much work that has been going on -- one is called *Child Art in Context: A Cultural and Comparative*

*Perspective*. It was published in 2002 by APA. And the other one is a second edition of a previously published book called *The Child's Creation of a Pictorial World*. It's an expanded edition and was published by Lawrence Erlbaum.

**Smith: In what year?**

Golomb: 2004. So I find that perhaps these are the major ones that addressed many aspects of the field I have devoted so much time to. Now in the domain of make believe play there's an early publication, which I like a lot, and I think it is still significant, published in 1977 in *Developmental Psychology* with Cheryl Cornelius -- she was an honors student -- called "Symbolic Play and Its Cognitive Significance." That's the one that deals with pretense play as a form of reversible mental operations, and it's the first one that actually provides very nice data for it, because until that time there were quite a number of colleagues who thought that pretense play did not have some cognitive significance. The question was how to demonstrate it. And this is a neat demonstration because in these pretense play activities we engage children in there is no reference to conservation. And then if you give them a conservation posttest and suddenly they have it. It's a challenge, yes. Then there is another one published in 1982 in *The Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* called "Play and Cognition: Studies in Pretense Play and Conservation of Quantity," and that summarizes a lot of studies in this domain. There's also one with Lisa Galasso, who also was an honors student, "Make Believe and Reality: Explorations of the Imaginary Realm" (*Developmental Psychology*, 1995), and that's the one that deals with Harris's model, and the extent to which children, even under conditions of emotional arousal, and sometimes negative emotional arousal, can maintain the distinction between pretense and reality. And so it's, I think, a very interesting study. And finally I would mention the one with Jamie Aronson, "Preschoolers' Understanding of Pretense and Presumption of Congruence between Action and Representation" published in *Developmental Psychology*. Now this is one--

**Smith: And the year of that one is?**

Golomb: That was '99. Yes. That deals with a very, I think, fundamental question about pretense play. To what extent is pretense play merely a form of cognition, which means -- and I don't want to downgrade cognition by saying merely which means do children clearly know that they can only pretend if they have a model for it? Or for example, do children draw upon this kind of tremendous freedom they think they have in transforming whatever they want and in whatever way they want? So it's a very different approach towards what the nature of pretense really may be. And of course, pretense has many aspects to it. And in this study we challenged the notion that pretense imagination is devoid of action. We think there is a distinction to be drawn between pretense play and imagining an event as fantasy. In fantasy, perhaps, you can evoke an imaginary event without any reference to action. But pretense by definition, at least by my definition, involves action. And so to the extent that action is a very vital component of pretense some theorists might consider it a flawed performance. And I think this particular article deals with the issue whether children who engage in genuine pretense play, and understand it, can differentiate between action and mental processes. We think that in pretense play the mental aspect of it is very intimately connected to an action. So I think that's in and of itself an interesting -- a challenging question.

**Smith: Great. And then it has here: any contributions the most wrong-headed?**

Golomb: That I've made? I can't think of it. There probably are.

**Smith: And then please reflect on the experience with research -- anything about research funding?**

Golomb: Well, I would say that I could have done better. Most of my funding has come usually from institutions, let's say NIH funding to an institute, academic institution, to a university. And that is to a large extent because when I studied these two domains they weren't very fashionable. And it was very hard to get funding for looking at drawings unless, again, you tried to link and show some clinical

diagnostic application, which I wasn't going to do. And the same was true with pretense. So I could have been more flexible, because in the '80s, for example, NIH was interested in mental retardation, so if I had been willing to link my work on drawing, for example, with populations of mental retardation it might have been possible. But given that time was kind of limited and that wasn't the focus of my research, I wasn't flexible enough to do that. And once I applied and got a fairly large grant from NIE on pretense play and its educational implications only to hear -- and I got a notification that it was number one on their list, and then the Reagan administration came in and changed the priorities. They didn't want to deal with young children. So in a way I could have done better in terms of getting outside funding, but given that I was focused on what I wanted to do I didn't really pursue it. That's in terms of outside funding. Yes.

**Smith: All right. Institutional contributions I think -- is there something else you want to say about personal research contributions that we didn't cover?**

Golomb: I don't think so.

**Smith: Okay. So in what institutions have you worked?**

Golomb: Okay. I was an Instructor in Psychology at Wellesley College from '69 to '70, and then from '71 to '74 I was an Assistant Professor at Brandeis University. In '74 I came to UMass Boston and I stayed there until the present time.

