Rebecca Benaroya Transcript

ROZ BORNSTEIN: Hi. This is Roz Bornstein, and the date today is July 17th, 2001. I am meeting today with Becky Benaroya for the Jewish Women's Archive, Weaving Women's Words Project. Becky and I are meeting to gather her oral history for the Weaving Women's Words Project. Becky, do I have your permission to interview and tape you today?

BECKY BENAROYA: Yes, you certainly have.

RB: Thank you very much. Why don't we start with where and when you were born.

BB: Well, I was born in Seattle, at the Providence Hospital, January 14th, 1923. I think I was a Sunday morning baby. My dad thought that's always important to put down the day and the time.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: And who are you named after?

BB: My father's mother, which was Rivka, but I was named Rebecca.

RB: That's wonderful. And where did you grow up you?

BB: In Seattle, on 310 19th Avenue. It was a long block with lots of neighbors, a few Sephardic and a few Ashkenazim. It was a wonderful block to grow up in.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes, wonderful neighbors. We still keep in touch.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: Who lived in your household growing up?

BB: It was my parents. Then I had a brother that was a year older and two younger sisters. I think I was born in another house, now that I think about it – no, I was born in that house. My brother was born in another house that my parents were renting before they bought this house. The other children were also born when we were living there.

RB: And what were their names?

BB: My brother was named Sam. My sister, Nellie, was named after my mother's mother, and Rita was named after a sister that my father had that had died. They name after living relatives and relatives that have passed away.

RB: And what were your parents' names?

BB: Do you want my mother's maiden name?

RB: Sure.

BB: Dona Benoun – Dona (Adatto?) Benoun. My father was Yuda Benoun, but they called him Joe when got here.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes. It was Yuda, and then they figured it might as well be Joe. So he was known as Joe Benoun. That's how he signed everything legal.

RB: Do you know where your parents were born?

BB: Yes. My mother was born in Tekirdag, Turkey. My father was born on the Island of Rhodes. That island has changed hands three different times, but it was Turkish when he was born there.

RB: And how did your parents meet and settle in Seattle? Do you know much about –?

BB: Yes. My grandparents, my mother's parents, came to Seattle. I think they arrived there only because my grandfather had a sister, Esther Levy – Esther and David Levy. I think that's why they came to Seattle. It really is a long way to go. I'm certainly glad that they did come out here. It's such a beautiful city. It was during World War I when my mother had three brothers, and they were going to be serving in the war. The parents did not want them to. So that's their reason for leaving Turkey when they did, long before the Holocaust. My father had been married before. It's sort of a personal thing. Anyway, he left right after he found that he wasn't going to stay there where his wife was, so he came to America and decided that he would make his fortune in Seattle. Then he would return to the Island of Rhodes and live like a rich man. Then came the Depression, and he lost all his money. He had been saving and depositing his money in the Bank of Italy. He didn't have any money. In the meantime, he was married and had four children. We always heard that we were going to be moving to the Island of Rhodes because it was such a beautiful island. Well, then, the Second World War and the Holocaust, and everybody in his family was wiped out. It makes you feel like there's a reason for everything. We didn't end up going back, which was just fine with me. But he never went back to see his beautiful island. And how they met – one of my father's neighbors from the Island of Rhodes happened to be a neighbor of my mother's. She thought they should meet, so she introduced them. He came to call. In those days, instead of passing candy, they served homemade preserves.

RB: Could you describe that custom briefly?

BB: Yes. It was served on a beautiful silver tray, and these beautiful crystal dishes with a variety of different kinds of homemade jams. They were a real treat. And then the beautiful crystal glasses with their silver spoons – you're supposed to take a bite of the sweets, which is very sweet, and then you drink water. [laughter] Well, my mother was passing this tray. My mother, being very tiny, and this great big silver tray, and carrying it – it was very cumbersome. She's nervous besides because she's meeting this gentleman. He served himself a bite of sweets and then made a toast: "May our lives be sweet." She almost dropped the tray. [laughter] That was it, they looked at each other, saw what he liked, liked what he saw, and that was an official engagement.

RB: Oh, my gosh.

BB: [laughter] I know, it's wonderful.

RB: It's a wonderful story.

BB: But that's the way it was then.

RB: Could you describe a little bit more about your parents, their backgrounds, and roles in the family? What do you remember about –?

BB: Their roles?

RB: Well, what do you remember about them growing up, you know, as a young child?

BB: Well, it seemed like my father was the man that made the rules in the house. And whenever we misbehaved, she was going to tell Dad. That really got our attention. He was gentle and loving, [laughter] but she made him sound like he was a real threat. And that kept us in order. My dad worked very hard. When he came to this country he started, I think, shining shoes. Then worked in the public market. And he lived with the Francos, Dorothy Franco's parents.

RB: Marco and Bolissa?

BB: Yes. I think that's when he was seeing my mother. In those days, my dad being from the Island of Rhodes, my mother from Turkey, they had the class distinction.

RB: Is that right?

BB: They said that he was marrying beneath him. He said, "She's a fine woman." We never grew up having a prejudice that so many families experienced. So that's where he lived until he got married. So he had this market. I think he worked for Mr. Hanan. Then he got his own produce stand, and then he bought a tavern, and from there, he went into real estate. It was in that order. So he worked real hard.

RB: And your mom was in the home at that time? Was she a homemaker?

BB: Oh, definitely. Cooking and baking and catering to all of us, whatever we liked. Everything was cooked to order – a short-order cook. My sister liked coffee. I liked milk. The other one wanted cocoa, hot chocolate. She baked before we got up, just so we'd eat. [laughter] So, yes, her whole job was to take care of the children.

RB: How would you describe your home? Was it a typical Jewish home?

BB: Oh, very, very.

RB: How so?

BB: My grandfather was a very religious practicing Jew. My mother was brought up like that. So we kept a kosher home. We went to Talmud Torah. My grandfather came over every day, and he'd sit and read his prayer book. So I was brought up like that. And then he had time to play with us. He was a wonderful grandfather.

RB: And what was his name?

BB: Yosef Adatto. He was very highly respected in the community. He was a wonderful man.

RB: Do you have any favorite stories about him or memories?

BB: Oh, he always gave us little stories. Instead of disciplining us, he'd sit down and tell us little stories with a message behind it. He was so patient. He was the one that taught me to tie my shoes and how to fly a kite. He'd teach me how to roller skate and help me with my bicycle. He was there. If you need another person to turn that rope for jump rope, he was there. Yes, he was a wonderful grandfather. I knew how special he was. I used to think how lucky I was.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes. He would come to our house from morning services, and he always had something in his pocket for me. I'd wait for him. I'd see him blocks away, and I'd run down to him. I was little. He'd hike me up on his shoulders. I couldn't wait to get in his pocket. [laughter] He always had something special. It wasn't money, it was just a loving token.

RB: Did he have a close relationship with all the children, or did you feel –?

BB: He did. He didn't show partiality, but I related more to him. I must have needed him more. Because I think my mother used an awful lot of energy on me, and I needed my grandfather's [laughter] unconditional love. My mother was always – never perfect enough, whatever we did. Then I was a mother to my sisters. She turned all her energies on me, then it was my turn to take care of them. My grandfather, when he came, was my savior. He was so wonderful. He understood when my mother was getting tough on me, he'd talk to her in Turkish.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yeah, like, “Back off.” [laughter] So I think I felt more special, more attached to him than the others. But I know he didn’t show partiality. I’d just look for him.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: What a wonderful man.

BB: He was. And he died when he was in his early sixties. He fell off one of the stairs at the synagogue. He cracked a rib and was taken to the hospital, and he died of pneumonia. They didn’t have antibiotics then. So he went very fast.

RB: How did his death impact you? How old were you?

BB: I was about fifteen. I was starting to see Jack, who is now my husband. I always wished Jack had met him and known him. I did miss him.

RB: Those kinds of relationships are very special.

BB: Yes.

RB: They last over a lifetime.

BB: He was my role model.

RB: What values did he teach you? Which has stayed with you? [Recording paused.] So I was wondering, which values your grandfather held and passed down to you that really had a lifelong impact?

BB: Well, I felt it was so important – as I’m thinking about my grandfather – he didn’t tell me about not being judgmental. But I could tell after I thought about what I loved about him it was a live-and-let-live-attitude. He never thought that money was important. He

always felt that it's a gift while you're on this earth. The most important thing is a good name; that's what you leave when you leave this earth. I thought about that a lot. I think when you're looking for a mate, you think about those qualities and hope that they have the same feelings about it. He always said, "They judge you by the company you keep." These were little things that he would tell us when we were little, but they stayed with me. How sweet he was when we did things for him. He taught me how to make Turkish coffee. He always liked his Turkish coffee after he did his prayers. He taught me how to make it. Even if it wasn't good, he'd tell me how delicious it was because I made it. Oh, that special caring. You know how parents are busy with their housekeeping and problems? Well, my grandfather devoted all his time just one-on-one. That is special for any child.

RB: That sounds like unconditional love that he gave.

BB: Yes, right.

RB: That's marvelous.

BB: So I always think of him with very fond memories. I was very close to him.

RB: So was he present, then, for holidays?

BB: Well, my mother did the holiday dinner.

RB: Is that right?

BB: And he led the service.

RB: So for Shabbat or for [inaudible]?

BB: No, not for Shabbat. He was home with his wife, my grandmother. Passover and all the high holidays were observed at our house.

RB: That's great. Do you remember celebrating a special Rosh Hashanah Seder for Rosh Hashanah? Did you have that?

BB: You know what I remember, what stays in my mind, is Passover, how long it took, the services. We didn't mind because my grandfather was doing the service. We'd be falling asleep. [laughter] Then we'd wake up because we had parts to say. It was always very orderly. My grandfather led the service, rather than my father. My grandfather, they did him the honor.

RB: Do you remember any special customs that were Sephardic or traditions that – for example, do you remember how the ten plagues were named? Did you turn away while they were recited? Did you sprinkle grape juice on a plate?

BB: Yes, I think my grandfather did that, and then passed the water around, where you wash your hands.

RB: Yes.

BB: Yes. It's so long ago, I'd forgotten about that.

RB: Did you carry matzoh in a cloth on your back with the afikomen?

BB: Yes, yes. Like you're walking with a burden.

RB: Yes.

BB: And you still hid a part of it, so you can go look for it. Yes. It was very traditional.

RB: What about the Seder plate?

BB: You know, I don't remember.

RB: Okay.

BB: But I'm sure it was all very according to the practice. Well, I still do that.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes, so I must have remembered something from there. I think it calls for a shank bone, but my mother had a chicken wing. I think that was the difference. We didn't have horseradish, which is traditional. We had parsley.

RB: And how did you prepare the egg?

BB: The eggs were different. Yes, the Ashkenazim baked their eggs, and they dried out. These are boiled with onion skins, a little oil, and a little salt, and the eggs are very tasty. You just cooked them on a simmer – very low heat, overnight.

RB: And that's how they browned them?

BB: That's how they browned them. They were called baked eggs, but they weren't baked, they were boiled – simmered. And they were, I think, a lot better. I've had the other ones, they're dried, but they're browned. And that's traditional. The Sephardic menu is so different as well. We didn't ever have gefilte fish. We had salmon with an egg, lemon sauce, and parsley.

RB: Sounds delicious.

BB: [laughter] My daughter-in-law and her sister said, "Why are we making this gefilte fish? Nobody likes it. Get your mother-in-law's recipe" [laughter]

RB: What about charoset? How do you make – you know?

BB: Like my mother's. She did the dates and raisins and grated apple, and a little Passover wine and ground nuts.

RB: Sounds delicious.

BB: Yes.

RB: So it wasn't a – I know the Ashkenazic community will make it with apples and honey.

BB: Right. It's different. Some even put a little vinegar, or they cook it. This is just dried fruits, the dates – you can put apricots, raisins.

RB: Sounds great.