**Smith: Was that the Harbor campus at--**

Golomb: Pardon me?

**Smith: --was it the downtown campus at that point or the Harbor campus?**

Golomb: No, it was the Harbor campus, yes, in '74. When did you come?

**Smith: So I came in '79. Yes, okay. So you were only there a little--**

Golomb: Yes, five years is all, yes. Yes.

**Smith: And so then you stayed there?**

Golomb: I retired in 2002.

**Smith: 2002? So I don't know if this next one is relevant. Right?**

Golomb: Well, there are some questions about what courses I taught. Did you want to deal with that?

**Smith: Yes, that's three. If they're not at NIMH or any of those kinds of things, please describe your--**

Golomb: No, I didn't really, except that, of course, they called upon me for review projects and that I have done. And no, I can say that if APA is considered an institution, of course, I've had some commitment to Division 10 and I served in various functions within that division, for example, twice as their delegate to the Council of Representatives of APA. But no, other than being a reviewer I wasn't involved in any of these institutional kinds of frameworks and I didn't contribute much there.

**Smith: Okay. So let's talk about teaching, because I know a lot about you as a teacher, Claire, and I'd love to hear your side of it. I mean, I know you've taught some fabulous course at UMass Boston. We really miss not having some of these courses taught there now. I guess we don't want to go on record for all the things that don't get taught these days, but maybe describe some of your**

experiences as a teacher of child development research, and it might be interesting even for people to know some of the very distinctive courses that you developed, spearheaded and taught. Because I don't know if they're all that standard at other institutions.

Golomb: Well, maybe beyond the kind of courses on infancy and child development, humanistic psychology--

**Smith: So you did teach humanistic development--**

Golomb: --of course I did.

**Smith: --for people to sort of--**

Golomb: Yes, and I enjoyed teaching that. And actually at Brandeis I taught Psychopathology of Childhood Personality Development. I taught the Honors Seminar at UMass. I taught Representational Development with an emphasis on the development of child art. I taught a course on imaginative development and a field course in early child development. That was actually a very demanding but quite an interesting course, placing students -- because it was a combination of placing students in a childcare center with an agreement I had made that they could spend a certain amount of time collecting data. So the course dealt with data collection and interpretation, which was very good. And then they also had the practical experience of working with small children. That was very demanding, but a very nice course actually.

**Smith: Well, and you of course had many honors students, I know, who worked under -- some of them you were--**

Golomb: Of course.

**Smith: --mentioning in those papers that--**

Golomb: Honors theses, and master's, one doctoral dissertation, yes. Actually a number of master's theses in our department, but also in the Critical and Creative Thinking Program, I think four or five that came my way. I must say that I enjoyed teaching and invested a lot of time in terms of training students, supervising their work, helping them develop research projects for the different courses I taught. Actually, many, many, many projects. Each student in most of the courses had to develop some kind of empirical project too. So that needed supervision. And--

**Smith: Well, I know because we had the Barnett Prize and you were more likely than anyone else to have people who submitted things, because your students were more often than anybody else writing these long papers and then you would work with them to revise it. You know? So it was this kind of real commitment for them to read original research, to do surveys and then to actually -- you seemed to have this endless corpus of child art data for them to analyze too.**

Golomb: Right, right, and I would sometimes -- and certainly if they had an oral presentation they would come to my home, and I would observe their presentation, and help them to articulate their thesis and gain confidence in what they were doing. Yes. And actually I must say that this investment in students' development, in their critical thinking and the ability to revise was rewarding. It was time consuming and also I think I cared about their personal lives and was available to them in many different ways, so it was time consuming, but I always felt that my commitment to teaching was an obligation really. It's not only that it gave me pleasure, but I felt that I was hired predominantly to be a good teacher, and I don't think I resented having to spend the time, because in every course they had to write papers. And I enjoyed seeing them develop and become more -- in some ways become infatuated with the subject, and also able to present it in a coherent fashion. Perhaps I would have preferred, off and on, if I had gotten a course load reduction. That would have been very nice, but I didn't resent the time I devoted to teaching; it was my choice.

**Smith: You probably taught two to three courses a semester?**

Golomb: There were always three. And I can't quite believe it. I look at other places. Of course, at Brandeis I never taught more than two. At most universities there are only two.

**Smith: Each semester we might say for the record. You were doing six a year.**

Golomb: Yes, that's right.

**Smith: With very intensive--**

Golomb: That's right.

**Smith: --and with students who came from a wide range of backgrounds and preparedness to actually engage--**

Golomb: Yes, well it was interesting. You know, for some students it became really a major turning point in their life. They changed direction. I had, for example, one student who asked me at the beginning of the semester if he could sit in on a child development course, I think, which I taught two sessions of. Could he sit in on two sessions? And I said, "That is boring, why would you want to?" He said, "Well, I haven't been in school for a long time and I don't feel my brain is working very well. I need to sit in." So he did. In the end he wrote an honors thesis -- and honestly this is not for me, but for someone else -- a very good one and occasionally I've heard from him over the years. And it's kind of gratifying. Yes.

**Smith: So you've mentioned some of the courses. Any tensions between teaching and research in the field of child development or any--**

Golomb: No, I don't think so. It was just a time constraint. But I always felt that I was hired to be a teacher. And of course, the research was something I did for my own satisfaction, which is not objectively quite true, but that's the way I approached it, that research I pursue because I find it interesting, it gives me great satisfaction, it's stimulating, it answers the questions that are constantly kind of bubbling up. And the teaching I think is essential and certainly you could say that UMass was a teaching institution. And maybe that was one of the reasons why I found it originally, when I accepted the position, attractive to work with students who are not as privileged as the ones that I went to school with, or at Brandeis.

**Smith: And one of the questions here about describing experiences in applied child development research -- is there an applied arm to some of your research?**

Golomb: Well, it might be. It's not necessarily something I pursued, but occasionally a kindergarten teacher will call me up and say, "Well, I have read this article of yours and we have tried to apply some of your suggestions and we found it works beautifully." And in fact I went once to a kindergarten in Connecticut and saw what they were doing, and part of the research project that I submitted to NIE had to do with a follow-up on what they were doing and putting it through a more strenuous test of how effective it was by seeing what those kids would do the year after they leave kindergarten and so on. But the funding was rescinded.

**Smith: So yes, Claire, you had another sentence or two you wanted to say about your applied child developmental research?**

Golomb: Right. Perhaps this could come under the heading of applied since all of our research was always conducted in either the school system or in preschools and childcare centers. We always made a commitment to the institution that, once the data were in, we would come back and report to them on

the findings and see to what extent they were meaningful to them from an educational perspective. And this is what we did; this was part of our principles. We always did it. And with the exception of the institutions for emotionally disturbed children and for autistic children, where we only came back and reported to the staff, we usually reported to staff and to parents. And in some cases, I think, parents were quite impressed with the fact that we took their children's so called scribbles seriously, and that we could find meaning in them. And I think in a minor way it probably had some educational significance.

**Smith: Good. Thank you. And now I think SRCD wants to know more about your involvement with SRCD. So do you remember when you joined?**

Golomb: I don't remember when I joined, and I must, to my regret, admit that I only stayed a member for about maybe five or six years, and then I dropped it but continued to attend some meetings, but I wasn't a member anymore. And I must say that I regret that. I think that my commitments to Jean Piaget Society, to the APA, to Divisions 7 and 10 were just at times too much, so I dropped it. And I think it wasn't a very wise decision. I think in the developmental field it is probably -- is really the outstanding organization and the most productive in terms of their meetings.

**Smith: Do you remember any early contacts with the Society that you had or with whom?**

Golomb: Not really.

**Smith: Okay. Can you remember anything about the first biennial meeting that you attended? It's a long time ago, right?**

Golomb: I don't remember which one was the first, yes. I don't remember.

**Smith: Any one that stands out in your mind even if it wasn't the first?**

Golomb: No, I don't remember which ones I would particularly single out, no. I can't say that. This is also true for other meetings that I attended. I can't say which ones of the Jean Piaget Society made this outstanding impression. They were all interesting and provided a forum for sharing ideas and presentations.

**Smith: So can you say something about some of your participation in the different scientific meetings and the publications with the Society?**

Golomb: Of SRCD?

**Smith: Mm-hmm.**

Golomb: Not really.

**Smith: Okay. Or in other non-governmental -- okay, so we'll maybe skip over that. So were you involved in SRCD governance or no?**

Golomb: No, not really.

**Smith: All right. And maybe you don't have particular opinions about the most important changes to occur in SRCD, its activities?**

Golomb: I can't really. I can't speak to that, yes.