BB: Yes. The apple sort of loosens it up a little bit because it would be very, very sticky. And a little wine, again, to make the right consistency. It's very good.

RB: Sounds wonderful.

BB: We make extra because my son Alan has to have some to take home with him.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: Any other special foods that were prepared for Passover?

BB: Yes. The leek patties. [laughter]

RB: Can you describe those?

BB: Sure.

RB: What were they called?

BB: Keftes de Prasa. My mother always added a little extra onion to the leeks. Now, I don't know if that was for flavor or to stretch it [laughter] and a boiled potato that she diced up – cooked it with the leeks. Then, after it finished cooking – it had to be tender –

you drained it, got as much liquid out, then mixed lots of parsley and eggs and matzoh meal, and salt and pepper to taste, and formed them into a patty and fried them. They're very good. If you like onion – everybody that likes onion loves these little leek patties. That's a traditional dish. And artichokes prepared sweet and sour.

RB: Could you describe that?

BB: Yes. You cut it down to the heart. You take all the outer leaves out, save some of the tender parts, and put that in the sauce. You cook the artichokes – lots of lemon, a little sugar, and salt. That's like an appetizer, serve it cold.

RB: Is that before or during the Seder or after the meal?

BB: Actually, we didn't serve it during the Seder. There were too many other courses. But that would be another course, like during the week, when you're observing the Passover. If you got tired of fish, you'd do the artichoke. It would be a starter.

RB: It sounds wonderful.

BB: Yes.

RB: And how would you eat it?

BB: Cold.

RB: Just with your fingers?

BB: Oh, no. It's already – you're down to the heart.

RB: Okay.

BB: So, a fork.

RB: That's right.

BB: Yes, you don't have to worry about the coarse leaves. The tender parts that you take off, you put in the sauce. My mother would put a little matzoh meal to thicken the juice so that you could get the juice too while you're eating. I loved the lemon sauce.

RB: That's delicious. What about apio? Do you remember apio?

BB: Oh, sure. I still make it.

RB: Do you? Can you describe that dish?

BB: You cut it up into – let's see. First, I cut it in half, then in quarters, and then slice it quarter to half-inch thick.

RB: Which vegetables are you cutting up?

BB: Oh, I'm cutting up celery root [laughter], which is called apio. We add carrots to that. Slice the carrots about one-quarter inch round. Then you just cook it until it's tender. They both need about the same amount of cooking time. You add carrots to your celery root, a little water, sugar, about one tablespoon of vegetable oil, and lots of lemon and salt to taste. And that, again, is like an appetizer, cold dish.

RB: What would be a typical main entree?

BB: For Passover?

RB: [inaudible]

BB: They used chicken. I don't think my mother made brisket, which is, I know now, very traditional. It was always chicken.

RB: Did you eat rice on Passover?

BB: No, no. I remember asking the rabbi about that. He said," Did your parents serve rice during Passover?" I said, "No." He said, "Then, just do it the way your family did." But others did serve rice. It was a very strange explanation. If you eat it when it's first made, it's all right, and then you throw out any leftovers. But I never had it during Passover. I'm not as Orthodox, but I'm still traditional. I think all the way, very traditional.

RB: So a lot of these recipes that your mother taught you were passed down to you?

BB: No, my mother didn't teach me. [laughter]

RB: Okay. I'm glad you said that. How did you learn to cook?

BB: My father kept saying, "You've got to teach her how to cook. How is she going to get married?" I think he was afraid he was going to get his daughter back because if she didn't know how to cook … [laughter] I really didn't know how to cook. My mother said, "She'll learn." I remember trying to cook a few times after taking cooking in grade school. You got extra credits if you repeated that particular dish that you learned at school if you made it at home. Well, my mother didn't want me messing up the kitchen, so she wouldn't let me. I knew I could do it, and I knew I wanted to, so I would say that I did just for the extra credit. So when I was married, I really did not know how to make eggs or boil water. My mother used her energy in teaching me how to clean the house, and I sewed a lot. I loved to sew, so I did a lot of the sewing. Jack's sisters, I would call them and ask them for recipes. "What are you making, and how do you make it?" So I would make the same dish. And Jack would say, when we'd go over to my mother's, "Becky made the best dinner." My dad would shake his head, "I don't believe it." He could not believe I could cook. So he'd start in with my mother again to teach my sisters how to cook. Her answer was, "Becky learned, and they will learn." So she never did teach any of us to cook.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: No. So after I was learning how to cook, I would ask her, “How do you make this and how do you make that?” But, no, she never could give me a recipe. I can’t give a recipe now, either. It’s just taste.

RB: Can you describe the process or the way that women used to cook, of your mother’s generation?

BB: The what?

RB: The way the women of your mom’s generation would cook.

BB: How they would cook.

RB: You know, did they have set recipes, or was it in their head usually?

BB: Yes, it was. My mother said she didn’t know how to cook either when she got married. She practiced how to bake until she learned how to do it because her mother didn’t do too much cooking. I don’t know why, but she didn’t. I always found it very amusing when they would get together, the ladies. They would be within walking distance and stop in for coffee. That was the time they had a chance to visit and gossip and have their nice little visit. If they were going to have string beans for a big family, they’d have to get all the strings off and get the ends off, and they’d bring their string beans with them. As they were talking and having their coffee, they’d be preparing their dinner. [laughter] And that was their outing.

RB: Isn’t that [inaudible]?

BB: If it was beans that you had to pop open like fava beans, or the barbunya – what do they call those – shell beans, they’d bring those over and [laughter] get ready for their dinner.

RB: Isn’t that terrific?

BB: It was very neighborly.

RB: That's wonderful. So they would combine a social visit with–

BB: Then they would talk – "How do you prepare?" – and exchange ideas as to how you cook, and they'd make their dinner. We didn't really eat that much meat. I don't know if you heard about when we were growing up. It was more meat for flavor rather than meat as a main dish. They made the beans; there would be a little meat first that they'd cook up, and then you put the beans in, and you get the meat flavor and Spanish rice. That would be dinner. A salad. And dessert would be fruit, not necessarily anything baked.

RB: How were beans prepared, typically?

BB: With tomato sauce. There would be a big serving of string beans and a very little piece of meat. It was healthy when you think about it. Every once in a while, we'd have lamb chops – not too often. French fries were a real treat. [laughter] So we grew up with rice and pastas and legumes.

RB: Sounds delicious.

BB: That was our main food. It is good. I cook like that now.

RB: What are your favorite recipes that you remember that you cook now?

BB: I don't know if I have a favorite. But let's see, I make quashado, the spinach casserole. I make that a lot. Eggplant. I love eggplant dishes. I didn't like it as a child. I think that's my favorite vegetable now.

RB: How do you prepare it?

BB: I have made moussaka. That's a layered eggplant with the meat and rice in between, tomato sauce.

RB: [laughter]

BB: Yes. I've made fried eggplant and put cheese on it. It's good. I have made eggplant soup.

RB: Really?

BB: Yes. With kidney beans and pasta. It's a wonderful, wonderful dish.

RB: Sounds delicious.

BB: Oh, I have made another wonderful dish where you cut the eggplant in half and then again in thirds and make a slit in each slice. They're like little boats. You fill them with tomatoes and mushrooms. You put tomato sauce over and bake them. Oh, you do brown them in olive oil before stuffing them. So it's either cold or hot, a wonderful dish. I do like eggplant.

RB: Is it served as an entrée?

BB: It could be an hors d'oeuvres, wonderful with a drink, or it could be a vegetable with the rest of your meal, or just as a first course. I love those things that you can do any way, hot or cold. It's a good dish for any kind of serving. I also like to bake. I like to make bourekas.

RB: Could you describe that for people outside of Seattle and the Sephardic community?

BB: Wouldn't know what a bourekas is.

RB: They wouldn't know.

BB: [laughter] It's an oil dough. And you work it pretty much like you would a pie crust. You don't want to work it too long because you want it to be flaky and crispy. The filling is like a mashed potato, only you add egg and cheese. I use feta cheese and kasseri.

So basically, it's mashed potatoes, you put your butter and milk and egg and cheese. And you fill the pastry and make little pies, little individual pies.

RB: That's great.

BB: I freeze them before I bake them.

RB: Really?

BB: So that when I want to serve them, I put them in the oven, and they are freshly baked.

RB: What a great idea.

BB: Yes, instead of baking them and then freezing them, I learned to do that. Let's see, what else do I like to do? I like the spinach boyos, the yeast dough.

RB: Could you describe what that is?

BB: It's a yeast dough. The filling has to be very dry spinach, or else your dough will be soggy. That has cheese and salt in it. You roll them into like fingers. I don't know how to describe it. You just roll it into long strips and bake them. I'm not going into a recipe, but just kind of idea of what you could picture.

RB: What they are.

BB: What they are, yes. That's something you serve, like for Saturday morning. That's our Saturday morning breakfast.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: Do you have that regularly, or is it–

BB: Not regularly. But we did at home when I was growing up. We had that every Saturday.

RB: What would you eat with that? What food was –?

BB: Oh, hard-boiled eggs, and maybe more cheese, feta cheese, sliced tomatoes, olives, and fruit – melons, different melons. That's pretty traditional. That's Sephardic. Now, I know that Moroccans don't serve anything with cheese in it. They're not fond of cheese. It's a different – that's what is so interesting about the same religion and so many different cultures.

RB: That's right. I remember hearing lots of stories about the way women would make filo dough way back when. I wonder if you have any memories about that.

BB: I do, because I had to do some of the cleaning up. [laughter] Never partaking in the pastry making. They made it from scratch. It was a flour and water dough, I think. And they laid it out – stretched it, actually, until it was paper-thin. Sometimes there would be little holes in it, but I don't know how they got it like that. It would take a couple of ladies doing it. They couldn't do it alone. It was always festive. When they're making this filo dough, it was for a special occasion. So already, they're anticipating the fun part of it. So they would be singing and laughing, and it was a fun thing. They'd lay out bed sheets on the beds so they can lay this fila dough on it. They're great big sheets of filo dough, I don't know, maybe three by three or bigger – three feet by three feet, from the kitchen table to the bedroom. Our bedroom happened to be in the room next door to the kitchen, so it wasn't far. These beds were filled with this filo dough. The windows were open so that the sheets would dry. Then as they dried out, they'd start making filling for the baklava. That's what they made with the filo dough. Big job.

RB: What a huge job.

BB: Yes.

RB: Did they slice or cut the filo in strips as it was drying?

BB: No, they didn't make those little individual filos. It was a nine-by-thirteen pan or bigger. These sheets were laid out –

RB: I see.

BB: – and they'd break off what was needed to lay out in the pan and then make layers of it.

RB: Wow.

BB: They'd add nut filling – it was ground almonds and walnuts and sesame seeds, and bread that was dried out and toasted and ground in with the rest of the ingredients because the nuts would be too rich. There's cinnamon and sugar. Everyone had their own recipe. Then you made alternate layers of dough and filling, and you'd end up with the filo dough on the top. They made the syrup. After it was baked, they would cut it into diamond shapes, and then the syrup would be poured over it. They'd let it sit until it all saturated – big job.

RB: Huge job. And they would make lots of it, I imagine?

BB: Lots of it because it was such a big to-do. They could put it in a canister and save it. My mother knew my brother loved this baklava, and he'd always find it wherever she hid it. She decided she was going to outsmart him: "I'll put it under his bed, he'll never think to look there." Yes, he found it. [laughter] When she went to get it, all she found was drippings of honey. [laughter]

RB: [laughter] Oh, what a great story.

BB: It was a lot of work.

RB: Do you remember any of the songs that women would sing?

BB: No, no.

RB: They're just happy, joyous songs?

BB: They were Spanish songs. And my Aunt Louise would come over. She was the one that loved to sing. She had a beautiful voice. And she had this instrument that they called an oud, and she would play it and sing, and the ladies would sing with her. But I don't know any of the songs. We never learned them.

RB: Isn't that remarkable that they would be baking and singing and playing instruments?

BB: Yes. Well, when they sat down to have their coffee, now, job well done, now a reward.

RB: And was this an all-day process?

BB: Yes, pretty much.

RB: I see. Was it for weddings or for engagements?

BB: Yes, or a holiday or somebody special coming to visit. It was something very special.

RB: So the women really devoted a lot of their time to baking and cooking?

BB: Yes. They managed to have their social life too. And they would bake for each other. "Come over; you have to taste what I just made." It was a very good life, not stressful, very peaceful. They didn't have telephones. I didn't have a phone in the house

until I was a teenager. If we needed to make a phone call, we would go to the corner grocery store. So they kept in touch. It's amazing.

RB: That is amazing. What was your neighborhood – could you describe some of the landmarks of your neighborhood? Any stores or churches or synagogues?

BB: The synagogue was three blocks away, the Bikur Holim.

RB: Is this the Sephardic or the Ashkenazic?

BB: Sephardic.

RB: Okay.

BB: The Ashkenazim wasn't much further. They were close by also. They were on Yesler, maybe six blocks away. And the Ezra Bessaroth was on 15th. We lived on 19th, I'd say, about six, eight blocks away. Jack and I were married at the Ezra Bessaroth by Reverend Behar, who married my parents.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: Yes. Only they found out at the time he married my parents he wasn't ordained, [laughter] but they didn't know. He was the only man that knew how to do a ceremony.

RB: Service? Isn't that something? Maybe this would be a good time to talk a little bit about how you met Jack, your courtship, marriage, and honeymoon. Any stories you'd like to share about that would be great.

BB: We met in high school. He was going with my very closest friend at the time. We dated in groups. Jack was the only one that had a car. It wasn't his car, it was his brother's, but he could get the car when he needed it because his brother still lived at home. In those days, everybody lived at home until they were married. They didn't move

out. So he had the car. We double-dated. He had a buddy that he fixed me up with. And then one day, it was like, he wanted to take me out. It just happened like that. So I felt a little badly about it. I remember telling my friend. She had a feeling – she did have a feeling that this was happening. So he managed to get a date for her like he did when he got his buddy to take me out. In those days, these young men didn't have jobs and didn't have any money. I guess it was right after the Depression. But Jack always worked, and he would treat the two couples. [laughter] We didn't do very much. It would just be a movie, maybe, or go out for a coke, whatever it was. He got his previous girlfriend a date, and they became a couple, and they got married.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: I was going with other young fellows at the time. I was sixteen. My parents didn't think that was very wise for a young girl to go with a lot of boys because it spoils your reputation. So I had to make a choice. And they said, "I'm not influencing you, and I'm not telling you what to do," but this is what they thought I should do. I couldn't believe it. [laughter] They were both pushing for Jack because they knew he was very responsible and very caring. I couldn't go out with a lot of boys, this is it. You'll either go with him, or that's it. Jack wanted me to go steady. In fact, two other boys were asking me at the same time. I had to make my choice. That was fine. My parents were pleased. I wasn't so sure about going steady at sixteen, though. Then my mother doesn't quit there. She asked him if he was taking her daughter's time or was he serious. He was only eighteen years old. He said he was serious. So my mother made a gesture as much as to say, "One daughter down." [laughter] That's the truth. So now I had his bar mitzvah ring as an unofficial engagement ring. He's eighteen, and I'm sixteen and a half. And his family thought it was great, except his sister, who is two years older, wasn't married yet, so we couldn't get married before she did. So I said, "Thank God she got married." [laughter] After she got married, I got my engagement ring, my official engagement ring. That was on his twentieth birthday. We were to be married on my birthday in January, but war

broke out in December. And my mother said, “There’s no marriage. Halt. We don’t know what’s going to happen. Let’s wait a while.” Everything was ready, my gown, the bridesmaids’ dresses, everything. She saw how sad we were, so she gave us her blessing. We got married in February.

RB: You mentioned that your dresses were ready. Did you sew your dresses?

BB: I made my wedding gown.

RB: Because I hear you were a beautiful sewer and seamstress.

BB: I always sewed, I still do.

RB: Do you have your wedding dress?

BB: Yes, in a cedar chest. My sister wore it too. It won’t fit any of my grandchildren. I have a granddaughter that’s five-ten and another one that’s a lot shorter. It won’t fit. But I have it.

RB: But you have it.

BB: Yes. I had seen a picture in a magazine, a bridal magazine, and I copied it. Do you remember Auntie Rachel?

RB: Yes.

BB: Well, she was a professional seamstress. And my mother called her over to see that I was cutting this fabric properly. I already had it laid out, ready to go. She says, “She knows what she’s doing.” So they just sat and watched. I wouldn’t do it today.

RB: Why is that?

BB: Well, I realize now, you're just cutting into fabric, yards of fabric, and you could just ruin it. I don't know. I just felt very sure about what I was doing. I got a pattern, and I just modified it to see what I had to do with it. It was like a Roman-draped skirt on both sides. I got a pattern that had all these panels. Then I just made two of the panels much longer, and I just gathered it up, and it did exactly what it was supposed to do.

RB: Wow, you must have had a great touch.

BB: I don't know. You know, I felt that if I'd had the chance to have any kind of formal education, I should have gone into something with design –

RB: Is that right?

BB: – because I've always liked it. I think I have a good sense of scale and color and design. That's probably why I like to sew because I can do certain things I probably wouldn't be able to find ready-made. I'm sorry that I didn't, but I never thought about going to school. In the days that I was growing up, a boy got the education, not the girls. My mother didn't encourage it. In fact, she preferred that I didn't. She thought, "If you get an education, you're too picky when it comes to getting a husband." That was how she perceived it.

RB: So, really, marriage was very important as a goal in life.

BB: Yes, it was, when you have three daughters.

RB: Do you remember any specific Sephardic customs when people were engaged or married?

BB: Yes.

RB: I've heard of some beautiful ones.

BB: Yes. The bride and groom exchange presents, and they have sweets. They present it on a tray. It could be a – for the gentlemen, it would be maybe a robe and slippers, or maybe a piece of jewelry or something. My gift was a beautiful brush, comb, and mirror set. In the olden days, when they took their baths, they had these little bowls where you splashed water on you because they didn't have the showers. So I had one of those. They called it a tas, T-A-S –

RB: [inaudible]

BB: – and a robe. Yes, that was my gift.

RB: Do you remember the Ladino name of this custom?

BB: (Mandatha?). "What you send."

RB: That's right. What about your trousseau?

BB: My mother was making my trousseau from the day I was born. She made all these cutwork linens, bed linens, tablecloths. She embroidered all the time. And then she quit when it came to the other girls. No way could she duplicate it, those years and years and years of doing this. I still have some of the linens.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: Are they embroideries?

BB: Embroideries.

RB: I bet they're beautiful.

BB: They are. That was the custom. That was part of the dowry, you're supposed to have this. So when my daughter was married, her in-laws were from New York, and so a lot of the New York friends were sending gifts to the bride and groom. When the parents of the bridegroom came over, I thought I would do a – what do they call it? There's a name for it – "(Paratha?)." Anyway, you display everything, all the gifts. In the olden days, they would show what the bride was offering towards the marriage. So this is sort of that kind of feeling. I thought, "She doesn't even know what her friends are sending. I'm sure she'd like to see the gifts, plus the gifts they receive from our side of the family, the wedding dress that you display, and the linens that we had for her." I had it all laid out in the recreation room. And I said, "This is very Sephardic. I want you to know I'm just carrying on the tradition." I don't know what it meant to the new in-laws, but it meant a lot to me to do this.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: That's terrific.

BB: Well, I just thought it was kind of fun – real fun customs. And they've gone by the wayside. I don't know of anybody that has done it, my generation. But I thought it was nice, just carrying on a little tradition.

RB: That's beautiful. I think that the women would often meet when the trousseau was displayed. Do you remember anything about that?

BB: Yes, yes. Then the bride had to go to the baths, the mikvah, and then the coffee afterward. Yes, they would have this big festivity.

RB: There would be a party after the mikvah as well?

BB: Yes, or even there at the mikvah. They'd bring the coffee and the sweets.

RB: Really?

BB: Yes.

RB: Did that happen for you?

BB: No. I told my mother I didn't want it. She was very disappointed. My sister was willing to do it. She got her period the day that she was supposed to go to the mikvah. [laughter] My mother said, "Look at my mazel." And my sister says, "Your mazel? What about me?" [laughter] She gave up on the third daughter. She didn't try. But I know my friends have done it. The bride is naked. They're watching her get submerged in the tub, and then they sing these songs. I didn't feel like I wanted to do that. [laughter] Did you hear about those things from your grandmother?

RB: I did, I did. That's right. They're marvelous stories.

BB: I know.

RB: Oh, I know, it's really wonderful.

BB: They're a little archaic. But when you think about it, I'm first generation. So these people that came to this country, this is how they grew up.

RB: Exactly, that's right.

BB: So they carried the same traditions when they came to the United States.

RB: Well, I think it's wonderful that you've tried to continue some of these traditions in your own family.

BB: I tell my children and grandchildren, “So at least you’ll know what it’s about. You do what you have to do, but you have to know about your background.”

RB: That’s great. Let’s see. Where did you go to grade school?

BB: It was Washington Elementary. Now it’s a junior high.

RB: And do you have any memories of your education there that really stand out, any activities that seemed formative or that shaped your identity?

BB: I remember my neighbor took me to school to enroll me. My mother was home with two babies. I was happy to go with the neighbor because my mother didn’t speak very good English.

RB: What language did she speak?

BB: At home?

RB: Yes.

BB: Ladino. She knew very little English. She was learning as she went along. And my neighbor – it’s funny – she was a Russian Jew, and she didn’t speak very good English either, but it was all right that she took me. I was happy to go with her. She offered to take me to school, and I was thrilled to go with her. We loved going over there, she was so nice to us. There were two neighbors. One was an Italian neighbor, and then there was Mrs. Horowitz, a wonderful lady. We used to go over there anytime. We were always welcome. I remember going there a lot. My sister, Nellie, liked going over to Mrs. (Kasha?), and Rita would go over to Marcel’s house because she and Marcel grew up together. We had all these neighbors in the row. We all picked the one that were nice to us, I guess. [laughter] But as far as grade school, it was a very international school – Japanese, Chinese, Black, Jewish. I don’t remember anything outstanding other than I

hated getting up in front of a class to – whatever it was you had to recite. That was painful. That's all I can remember. [laughter]

RB: What were your interactions with non-Jews at this time in your neighborhood? Were there many?

BB: No, they were all Jewish. High school is when you start mixing.

RB: I see.

BB: No, it was all Jewish in our neighborhood. I had one neighbor across the street that was a devout Catholic. We sensed something that wasn't quite comfortable. But outside of the house, we were the best of friends. She was welcome in my house. I didn't feel I was so welcome in her house. They were very Catholic, and there was a lot of this antisemitism. There still is today. There still is today, but it's a little more covered up. But I still think it is. I don't think it will ever go away. This is what I liked about my grandfather's feelings, that you don't stand in judgment, you don't judge a particular group. It's on an individual basis. There are people that you can feel comfortable with and others that you know your place. But in grade school, I think all my friends were Jewish–Sephardic, as a matter of fact.

RB: And what year did you go to Garfield, to high school?

BB: What year? It must have been – let's see – '13, '23, '36, yeah. And I think I graduated in '39. That's right.

RB: What were your interactions with non-Jews at that time, and Jewish too?

BB: This is where I started to meet the Ashkenazim.

RB: I see.

BB: And there was this AZA group, and there were dances. That's where girls started to date. They'd go to the dances with girlfriends, and you'd find boys there. That was your coming out party. It was fun.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: Were there any Sephardic social groups that you were a member of?