**Smith: Okay. So let's move on to your perception of the history of the larger field during the years you've participated. Are you seeing some major continuities or discontinuities in your field? And**

**have your views concerning the importance of various issues changed? So step back and give us a kind of bird's eye view.**

Golomb: I think there has been a tremendous expansion in the field since I graduated with a degree in psychology. I think very exciting things have happened in, as I mentioned to you before, infancy research, for example, on perception and cognition in infants and a vision about the nature of infancy that's kind of relevant to the research that I'm doing. I'm not even talking about extremely interesting research on twins and so on. That's outside of the area in which I was deeply involved. But I think that particularly the kind of new directions that have come in with research on theory of mind I find extremely interesting and, again, the field has branched out in so many directions that it's very hard to see a coherent unifying theme, and maybe that is not necessary and it's maybe also too early, but by and large what I sensed when I wrote my dissertation, or maybe even earlier, that it's time to think about the rehabilitation of the child, clearly has come to be. Are there any specific questions you would like to raise about the field?

**Smith: Hmm, well, what are your hopes and fears for the future of the field?**

Golomb: I don't think I have specific fears in terms of the field. Maybe I do believe that knowledge in and of itself is a good thing. Of course, knowledge in the service of bad political philosophies can lead to very negative results, but I don't expect this in terms of psychology. If I think about the field in which I have not done research, but which is related to my interest, which is clinical psychology, I would think that the direction that some of the research has been going in terms of therapeutic interventions are probably not benefiting the patient. They have some serious--

**Smith: Well, can you say a little bit more of what you mean by that?**

Golomb: Well, I think what these days are calls for research-oriented evidence-based findings very often involves short term interventions, and we seem to have forgotten that human relations take time, and that this kind of philosophy that we can treat severe depressions and personality disorders by allocating eight to ten sessions, presumably under the heading of it being research supported evidence, has done some harm to the field. But that's not really the domain of my research, but given that I also have an interest in clinical psychology and in mental health, I think that it's not a direction I see as being very productive. Clearly we want to ask for evidence, but narrowly based evidence without much of a follow up I think has not been very helpful to the population that's in need of therapy. But in terms of the developmental field I don't see actually any potential harm in terms of new research that comes up. I even think that research on racial similarities and differences need not necessarily have ill consequences. I think we ought to pursue whatever we are interested in, and the political implications are on a different level.

**Smith: Right. Well, I had mentioned to you I think that a lot of the things that you had started and have been involved with from the beginning, like concern with domain specificity, variability, looking at the positive aspects both in people with mental illnesses and also with young children, are really very center stage. They weren't so--**

Golomb: They were not at the time.

**Smith: --at the time and so those trends it must be gratifying for you to see--**

Golomb: Yes, they are, definitely.

**Smith: --to some extent that that has been picked up on. One of the things that also is very much center stage in a lot of developmental work is about cultural variability. And you started to comment on something about that earlier and I think maybe we switched gears. Was there anything else you wanted to comment on that or is that not a theme or issue that--**

Golomb: I have looked at some cultural variability, but again--

**Smith: --or similarities, yes.**

Golomb: --right, you are pointing in a direction I'm pursuing that the variability that I have seen on the one hand reminds us that development isn't just a single course, regardless in which field of development we are looking, that there are many different forms of adaptation, even from an evolutionary perspective, and not a single format to be pursued. But in addition, my own work has pointed out that underlying this kind of cultural diversity there are really some universals in terms of structural characteristics of drawings. And in all likelihood that is true for pretense play too, but I must say that my work on imaginative development has been predominantly in western societies and not cross-cultural.

**Smith: Okay. And the last set of questions on personal notes, do you want to tell us something about your personal interests or your family, especially the ways in which they may have had a bearing on your scientific interests and contributions?**

Golomb: Well, I would think that having children clearly has had a big impact on the kind of questions I have asked, because they are the best teachers. And perhaps to a large extent they encouraged this notion that young minds are very active and probing, and that early on they develop some sense of what the mind is about. And I think in that sense they have had quite a stimulating impact on the questions I have asked. If you sit in on the conversation between a three and four year old about their drawings and the criticism that the younger one, who barely draws a tadpole, makes of the drawing of the older one, who is quite accomplished, you recognize that there is a very rich and almost sophisticated understanding that is not necessarily verbally articulated in the format in which we adults seem to think, but that indicates a tremendous understanding of mind and of the nature of the kind of abstraction that's involved both in pretense play and in artistic activities.

**Smith: Thank you very much.**

Golomb: Thanks for listening to me so patiently.