BB: I didn't go to any. I just remember the AZA. They would meet at the Talmud Torah, in that auditorium, where they had their dances. In those days – oh, there was a special format. You had a program, when you got there, you wore it on your wrist. Fellows would come up and put down what dance you were going to dance with them. You get your whole program all filled. It was so exciting because you were popular. You had all this fun. You just knew that you were going to dance with different people. It wasn't that way when our daughter, Donna, went to college. You went with one guy, and you're with him, and you don't get a chance to meet anybody else. I liked it the way it was when we were growing up. It was friendly and fun. Then you get to know who you're really attracted to. It's not like that now.

RB: It's very different.

BB: I don't think kids date like they did when we did. There was one girl that always had friends over. Her parents were very nice about it. And we just went down there. It was open house for boys and girls.

RB: Is that right?

BB: That's where we learned how to dance, at her house. She'd put on the record, and we learned how to dance.

RB: Do you remember the name of this person?

BB: Oh, sure, Lucy Hasson.

RB: Oh, that's fun.

BB: Lucy (Capeloto?) now. She was a very good friend. I loved her. She's in the South now.

RB: Her house was open for, what, like Saturday nights, or when would you go?

BB: No. Anytime you wanted to go.

RB: Wow. After school?

BB: Summer, particularly. Yes, in the summer. We didn't have a telephone to say, "Can we come?" We just went. And they were there anytime you went, just a gang. It was always in groups when we were dating, always in groups, kind of like a little clique. We'd go to Alki, go bicycle riding, or have a marshmallow roast, or fish n' chips. That would be it. One person would have a car, and you pile in. [laughter]

RB: That's terrific. What kind of music did you listen to and dance to back then? Do you remember?

BB: No. It was big band, which was popular then.

RB: And so the dances were swing?

BB: No. It wasn't swing it was the waltz.

RB: Waltz, okay, thank you. Wow. That's terrific.

BB: Then we had the Settlement House. It was called the Settlement House. I don't know what it's called today. That's where Jewish immigrants would go to get any help they needed. But they also had programs for young kids.

RB: Really?

BB: Yes.

RB: So which programs did you –?

BB: Well, they had acrobats and tap dancing and ballroom. That's the thing that I was interested in. I don't know the other ones that they had. But they even had a little clinic there. I remember my sister had her tonsils out there. And Clemence Eskanazi was a social worker. She worked there. I think they might have even had an apartment for her there. She was one of a few Sephardic women of that generation that went to college. It was a very diversified kind of institution where it met a lot of needs. I think for people that couldn't afford doctors, dentists, or counselors. They called it the Settlement House. I don't know what it's called today.

RB: And so it sounds like you would take classes there.

BB: Yes. You could walk there.

RB: So it was close to your home, or close enough.

BB: Yes, yes. Well, in those days, everything seemed close because we didn't have a car. It might have been about eight blocks. But if we went in the evening, my brother had to chaperon me. I didn't go alone.

RB: Is that right?

BB: He had to go with me.

RB: How long did that – how many years did that last? Or was there a certain age when you didn't need him as a chaperon?

BB: Yes. I was fourteen until about fifteen, sixteen. Then boys were driving, so I didn't need him. [laughter] He was good that way. He didn't want to go, but my mother said, "You have to go." You did what your mother told you to do.

RB: Back then?

BB: It was a lot easier raising children then.

RB: Is that what you think? Do you see differences?

BB: I think so, I think so.

RB: How so?

BB: It was easier for the parent, not necessarily best for the child because you're not able to express yourself, you're just told what to do.

RB: That was the way it was in your parents' generation.

BB: Of course.

RB: Yeah. How did it compare, in contrast, with your generation and that of your children?

BB: Well, each one thinks they're going to be a better mother. I know my daughter thinks that she's a better mother than I was. But you make different mistakes.

RB: Right.

BB: It just can't be avoided. You know, the way I look at it, you do the best you can, the best that you know how. I feel that if your heart is in the right place, you do what you think is best. I think a lot of things that my mother did were wrong, but she didn't do anything out of malice, just the best that she knew how.

RB: When you and Jack married, it was the start of war.

BB: Yes.

RB: What happened?

BB: Well, we had an apartment for a few months. Let's see now, he wasn't called into the service. He was just twenty, twenty and a half. And in those days, you had to be twenty-one, except when war broke out, and nobody knew what the new ruling would be. But we were married about five or six months, and then he was called into the service. We put everything in storage, and I moved back with my mother. When they determined that it was okay for us to get married, I knew that my mother and her mother – my grandmother – were talking about, "Well, let's hope she doesn't have children. Let's see. We don't need that, too." Well, I got pregnant on Jack's birthday, July. I know exactly when I got pregnant. Now, I'm home with my mother and am not feeling good. She could tell I wasn't feeling good, but she thought I was very lonely, and so she left me alone. She never caught on. [laughter] After Jack got settled over in eastern Washington, he sent for me. I didn't tell my mother until I was five months pregnant. But in the meantime, every time we'd come home, she and her mother, my grandmother, would say, "So far so good." I knew what they were saying, and I was thinking, "How am I going to tell them?" So I finally thought – everybody in the base knew I was pregnant. I didn't want my mother to hear it from somebody else. It was time to tell her. We had come to Seattle to visit, and we were staying with my mother. My mother was reading the L'Vara, that was the Sephardic paper that came from New York. That was the only Ladino paper that they had in those days.

RB: So she would subscribe to it?

BB: Yes. And so Saturday morning she'd be sitting there reading the L'Vara. And I said, "Mom?" "Mmm?" She's reading. "Mom?" She answered, "What do you want?" I said, "You're going to be a grandmother." She got so excited! She said, "When, when?" She was so excited. "Oh," she said, "I can't wait to tell Papa!" So she yells, "You're going to be a grandpa. You're going to be a grandpa." So they were excited in spite of the war and the uncertainties.

RB: Yes.

BB: So I came home when I was close to my delivery date. I stayed with my parents. They're the ones that took me to the hospital, my mom and dad.

RB: Was Jack overseas at this time?

BB: No, he was in eastern Washington. He was still in the States. My sister wired him. He came home the next day. He was able to be with us for a few days. When my mother took care of that baby, it was her baby. She was named after her, too, Donna. So when I left a couple of months later to join my husband in Pasco, Washington, she was crying. I was taking her baby away. "How are you going to take care of her? You don't even know how," she yelled at me. She was the one that created this situation.

RB: So while you were recuperating–

BB: I was fine.

RB: – you were fine.

BB: My mother just wanted her first grandchild.

RB: She wanted her.

BB: She would say, “Let me take her, let me take her.” At night I could get up and feed her. But during the day, she would bathe her and hold her. Every once in a while, she’d let me hold her – “Here.” When she was busy, “Here” – like I was the babysitter. It was her baby.

RB: How was that for you? Did you mind?

BB: I didn’t mind. I didn’t mind. I was afraid of the baby. I didn’t know how to handle a baby. If I were alone, it would be fine. I’m sure I could have learned. But my mother didn’t think I could, so I was convinced that I couldn’t. So she bathed her and took care of her. Well, when our daughter, Donna, had her first baby, she came over for the baby’s first bath. My mother had to be there. You should have seen that scene. My mother is bossing all of us. My daughter didn’t know what to do. My mother was saying, “The water is too cold. The baby is going to catch cold.” I had my girlfriend over with a camera. She was laughing so hard she was crying. The scene was too much. First babies are like that. So anyway, I took the baby from my mother. She just couldn’t believe that I would know how to take care of her. And then, when Jack was shipped out, I came back to my mother’s. My mother took care of Donna while we were in transit. I wasn’t sure when he was shipping out, and I was sort of following him to San Diego. And my mother wanted her. She really wanted – I think Donna bonded with my mother more than she did to me. My mother had a lot of input there, yeah.

RB: So there was a lot of closeness between Donna and your mother.

BB: And my mother, yes. I think it started from then, the bonding, at that period.

RB: So you went down to San Diego briefly. For how long were you there?

BB: Well, Jack had called after he was gone for a while. And he said, “I don’t know how long I’ll be here, but you have to come down.” So I wasn’t sure about anything. He said, “I may not even be here when you get here. Check with so and so. Check in with them.”

So I got down to San Diego. He was still there. And every five days, I had to move from one hotel to another. Then he was transferred to San Francisco. I said, “I have to go get Donna. I just can’t do this.” So I went and got her. Again, I didn’t know if he’d be there. We stayed in a hotel. We finally found a hotel with a little refrigerator. Jack came in whenever he could. One day he called to say, “We’re definitely shipping out.” I was always dreading that call, so when I finally accepted it, I have to tell you, it was such a relief. I couldn’t live like that from moment to moment.

RB: The unknown? Sounds like it was too much

BB: At least I could go on with my life now. I just didn’t know where I was. I was in limbo. My daughter was in limbo. And we finally could go home. So we stayed with my mother again. But before Jack shipped out, he was able to find us a house on 27th, right off Cherry. So we lived there. And then my sister, Rita, moved in with me.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes, so I wouldn’t be alone. She lived with us less than a year, then the war was over. So Jack came home two months after the war ended.

RB: What a time.

BB: Yes, but I have to tell you, this not knowing is so awful. Even if it’s bad news, at least you know where you stand. So I feel a lot of times, like when people are waiting to hear a diagnosis on an ailment, it is better to know rather than be left dangling. I learned that from that experience. It’s better to know where you are and you go on with your life as best you can. I really felt better off after he left. Then we were corresponding. He wasn’t in a place where it was really dangerous. They were out in the Philippines. I just missed him. I knew he was okay. And because we were married and had a child, he was able to get out earlier, as soon as the war was over.

RB: So they made those exceptions or allowances.

BB: Yes. It's like priorities, yes. It was like refrigerators and washing machines, all electrical appliances were hard to come by. But because he was married and had a baby, he had a priority. We could be first in line. Yeah, they did make allowances. So that's how our first years were. My mother was definitely an important part. We were running home to Mom [laughter] every time we had a change in plan, back to Mom. And it was fine because by then, my brother was away, and there was plenty of room in the house. And she enjoyed Donna so much. So they had a nice – they've always had a nice rapport.

RB: So she was a huge support, it sounds like.

BB: Oh, absolutely.

RB: [inaudible] comfort.

BB: Parents are, yes

RB: At a certain point, you went to Cleveland, is that right?

BB: Yes.

RB: Is this later on?

BB: Well, Jack had invented a truck body for beer distribution. And it was a truck that you could pallet load. You open the sides, and you could pallet load. I forget how long it would take manually versus a few minutes by pallet loading. So he moved to Cleveland because that was centrally located for him to distribute this truck body. He had somebody in Gerstenslager in Columbus, Ohio, manufacture this truck body. So he would travel all over the country, demonstrating and selling this truck to beer distributors. I was just told that we were moving. It wasn't where we sat down and discussed it.

“Well, we’re moving.”

RB: What was that like to hear that?

BB: I didn’t like it. I thought, “Don’t I have anything to say about it?” I’m sure I would have gone along. But to be considered, I didn’t have that. Jack and his brother were in the beer business. And his brother is eleven years – was eleven years older. He was like a father image and from the old school again. “Women don’t have much say about this.” So he went ahead and found us a place to live. It was in a hotel until we found a house. I found us a house by answering ads. He was on the road traveling all over, demonstrating his invention, and I was alone with the three children. And that was when I really felt it’s sink or swim. I’m either going to sit here and rot, or I’m going to get up and make friends and make my own life. I didn’t have to do that in Seattle. My life was already decided for me. You grow up with these same friends, and your parents are there, and your relatives are there, your siblings are there. So here I am all alone, not even a husband here, because he’s traveling. He didn’t even know who my friends were. He was on the road, home on weekends, but at the office on weekends. I found this house. Luckily, it was in a Jewish neighborhood because I didn’t know Cleveland. This couple that rented their house to us was called into the service. I think it was the Korean War. It was a new house that they had built. My next-door neighbor became my best friend. I still keep in touch with the children. As a matter of fact, yesterday – Sunday, I called them. I’m still Aunt Becky, and they’re like my nieces. One lives in New Jersey, and one lives in Boca Raton, Florida. Their parents have passed away. But they were the best of friends. They were a little bit older, the neighbors, and they just kind of took care of us. I met her friends, and I joined some organizations while I was there. She taught me how to shop. She was the best shopper. She’d always take me along with her. She loved my children. So that was my family. My son, Alan, who was five-years-old, said, “I love you so much Mrs. (Agin?), can I call you Auntie?” She says, “Alan, I’m flattered. Of course, you can call me Auntie.” He didn’t call her Aunt Bess, it was Aunt

(Agin?). [laughter] So that was how they addressed her – as adults, it was always Aunt (Agin?) and Uncle Max.

RB: How old were your children at the time?

BB: Let's see, they were three, five and ten.

RB: Wow.

BB: Yes. Larry had his third birthday there, and we didn't have a soul to invite. We went to the store – we didn't have our car yet. We had ordered a new car from the factory, and it hadn't come. We took a cab to the shopping center. We bought a Happy Birthday record, and a cake, and came back, and had a little party, just our family. And I started to cry. We're playing "Happy Birthday," and we're just our little family, and I felt so lonely. So I remember he was three- years- old. Then we met the kids on the block, the children. When you have children, you meet the neighbors. I was the one that started to do the inviting. I invited two couples for dinner, and I did the cooking, which surprised them because even then, I guess they didn't cook. They wanted to know – they were talking to each other when I was in the kitchen, "What's the occasion?" I said, "Well, you know, if I didn't do this, I'd forget how to cook. So I wanted to have a little party." I found that they never opened their house. Everything was at the club. Whatever they did was at the club.

RB: Which club?

BB: The Jewish clubs. It was Oakwood, and I forget what the other one was.

RB: In Cleveland.

BB: In Cleveland, yes.

RB: Wow. So a very different lifestyle you encountered in Cleveland.

BB: Yes, completely. There was a B'nai B'rith benefit. And the only way you could attend was to earn the money. You couldn't pay for the ticket. So my friend wanted me to go. I said, "Well, I don't know how to earn the money." She said, "Well, just sell raffle tickets, or you could do a luncheon and charge the guests for lunch." I said, "Fine, good and well. I don't even know who to sell raffle tickets to, and who would I invite to my luncheon." [laughter] She said, "You cook, I'll bring the friends." [laughter] She invited all her friends. It was my coming out party. And she said to her friends, "Don't you think her lunch was really good? Maybe we should pay more. And don't you think you want to buy her raffle tickets?" She did it for me. [laughter] So I got to go to the gala.

RB: That's marvelous. And this is your next-door neighbor.

BB: Yes, in Cleveland.

RB: Wow.

BB: This was while we were renting. Then we built our house while we were there, but we still remained friends. We lived a little further apart. We looked for each other every day. Just a wonderful, wonderful neighbor. So those were my growing-up years.

RB: Wow. How did you manage with three small kids by yourself?

BB: Oh, they were good. They were good, yeah.

RB: Yeah. Did you have help in the house?

BB: Not live in, but day help.

RB: You did.

BB: And Jack was hardly home, your cooking is different, your shopping is different.

RB: Yes.

BB: So I had a lot of time. During the day, I'd run and play. And at night, when the children were in bed, I'd sew because I loved to sew. I'd do things, projects. So I kept busy that way.

RB: And you became involved in different organizations?

BB: Not while I was there.

RB: Oh, okay.

BB: No. I didn't even think about it, other than this B'nai B'rith event, because I wanted to go to this gala. No, I didn't even think about it. But I don't know when I was motivated. I think it just happens. People call you. The Federation calls you. [laughter]

RB: So you moved back to Seattle in what year?

BB: Two and a half years. It was 1956.

RB: Okay. And what was it like coming back?

BB: I really didn't want to leave Cleveland.

RB: Really?

BB: Yes.

RB: How come?

BB: The children were settled, wonderful schools. I really liked being independent, not having to account to family. Jack's brother was really calling the shots. We didn't have to have that. But then, he was the one that said Jack had to come home, so we came home. It was at that time that Jack decided he didn't want to be in partnerships in the beer business, and that's when he went on his own. Either he could do it on his own, or

he wasn't as capable as he thought he was. So that's what he did. It was the best thing for him, not having to do what other people think you should do. You have to be your own person. So I think moving to Cleveland did that.

RB: It sounds like you were a tremendous support to him emotionally, that you went along with him with plans to go to Cleveland –

BB: Oh, well, I think that's what a marriage is.

[END OF CD ONE]

RB: Hi. This is Roz Bornstein, and this is tape two of Becky Benaroya's oral history that we're gathering for the Jewish Women's Archive, Weaving Women's Words Project. And the date is still July 17, 2001. We are still meeting at Becky's home in Seattle, Washington. Becky, do I have your permission to continue interviewing and taping you?

BB: Yes, of course.

RB: Thank you very much. We were talking about relationships with marriage and compromise. I wondered if you could comment on that a bit.

BB: Well, I think that's what relationships are all about. There's too much of this power struggle, I think, in relationships, and it shouldn't be that way. There's a give and take. It's something that I think couples should learn to understand, that it can't be all one way, that if an issue is important, it should be discussed, and that there's room for compromise. I'll give an example. [laughter] I love the ballet, and my husband doesn't like the ballet – or he didn't. So, this evening we were getting ready to go. He said, "I really don't want to go. Why don't you call a friend or, you know, if you want to go alone." I said, "I like to share it with someone. I don't want to go by myself." So I invited a friend. But I invited a male friend. There was a reason behind this. I figured that will get his attention. Next week was the football game. I honestly don't enjoy football, but I've

been going for years just because I felt that my husband would like me to go with him. So I thought, “Well, if he feels comfortable about not going to the ballet, I’m comfortable about not going to the football game.” I said, “Honey, why don’t you invite a friend or your grandchildren or somebody.” He said, “Are you retaliating” [laughter] I said, “Call it what you like, I really don’t like football, so just invite a friend.” He didn’t like that. So the next time the ballet was performing, he came very quietly. I said, “See, honey, the bottom line is that you’re coming to please me, and I go to please you.” So that was a good lesson. [laughter]

RB: That’s a great story.

BB: That’s a compromise.

RB: Yes.

BB: Yes. I find that a lot of people don’t know that that’s the way life is. We’d all like to have it our way. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? [laughter] You were asking me about my move to Cleveland. I wasn’t consulted at all because, back then, it was a male decision. I would have liked to have been consulted, but since I wasn’t, my job was to go along. I think that it was easier then where you didn’t have that conflict. I knew that it was important for my husband, and so I went along. Then I found that it was a really growing experience for me to even just go, be on my own, and learn that I could do things on my own and be independent. That was the best thing that happened to me.

RB: In that way? What parts were the most difficult?

BB: Reaching out, meeting people, and enjoying it, not just doing it because I knew I had to do it and appreciating anybody that put themselves out because they already had their friends. They already had their groups. So if anybody reached out, I thought that was very special. I learned about reaching out to newcomers when we moved back to Seattle because I knew what it meant to me when I was in that position. So this is what I mean

about learning, just from experience. So it's all a part of growing up.

RB: It's a lovely lesson.

BB: Yes.

RB: When you moved back to Seattle, how was that transition for you? What happened?

BB: Well, I liked my independence so well that I didn't know how it would be when I came back. But as soon as we came back and we were with friends and family, it was wonderful. No, it was fine.

RB: That's great.

BB: Again, it was changing – shifting gears – Jack going into another business – and a challenge. But life isn't cut and dry. I find that the more challenges you have, the more interesting your life is. You reach different plateaus.

RB: What were the rewards and challenges during this time?

BB: We were pretty secure the way it was. We knew that we had a very comfortable life. Then we didn't know what our future was, starting from scratch. We were in the midst of building a new house. It always gets more involved than you anticipate. There we were, wondering whether he would succeed in this new venture, and we weren't sure we could keep our new house. So it's a little anxious times there, but we managed to do it. So that, too, makes you feel like it's a real sense of accomplishment. We'd been through it together. It makes you stronger. It's not everything that you see when you see people. You don't know what goes on to arrive where you are.

RB: How did you support each other at this time?

BB: Well, I just had confidence in my husband. I knew he could do it. If we had to cut back, it was fine if that's what we had to do. He knew that he wouldn't want to do that. He just had to prove to himself that he could do it. I knew he was going to accomplish that because – I think my parents already knew that about him, that he would be there and be conscientious and supportive. And he did.

RB: It sounds like you worked together as a good team, I would say.

BB: Well, you know, back then, I would say I liked the way the young couples are today. I was in charge of the household and raising the children. His big job was his office and making a living. I felt that the children missed not growing up with a father. He'd be there weekends, but not really everyday exchanges. And a few times I'd tell him about the cute things that the children did, and he missed it. But I guess it had to be like that, his generation. He's first generation too.

RB: And where was he born?

BB: He was born the day they arrived in Montgomery, Alabama. He was conceived in Beirut.

RB: Really?

BB: Yes. His father and mother came over with four other children and a pregnant wife who was ready to deliver. They were delayed in Marseilles because his mother had an eye infection. So they didn't plan it that closely. They planned on getting here a few months before the delivery day. So they barely made it. They moved in with his mother's brother's family. They already had three children. They had just had a new baby, two weeks old. Then this family of six comes in.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: And I remember asking his aunt, “How did you ever do it?” She said, “We never questioned it. We just did it. We never questioned it.” This cousin, the one that was two weeks older, and another cousin was born a matter of days or weeks of Jack’s birthday. These three cousins celebrated their eightieth birthday in Montgomery in June 2001. So all these babies are born, and Jack’s family comes in from Europe – no diaper service, no maid service. [laughter]

RB: A lot of bottles to wash.

BB: Yes. And I think Rosie, Jack’s sister, was in diapers. She wasn’t quite two.

RB: Actually, were there – was there bottle feeding at that time? I would assume [inaudible] but maybe not.

BB: I don’t know if they breast-fed or if they bottle-fed. I don’t know.

RB: And with your generation, what was that –?

BB: Both. My mother thought breastfeeding was old-fashioned, and that was fine with me.

RB: So the trend was towards bottle feeding.

BB: Yes, and then it goes back to nature.

RB: Right.

BB: Yes. But at that time, my mother thought it was old-fashioned. One of my friends was breastfeeding. She would come over because she was with her mother – it was during the war – just like I was with my mother. We were a block apart. She’d come over with her baby. And she was nursing. I think my mother liked my giving the baby the bottle. She thought that was very modern. [laughter]

RB: It's also easy for other people to feed the baby.

BB: Like my mother. [laughter]

RB: That's great. [laughter]

BB: She thought it was her baby. [laughter]

RB: So over time, it sounds like you became active in different volunteer and philanthropic –

BB: Oh, I remember I got involved with Hadassah when I first came back from Cleveland.

RB: Okay. I'd love to hear about that.

BB: How did I meet this friend? Oh, through Mahjong. I think we played Mahjong in those days.

RB: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but could you describe that? Because that's really–

BB: Mahjong?

RB: Yeah.

BB: Well, it takes four players. You play with tiles. You have to remember the tiles. You call the tile before you – you would draw a tile. You call the tile when you put it down. You could put it in your rack. I forget the game because I haven't played in a while. You try to make up hands. There's a card. Every year they come out with different hands, different combination of tiles. The first one that comes with a hand says, "Mahjong." And they play for money. You decide whether it's small stakes or bigger stakes. It's a four-handed game. We used to play once or twice a week.

RB: Is this with other women?

BB: Other women. It's a game that men play too. It's a very big gambling game in Hong Kong. Yes. Big money there. They don't change the rules like they do here. Here they get new rules every year. The difference there is, they flash the card and turn it over, so you have to remember – see, if you're trying to get a hand, and that tile has been discarded, then you know that hand isn't going to be made, then now you have to change your hand for remaining tiles, hopefully, that you can make that hand with other tiles that you're going to draw. So in Hong Kong, I saw them play, where they turn the tile over, and now you have to remember each tile that has been played. It's a very, very intense game in Hong Kong. We used to play Mahjong with American rules, and that's how I met different girls in the neighborhood. They started this Hadassah group. And it was social.

RB: Were these Sephardic and Ashkenazi women?

BB: Yes, both.

RB: I see.

BB: Yes. Now, when I lived in Cleveland, there weren't any Sephardics, so they were all Ashkenazi friends. That was my introduction to the outside world. In fact, when I was selling raffle tickets to earn money for a gala I wanted to attend, my friend suggested I sell tickets to my cleaners. The lady at the cleaners said, "What are you doing selling B'nai B'rith tickets? You're not Jewish!" I said, "Yes, I am. I'm Sephardic." She said, "Say something in Yiddish." I said, "I don't speak Yiddish. I'm Sephardic." "What's Sephardic?" I found out there was one other couple besides us that were Sephardic in Cleveland. The other couple was from South America. So they didn't know about Sephardics in Cleveland. So, all my friends were Ashkenazim. And they were introduced to Sephardic food. [laughter] They liked my bourekas better than their – what did call them? – their potato –

RB: Oh, knishes?

BB: Knishes, yeah. "We like your bourekas better than our potato knishes." [laughter] And I'll admit, they are better. The other thing – customs – my friend's relative passed away, my friend, Bess (Agin?). She told me that her relative passed away. I didn't know who it was, but it was her relative. I said, "Oh, where can I send flowers?" She said, "Are you sure you're Jewish?" I said, "Why?" "Only goyim send flowers." I said, "Well, what do you do?" So you notice that it's different customs in different areas. I said, "Well, in Seattle, they send flowers." She said, "Here, you bring food when you go call on the family." So you learn different customs. It's not only one way, the only way that I knew. They questioned our Judaism because our reading was different than their reading.

RB: How so? What were the differences when you were growing up? That would be great to hear. Was their Ladino in [inaudible]?

BB: Oh, yeah, Ladino and Hebrew.

RB: Okay.

BB: Yes, definitely.

RB: So the melodies were different as well?

BB: Yes. You like the familiar melodies what you grow up with.

RB: What was the women's role in public synagogue life when you were growing up in the early years?

BB: Women didn't speak up, the men did. I found it very interesting when one lady did get up when they talked about merging the two congregations, Ezra Bessaroth and the Bikur Holim. And their children were already integrating, you know, the Rhodeslis and Tekirdaglis, and so what's the big deal? Well, this woman said, "No," that she wanted to

keep it separate, even though she had two or three daughters-in-law that were of Turkish background and her sons were Rhodeslis.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: So it was interesting for a woman to stand up and not even be in agreement. She was opposing. It was most unusual. Yeah, you didn't do it in those days. Very few women spoke up. There was one other lady, Anna Adatto, and her son, I think, was writing about Sephardim for the Archives. Albert Adatto, is he a professor? No, he was in the Army, Capt. Albert Adatto. Her children were all educated, they all went to college. She was her own person, very colorful. But they were rare, very rare.

RB: So the women played kind of behind the scenes roles?

BB: I think very behind the scenes, but they got everything they wanted. They manipulated. But they acted like the man was the head of the household, but they weren't suppressed.

RB: When did that change over time? How have you seen that evolve?

BB: How did that evolve? Well, I remember when we were first married and we saw how other couples related and how women would talk about how they handled things with their husbands. Example: Her husband would ask, "Is that a new dress?" "Oh, no. You just don't remember it. I've had it a long time." Then, behind his back, "He would kill me if he knew I bought it." Well, where did she get the money? So she must have had her own little way of getting extra money. I remember my husband saying, "Now, isn't that stupid? That man is paying for it. Why shouldn't he get credit for it? Why does it have to be like this?" He says, "That man is paying for it anyway, so you pat him on the back – 'thanks, honey.'" So that was how we related. We never felt that we had to do things like this.

RB: It sounds like you had open communication [inaudible] –

BB: Yes, yes. Well, that's the best way. I like to know where I stand. I think everyone does.

RB: Absolutely. So at what point in time, as you were raising your children, did you become involved in the arts in Pilchuck School? Maybe I actually –

BB: I'm trying to think how long ago. We were early collectors when they first started.

RB: Maybe I should have you describe Pilchuck School for those outside of the Northwest.

BB: Well, it's a school that's internationally known. People come from all over the world. It's built on a campus that belonged to John Hauberg, who had this acreage north of Seattle. It's a tree farm. He wanted to have kind of a little museum out there. He approached several artists, but they weren't interested. Then he found Dale Chihuly and another friend. And Dale Chihuly really got the glass movement going. He was like a hippie in those days, maybe like thirty years ago. So he went up there with a couple of buddies, and they built tents because there wasn't any housing and built a little furnace where they could blow their glass. Dale Chihuly is now world-famous. It became very famous. People wanted to come. And it was really during the hippie days anyway, where people lived in communes and tents, and arty, very creative. And that's how Pilchuck started. Now they have wonderful buildings and very modern facilities. They have an open house once a year, it's open to the public. The campus is open year-round, but during the summer, it's like full steam ahead. They have students come from all over, they give scholarships, or there are people who pay for their tuition. Pilchuck School's office is in downtown Seattle in the winter and on Pilchuck campus in the summer. We were asked to come to an auction that was at the Henry Gallery, the first one we went to. I believe it was their second auction, but it was our first.

RB: Do you remember what year this was? I'm sorry to interrupt.

BB: I would say about twenty-five years ago. I don't know exactly what year. I would say twenty-five years ago. So that gets you back to about '76. We went to this auction. We went because a friend of ours invited us. I remember getting the invitation, you know, in the mail, and I threw it out. Then I got another invitation signed, "Hope you can make it," by my friend. And I thought, "Well, you know, you support your friends. Let's go." So that's how we happened to go. Everything we saw we wanted to bid on. We ended up with two pieces. And it's kind of fun to have what was then a big piece, Dale Chihuly was big at the time. So we have a lot of his work as he progressed.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: So it's a nice retrospective. That was the beginning. Then they asked us – they saw the interest that we had. We were asked to join the Board – I was, and then Jack was asked to join the Board. Then you just meet people that come from all over. We joined the American Crafts Museum in New York. These people are interested in all kinds of work – fiber, ceramics, glass, jewelry, any kind of wood carving. So they go on these wonderful trips that are very well planned. And you meet these people. And if you go to a few of them, you're having a reunion again. So it's been really fun and a growing experience. Even though you don't collect certain things, you go to these galleries, because of everyone's diversified interest. You're learning something from it all the time.

RB: Wow. In what way has it been a growing experience?

BB: Just meeting people from different walks of life. We met this lady that has her doctorate in art. We've become very good friends. We were in Paris when we met her. And we were looking at things that we were interested in. She would tell us, "This is not a good piece by this artist." She would guide us.

RB: Isn't that something?

BB: So we have visited back and forth. And she's very Jewish. She was previously married to a rabbi. Her son is a very famous rabbi, Mark Schneier. She has remarried. When this Black man that was – what was his name? – Jesse Jackson – it was divulged that he had a child out of wedlock, it was publicized – e went to see Mark for counseling.

RB: Is he a Sephardic rabbi?

BB: No, they're not Sephardic.

RB: Okay.

BB: No, you're thinking Marc Angel.

RB: Yeah.

BB: He has that wonderful congregation.

RB: It sounds like your interest in design and your artistic abilities spilled over into this – is what I'm guessing is that–

BB: It's good if you both like the same things. Then when you're shopping or traveling, you have this common interest. You want to go to antique shops or whatever. We both enjoyed doing it. We know a couple that were both very strong-willed, and they ended up going in different directions. They didn't want their marriage to break up, so they got counseling. In the course of counseling, the counselor asked what their common interests were. It was glass collecting.

RB: Really? Isn't that something?

BB: So they concentrated on that. They were buying glass with a vengeance. They have a collection that doesn't quit. The opening show at the American Crafts Museum was their collection. And it's traveled, and they donated a lot of their work to a museum,

but they're still collecting. They're passionate about it. So they found a common interest. [laughter] So I always think that if a couple has something like this, it's good. So we've enjoyed it. We've come to a conclusion that we both have to like it – can you imagine: – "I love this," "I hate it," and you buy it? It's a sore spot every time you look at it.

RB: Absolutely.

BB: We both have to love it. At this point, we've bought so many things, we have to love it before we buy it now. If one of us doesn't like it, it's fine with me if he takes it to the office. I don't have to look at it. [laughter]

RB: [inaudible] [laughter]

BB: So that's our compromise. So it's been fun. We've gone on wonderful trip different when you go on group trips. It's a well-planned trip. You're meeting families because you're seeing their collections. You see what other people collect and how they display it. It's a learning experience. We have our house open for groups that come through.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes. I had a group Saturday, as a matter of fact.

RB: That's really wonderful.

BB: Well, it's fun to share.

RB: Gosh. So have you volunteered in other ways for Pilchuck School, or have you –?

BB: No. I've just been on the Board, and I've done fundraisers for them. And I think that we're a very important part of the Pilchuck Glass Movement because when people come to see the collection if they're drawn to a particular artist's work, they want to know who handles their work, and eventually, they buy. So it encourages – the artists know that we

have been very instrumental in their success and the gallery's. So it's just that kind of a good experience. In the desert, I like to work with children at the school, volunteer with their reading. They are so cute. Most of them come from families that don't speak English. There are a lot of Mexican children, and they only speak Spanish at home. They don't comprehend what they're reading. If they're reading, they don't know what they're reading. It's like when Jack told the stewardess on the airline when she was announcing we were landing in Israel, first part was in Hebrew, and then in English. So he tells the stewardess, "I can read Hebrew, but I don't understand what I'm reading." She says, "How could that be, you can read it, but you don't understand?" Well, he was taught Hebrew without understanding what he was reading. Well, it's the same thing with these children. I can understand that. They can read it, but they don't know what they're reading. So working with them has been wonderful.

RB: Where do you do this?

BB: At school, at an elementary school in Cathedral City, in Palm Springs.

RB: I see. Okay, you mentioned the desert, and I wasn't sure which –

BB: Oh, Palm Springs.

RB: That is marvelous. So when did you start working with these children?

BB: Oh, about ten years ago, when we first became homeowners.

RB: And what motivated you to work with them?

BB: Well, a friend of mine asked if I'd like to do it. And I said, "It sounds like fun." So I've gotten other people involved. Some have stayed with it, others haven't. But I don't think they like volunteers that don't show up. They're counting on you.

RB: Do you have any stories of children in particular that really –

BB: Oh, a couple of them stand out. One I'm sure will be a fabulous artist.

RB: Really.

BB: After he'd read a story, he said, "Do you want me to draw the picture?" However he perceived the story, he would just free draw. Well, the teacher gave me a couple of his pictures and had them framed for my reward. He saw them framed, and he didn't want to part with them because they looked so nice. He signed them and everything. He said he wanted them back, and the teacher said, "You can make some other ones." [laughter] There's one child I was reading a story to – sometimes I read so they'll know the expression of reading, and then they can read back to me. This word, I think it was balcony. I said, "Do you know what a balcony is?" I could see where they wouldn't know, because houses there are all one floor. How would they know what a balcony is? And the other thing is, they don't have that much exposure to other things to relate. I said, "You know a veranda?" "No." "Do you know what a porch is?" I was going to say if you know what a porch is, then it's on the second level. And this kid said, "Is it a car?" [laughter] He was thinking of Porsche. So, we had a good laugh. They're very good with the computer. I told them that I don't know how to use the computer. He said, "Well, you helped me with my reading, so when we go to the computer, I'll help you."

RB: Is that right?

BB: And he'll praise me – "Very good!"

RB: [laughter] And what ages?

BB: They are sweet.

RB: What ages?

BB: They're first to third grade.

RB: That’s terrific.

BB: Yes, six, seven, eight years old.

RB: And how often do you do this volunteer –

BB: A couple of times a week.

RB: And what are the rewards and challenges for you?

BB: The rewards? Just seeing them progress. And then, when it becomes a challenge, I have to talk to the teacher. [laughter] The problem there is they don’t get to bed on time. They’re yawning. They’re scratching their eyes. So, I’d ask them a little bit about their personal life. It’s pretty sad. Half the time, they don’t have a father around. This one child, I didn’t have her regularly. Her mentor wasn’t there, so the teacher asked if I would take her. If you are reading a story, and you come across a word that you don’t know, you write it on a card and make a sentence out of it. If you can read that word three times in a row, you get a little "X," and you put it in a jar, and then you get a prize after so many words. So she had this sentence, “My brother is mean to me.” That was her sentence. My brother – "mean" was the word. So, I said, “Very good.” She read the word. She goes on to tell me how mean he is. I said, “Well, maybe your dad should intervene. Does he know what’s going on?” “Oh, his dad is in prison.” “Oh. Are there other children in the family? Well, what about that dad?” Anyway, there aren’t any dads and three different children. Her dad is remarried and lives in Mexico, and he has his own other children. Well, you hear things like this, and you wonder. You talk to the teacher. How can this child be helped? Not that she’s slow. She’s just carrying the whole world on her shoulders. It’s just not fair.

RB: Right.

BB: So you get a lot of those. And then you get some real bright ones, and it keeps you going. But you don't know how the other half live. You haven't a clue.

RB: It's true. Unless you work directly, sometimes, it's hard to know, isn't it?

BB: It is.

RB: I guess what I'm really struck with as you're talking is how diverse your interests and passions are, from art to working with children and cooking. It's really remarkable to me. I have to tell you. Another area that I've noticed is bridge. Is that something that you do regularly?

BB: What's that?

RB: Play Bridge, do you play–

BB: Oh, yes, I love it. I play it twice a week.

RB: Is that right? So has it replaced mahjong?

BB: I don't play mahjong. No, if I had time for one, it would be bridge.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Most of my friends still play both games, but I don't devote that much time. Twice a week is good.

RB: How did you start playing bridge?

BB: I'm trying to remember. Somebody must have suggested taking bridge lessons at the Y because I remember going to the Y. We were playing, but we weren't playing well. Somebody told me, "You should play with better players, that's the only way you learn." Then we took more lessons. Oh, and when I was playing tennis, the girls were talking

about, “Let’s play bridge afterwards. So let’s take lessons.” So our bridge game became bridge and tennis, and that was fun.

RB: Where do you play bridge, typically?

BB: At home. Well, I like to have it at home. Most of the girls are having it out, where you don’t have to prepare lunch. [laughter]

RB: [laughter] I bet they love coming here.

BB: Well, yesterday, we played at the Yacht Club. And they said it’s centrally located for people that live on the east side, the north, and here, which it is. But I’m having a game here on Friday, and next Friday a different group of girls, but I will prepare lunch.

RB: Is it all Jewish women, or is there a mix?

BB: Yes, they are. I have played duplicate at the tennis club, where you have your partner, and then you’re playing with women that aren’t – well, men and women that aren’t Jewish. But I don’t like playing duplicate as much as social bridge. I like the game, but I also like to be with my friends. It’s more that than the game itself. And in the desert, I play a lot more bridge. There are more games there than here.

RB: Really?

BB: Yeah.

RB: So, how often would you play?

BB: I play Saturday, Monday, Tuesday – three or four times. That’s la-la land. It’s a lot of fun and games.

RB: Sounds great. Now, how often are you there, though, what’s your–

BB: Well, we're there about five and a half months.

RB: I see.

BB: It started out where it was going to be a few weeks at a time. It just progressed. I would say that's as primary a home as this is. I used to say this is my primary home, but I'm there just about as much as we are here.

RB: It sounds wonderful. Do you have a community down there that you –?

BB: Yes, we belong to a country club. We live in a gated area, Morningside. We belong to that club too. It's an independent, free-standing house, but they call them condominiums because they take care of the common areas – the outside of your house and the roof. The rest is your own private. It's nice because you have the security. If you're not there and a service person has to come, they'll let them in. It's very nice. It's like here because I have the valet here that can come up and get something if I need it. It's the best of both worlds. We're here for the wonderful summer and there for the winter. I can step outside in my garden with the house. And here, you're in a high-rise. So it's kind of nice having the two.

RB: Sure.

BB: We're at the age now where I think we can do that.

RB: Absolutely.

BB: Jack had a harder time liking it.

RB: Is that right? How so? What was his –?

BB: Well, he didn't ever learn to play. When he was playing tennis, he liked it better. But he's not able to now. So he is not so socially involved during the day. I don't think

he's unusual – making plans, getting together with buddies unless they call him. There's a little group now that he belongs to. They go to lunch. It's wonderful.

RB: That's great.

BB: So he doesn't socialize as much as I do. He's still involved in business, in his investments, so he keeps happy that way.

RB: That's wonderful, at eighty. Isn't that great?

BB: Yes, it is. It is. But you know, we have a lot of friends that are older. You should see them dancing. They stay as long as the band is playing. I see younger people leaving at 10:00. They all take dancing lessons, these friends that are older, and they have a ball. But Jack has Parkinson's now, so he isn't as mobile. But he's doing fine, considering.

RB: How has his health impacted you or him in your relationship?

BB: What?

RB: His health, how has that been for you?

BB: Well, it was pretty devastating when I heard, but I couldn't let on, because he was having a tough time. So I said, "There are a lot of things that are worse." And there are. I convinced myself. I said, "You're still functioning. It's not life-threatening. It does debilitate you, but it's not life-threatening. And there's wonderful medication now that's keeping it under control." And then I had to add: "You're lucky you have me." [laughter]

RB: [laughter] I would agree.

BB: And he laughed. So I have to remind him periodically when he gets down that there's a lot worse. And he agrees. So you know, we're really pretty lucky to have each

other all these years. February, it will be sixty years for our anniversary.

RB: Congratulations.

BB: Thank you. No, we're blessed. You know, everything now is a bonus.

RB: Right. You mentioned tennis, which is kind of – I'm just taking a step back. And I want to pick up on that before I let it go completely. You mentioned Bridge and tennis. That's one area that you haven't – he hasn't been able to play as much.

BB: He was never a card player.

RB: I see. So he would play tennis.

BB: Tennis.

RB: With you?

BB: Sundays, we would go – we'd play tennis and then go to brunch with another couple. That was nice.

RB: In Seattle?

BB: That was the only time we played together, on Sundays.

RB: I see. In Seattle?

BB: Both. We have tennis courts right out here, and then the two clubs have tennis courts.

RB: Do you still play?

BB: Not as much. My friends have all given it up. In the desert, the pro will call me and put a game together. If I call her and she can't get a game, she'll play with me. So I still

try to play, but it's not the same when you're not playing with your friends. The social aspects – like my bridge, I like to play with my friends. So things change as you start losing friends. I just had a terrible phone call the other day. A very dear friend that I – a new friend – and when I say "friend," you can use that term very loosely, but this was a friend. I met her down in Palm Springs. She lived at Morningside, where we live. Perfect health. And she died yesterday. The funeral is tomorrow. A disease that they don't even know what it is that affected her brain. When I left her, she was in perfect health. She called me when she was home in Chicago, and I was here in Seattle. I got her message on the answering machine: "Just thinking about you and hoping you're all fine." And she said, "I want you to know we love you." That was the last I heard from her. When she was putting things away, she'd had sort of a memory lapse, and she didn't know where things were – why she put them where she did. But it was happening more frequently. Her husband took her in to see the doctor. She had a disease that was progressive, and she died in less than two months. Very sad.

RB: Sounds very tragic.

BB: That's the sad thing about getting older – losing good friends. And that's happening lately.

RB: What lessons have you learned from those kinds of illnesses and what perspective –?

BB: I always think of my grandfather, that life offers different things at different times. You reach different plateaus, and there are always things to look forward to. I'm sure there are.

RB: And of those lessons, what have you shared with your children?

BB: Well, I remember my daughter asking me on my sixtieth birthday, "How do you feel?" Like, a senior citizen. I said, "I don't know. It's just a number." I said, "I wouldn't

have all this if I weren't this old. I've got my children, grandchildren, and they're all blessings." So, I try to tell them, "There's good things to look forward to." I don't know how much they get out of it. I know when my mother used to tell us, it went in one ear and out the other, and that you digest it when you're experiencing it.

RB: Isn't that something? So at the time, it seems –?

BB: But it's planted. It's a seed. It's planted.

RB: So let's see, you have three children.

BB: Yes.

RB: And how many grandchildren do you have?

BB: Four.

RB: Four. Can you describe your experience of being a grandmother?

BB: Well, I remember my mother telling me when she found out that I was going to be a grandmother, she said, "You think you know what you have in store. You don't have a clue. You just wait." And that's the way it is, yes.

RB: And how has it been? What are the rewards?

BB: Yes, they're wonderful. They're all different. They're all different. I was closer to my daughter's children than my daughter-in-law because she had her mother that was home all the time. That's the other thing, her mother wasn't in good health. So she could always count on her mother to babysit. And she never asked me. One time she asked me. Her babysitter let her down. And my granddaughter was about three. She said, "Grandma, this is the first time you babysat me." And I knew it. But she never asked me, and so I felt like – you miss out on something. You don't have that bonding at the

beginning, but you make up for it now that they're adults, and we keep in touch. And they are wonderful. They're very special. But I had a different feeling with my daughter's children.

RB: So that early bonding at the beginning is significant.

BB: Oh, they were like my children. I knew how my mother felt [laughter]when she had that baby, my daughter. Yes, they're just like your own children. In fact, you mix them up, their names. I call her Donna, and I mean Renee. Yes, it's special.

RB: How do you think parenting has changed over time, over the generations?

BB: I think that parents want to be buddies with their children rather than letting the children know that there's someone that makes the decision for them when they're little. I think it's a big mistake because the children start telling the parents – and then you're out of control. Children need to be led. Yeah. So I think that's a difference. I think that what happens is, you get too much of this domineering parenting, and then you're too lax the other way. There'll be a happy medium. I know we were very strict, because my parents were very strict. And maybe I was too strict.

RB: With rules or with – were there certain areas?

BB: All of them. All of them. They had the same kind of – there were rules and regulations, and they had to abide by it. I had a nephew that was living with me for a while, and he didn't have rules. His mother had remarried. Anyway, I told him he could live with us. He was coming and going as he pleased. And I said, "You can't do that. You can't do that. My children are going to resent it that you have all this leeway, and they don't. If you're living here, these are the rules. You have to let me know if you're going to come home for dinner. You can't just pop in and out, or I'm waiting." I said, "I have to know. My children have to tell me where they are and if they're coming home for dinner." He didn't have to. His mother was working before she married, and he came

and went. So he had a hard time going by these rules. But I knew that he had to abide by it, or my children would say I'm showing favoritism. They didn't want rules. [laughter] Yeah, we were pretty strict – maybe too strict. But you do how you've been brought up, and you think that that's the only way that there is to do it. You try to modify it a little bit someplace or another. I know where I modified it. My mother would lay the rules down and then change her mind later. She'd say, "No, you can't do it," and then, "Oh, all right, go." After you wear her out with arguing – "All right, go." So we always knew we could get our way. So I said, "I'm not going to budge. If I lay the rule down, this is it." I would tell them, "Fair warning, this is it." And I wouldn't budge because I had my mother wrapped around my finger, even though she was strict. My dad, you couldn't do that. His word was law. So you tried to compensate for one and the other. So maybe I was too much. I think with my children, maybe they feel that they didn't like certain things; they're going to do it their way. Well, I know my daughter-in-law and my son are doing a beautiful job with their children. I've got the best daughter-in-law anybody could want.

RB: That's wonderful.

BB: She is wonderful. She's a wonderful girl. I feel very blessed.

RB: They have also made huge philanthropic endeavors in this city and nationally. I'm wondering how that has been passed down in your family through the generations, that your generosity and your –

BB: I think that it's rubbed off.

RB: – compassion for –

BB: Yes, I think it's rubbed off.

RB: How do you think that's come about? Do you have any sense of that?

BB: Maybe because they know how we feel about it. I think being first generation, you have a different feeling about achieving. I think that when you inherit, it's a different kind of feeling. But when you have earned it, and you feel very grateful that you're here in this country and you have these opportunities, you want to give something back to your community. We've always felt this way. The children have heard us talk about it. I think they feel that this is what it's all about. Why not share? They are fortunate to be in the position to do this. Our grandson is diabetic. Everybody is very fond of Michael. He's a special young man. So this is a very personal involvement. This research center, we're hoping, will do miracles. The doctors are very excited about what's happening with the diabetes research. They feel they are very close to a breakthrough. So I'm sure there will be a cure in his lifetime. The whole family is involved with this special guy. He's doing really well. He's twenty, and he has his diabetes under control. Devastating when we heard about it. He was five and a half.

RB: What were the circumstances?

BB: He was out of school, thinking he had the flu or a cold or something. They do think that a virus could cause juvenile diabetes. Sherry noticed that he was always thirsty and urinating frequently. So she told Larry she thought he might be diabetic. "Oh, come on. He's got a cold," was Larry's response. But she had a premonition. She had an appointment with the doctor at 2:00 that day. Michael was feeling better, so she sent him off to school. She took in a specimen that morning so that when she went in for the appointment, it would be analyzed, and they'd be ready. They called her from school. He was very sleepy. They had him lying down on a mat on the floor, and he was wet up to his neck. She grabbed him. She knew already. Ran to the doctors and then to Children's Orthopedic. That was a terrible day. I remember having a luncheon here for Federation the day I heard that he was in the hospital. It was all I could do, waiting for the event to end, so I could go over there and find out what was going on. It was awful. My niece's mother-in-law was here for the luncheon, and we both cried together. Her

son, Harvey Poll – do you know who he is? He died of diabetes – diabetes complications. That's why diabetes research is our favorite charity.

RB: So it's an example of how your family took a situation like that, of an illness, and really –

BB: Did something about it.

RB: Right, right. How does that feel to know that your family has really done that, responded that way?

BB: Special.

RB: In what way do you think?

BB: It was selfish, let's start out with that. But we just felt that – we knew we had good people here doing research. And Jack, being a businessman, figured that if you give them proper facilities, you get other good people that want to work here. It's a business kind of mentality, and also doing something about it.

RB: So it sounds like your family drew on so many strengths, your business knowledge and compassion for people and concern.

BB: Yes, all those things.

RB: All of those things pulled together for you, didn't it? And benefit so many people now.

BB: But I have found that Jack has always analyzed things in a very businesslike manner. Take the symphony hall. We have a very good conductor, and he didn't have a concert hall. We knew he was being offered other jobs elsewhere in the country. How do you keep good help? So that's why he felt we had to do something to keep him.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes. So he had lunch with Gerard Schwarz, the conductor, and said, “What does it take? How much do you need?” He named a figure, and Jack said, “Okay, I’ll go for it.” And then the rest is history. But it’s always with a businesslike approach.

RB: And it sounds like a lot of passion for the arts and music.

BB: Yes. That’s our city. We love our city.

RB: And it’s been so greatly appreciated by the city what you’ve done.

BB: Yes, it is wonderful. It’s very gratifying. And now that we’re in the desert, we are asked to contribute there as well. Jack said, “We support Seattle, how can we do both?” I said, “We live here, and we want to feel we are part of the community.” So we support Palm Springs’ charities as well.

RB: So it sounds like there’s a partnership in this work as well?

BB: Oh, no question. No question.

RB: How so? How’s your partnership in this philanthropy work?

BB: Oh, just whenever he asks, “What do you think?” I always say, “Go for it.” Well, he knows if he can do it financially. If he thinks he can do it, go for it. We’re not going to live any differently. That’s what people don’t understand. It’s easy to give if you want to help others less fortunate. I remember when Federation started with the Lady’s Division. I think it was fifty dollars to go to the luncheon. I think I was soliciting at that time too. And the pitch was, “So you’ll do without a dress, or you’ll do without going out for dinner. Give until it hurts.” I don’t think you have to give until it hurts. You’re not going to live any differently. Do you think that if they gave fifty dollars they’re still not going to buy a dress that they wanted? You can give fifty dollars; you can buy the dress too. This goes back

fifty years or more. So the fifty dollars is all relative. So in those days – and today, it's the same thing. You're not going to do without. I don't think people are depriving themselves. It's just sharing. So whenever Jack would say, "What do you think," I'd always say, "Go for it." We don't live any differently. I don't feel that I want to live on a different level. I do feel that if there's something you want to put off for whatever reason, I say, "Don't put it off, not at our age." So this is what I say, "Live today."

RB: So you have a different perspective in your older years that –?

BB: Oh, sure, sure. But I also feel when people leave things in their will, they don't get the feeling of giving and seeing the end result, the product. You could say, "I'll leave this for – in my will, to an organization" – which we will still do. But in the meantime, we want to see the product while we're alive. So I think a lot of people should do that instead of waiting until they're gone. You can't take it with you. You're not going to spend it all. People at our age are already established. Young couples have a lot of things ahead of them – children's education and providing for their families.

RB: In a discussion that we had earlier, where you were talking about fundraising, you had some important messages that you expressed. I would love to get some of those on tape.

BB: I don't recall.

RB: Well, you had recently had dinner out with another couple and–

BB: Oh, yes.

RB: – you were talking about fundraising.

BB: Fundraising, yeah, how passionate she felt about giving after achieving a certain level. They felt that they had to give tzedakah. That's how she expressed it. So, she

and her husband discussed it a little further. And she convinced him that they should give more. But they're a fairly young couple too, and fairly new at being successful. So, it's an education. Where do you want to give it? Where is your priority? So it takes a little doing, knowing where you want to give. I remember when they approached Bill Gates when he first became wealthy. He was in his thirties. He was asked about giving to charities, and he said he was so busy building up his business that it never occurred to him what his interests were. He was really busy building up Microsoft. So I could understand that he just didn't think about where his priorities were as far as giving. But he certainly has done more than his share. It takes a lot of time and research to know where you want to give your money. And people were criticizing. And I didn't know that that was called for because he was helping the economy just by hiring people. It was a big industry right there. And now, of course, he and his wife, I'm sure that they're a team when it comes to giving.

RB: At what point in the life of your marriage did that happen for you and Jack?

BB: I told about you the time when we came back from Cleveland. We were building our house, and we didn't know if we could even keep the house, financially. So I don't know how long – things like this weren't really discussed, as to where we were financially. I know that we were able to keep the house and furnish it. I don't know how hard it was for him to do this. So I'm trying to think when he really felt comfortable. In his business, he borrowed so much money he always said he was the bank's best customer. That's only because he borrowed so much money. So he never felt it was his money, even though he had the buildings but not a cash flow. I think when it really happened was when he sold the properties, he felt now he could do it and feel comfortable. He never felt he could – well, when he gave to Federation, I know he didn't feel he could borrow to pay Federation. He didn't feel right about that. So he borrowed for his business, but not for donations. So he felt a little restricted. But I think after he was able to feel that he had control of the money, then he wanted to share. So I would say – he's always given to

Federation but gave in larger amounts after he sold the properties.

RB: And the two of you have really worked as a team when that [inaudible] –

BB: Well, we always felt – yeah – if he's a little reluctant, I push him.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Yes, go for it. And there's no squabble over that, it's fine. It's just like a sounding board. He probably was going to do it anyway. I just reconfirm.

RB: But that sounding board, it sounds like, gives him a tremendous amount of support or encouragement – or what do you think that serves?

BB: Well, I think it's important, don't you?

RB: Absolutely.

BB: To feel that you're doing the right thing?

RB: Yes.

BB: Yes, to have someone whose ideas you want to hear. I think it's good to have that reinforcement.

RB: It's very important. Becky, in talking with you about different family memories and holiday experiences, you mentioned a wonderful memory about Sukkot. I wonder if you would share that experience with us.

BB: Well, I had some wonderful experiences with my grandfather. He was always there as an extra buddy. For Sukkot, he had built this trellis years before, with this grapevine growing over it, and he trained it to go over this area that he had built behind the garage. He put benches where he could sit out there and this trellis that was covered with the

grapevine. And it was a nicely shaded area. And so for Sukkot – I seem to remember that every year was like a beautiful fall day, it was sunny. We'd hang these cookies that my mother made – bizcochos – and fruits, the grapes particularly, and pears and apples. It was so much fun. He tied a little string on the things that were going to be hung. And he picked me up so I could tie it up on top. We felt like we did it together. There are wonderful memories. I've never had a Sukkah since. It was my grandfather that did all this. But I was glad I had the exposure, where I knew what the celebration was about. And it was always fun.

RB: Do you remember, were there any special foods or any other customs besides the –?

BB: No. I just remember the decorating. That was so much fun. I think we just had a regular dinner. We'd eat out there, a table was set up. But I don't remember the food.

RB: Were there any blessings that were said?

BB: Oh, sure, always, before you eat anything, there was a blessing.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Always. Especially if it was first of the season; it was an extra blessing, Shehecheyanu.

RB: Of course.

BB: Well, in those days, it was seasonal fruits. You didn't have them shipped in from other areas.

RB: That's right.

BB: So if you're eating watermelon for the first time that season or a cherry, it was always that Shehecheyanu.

RB: So there were always blessings?

BB: Always a blessing, uh-huh.

RB: That leads into our other topic that we wanted to talk about, and that is an uncle of Jack's that is just–

BB: He's a hundred years old.

RB: – a hundred years old. Could you describe your relationship with him and the lessons you've learned from him?

BB: Well, I often wondered what made him so special. Because we've gone to Montgomery two or three times a year – that's where Jack has all his relatives on his mother's side. His uncle lost his wife when he was in his nineties. And after a few years of living alone, he decided he should go to an assisted living. He didn't like that because that was regimented. He had to get up for breakfast, and he didn't want to get up when they wanted him to get up. He checked out and moved into an independent living. He's very happy there. He likes to cook little Sephardic things that he enjoys. This last visit when we were there in Montgomery – there were a few little parties because of the eightieth birthday parties – and I was watching him. He's very sharp of mind. He's got a wonderful memory. He's blessed. He isn't just a hundred years old. He's very interested and very involved. He's a historian. We should be asking him questions about the family. You always think of questions after they're gone. So I was thinking, "What made him tick?" I realized I never heard him complain. After he was widowed he didn't complain. He just knew that he had to change things and have help in the house. And he just adjusted to it, blessed with the years that he had with his wife. His nephews and nieces adore him. They always go pick him up to go to Friday night services. They'll

pick him up and take him to the doctor, whatever needs he has. He's just very appreciative. I found that he’s not expecting anything. Whatever happens, he’s appreciative. I learned that if you’re not expecting, you can’t be disappointed. Just take what you have. He knows that he has these wonderful nieces and nephews that love him. So I thought we could all learn how to get old. Don’t complain. Don’t ask people to do things for you. Try to be as independent as you can. I think people will love you for it. I think that he’s a good role model.

RB: Well, it’s been wonderful to hear your stories and to gather your history today.

BB: May I add that you have been lovely too.

RB: Thank you very much.

BB: I enjoyed having you here.

RB: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]