



# Antoinette Matlins Transcript

Sandy Gartner: This is Sandy Gartner and Ann Buffum meeting with Antoinette Matlins to record a life history interview as part of the Vermont Jewish Women's History Project. Today is July 20, 2006. We are speaking with Antoinette at her home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Antoinette, do we have your permission to record this interview with you?

Antoinette Matlins: Yes, you do.

SG: Thank you. The first question is, what brought your ancestors to the United States? Where did they come from? Where did they settle?

AM: Desperate times brought my grandparents to this country on my father's side from Sicily. They were looking for a better life. My mother's ancestors came from Scotland and Ireland and settled in the southwestern corner of Virginia. I think it was in the late 1700s. I'm not sure what the motivation – I don't know if it was a potato drought. I don't really know what brought them, but that's when they came. The Sicilian family came from Mount Etna, a little town called Nicolosi, and settled in Washington, DC. They came through Ellis Island and settled in Washington.

SG: That was during –?

AM: My grandfather arrived here in 1906.

SG: How did your parents meet? What was it like for them and for your families? They blended the two very different cultures that you talked about.

AM: [laughter] They met during World War Two. My mother, who was also born in the southwestern corner of Virginia and was the first woman in her family to ever attend any post-high school educational facility – she went to a junior college (Ferrum Junior



College, in Ferrum, Virginia) and then came to Washington to work at the State Department as a secretary. She was also the first member of her family to leave the ten-mile geographic area in which the family was raised. She just got up and left. She met my father, who was a soldier. But he was classified 4-F because he was flat-footed and had also had an accident when he was a little boy that left him blind in one eye for the rest of his life. He was terribly frustrated because he wanted to serve and he wanted to fight, and they wouldn't let him be, in his words, a "real" soldier. But they met by accident; he saw her on a streetcar, and it was love at first sight; so he kept taking the same streetcar at approximately the same time until he saw her again, and he sat next to her and started talking and began to see each other secretly! He was a Sicilian, and my mother wasn't. He was Catholic, and my mother was Brethren. So they were afraid to let their parents know they were dating, and they eloped and were married by a Baptist minister with four witnesses: her best friend from the State Department, that friend's husband, and Mom's sister, and her sister's husband. My father didn't have any family he could trust to keep the secret. He was so afraid to tell his father that he went home every night for the first three months of their marriage.

SG: That's incredible. Wonderful.

AM: Finally, with my mother's prodding, he took her home. My mother had flaming red hair and looked and had a personality very much like Katharine Hepburn. My grandfather took to my mother very quickly. They ended up getting along very, very well. My grandfather taught my mother to cook many of the dishes that he'd learned to make in Sicily; she simply memorized the recipes! Amazingly, he had brought the cuttings of things like figs, grapes, and Italian tomatoes from his parents' land in Sicily and planted them in his tiny backyard in Washington, DC, and they took root and grew! He had the most incredibly lush garden on this little plot of land that I don't think was ten feet by six feet, including a fig tree that had huge luscious, sweet green figs that I can still remember. So she taught him some of the recipes from southwestern Virginia, and he



taught her the recipes from Sicily. My mother was incredible baker, and she baked everything from scratch – bread and rolls and cakes and pies and cookies and candies. You name it; she could do it.

SG: How did her family feel about your dad?

AM: I think her family had much greater difficulty with it because they were raised in the tiny area of Floyd and Patrick counties in southwestern Virginia and had never really ever been outside of this little area in southwestern Virginia. They were very insular. They always referred to him as being “Ah'talian.” [laughter] My grandfather had died – on my mother’s side – before I was born, and my grandmother had remarried. I always sensed that my grandmother was very fond of my father but always a little frightened because, in their home, they never raised their voices. They spoke almost in a whisper. Italians don’t know about whispers. They get excited, and their voices go up. My grandmother always found this very intimidating. So I think they never felt quite the closeness and warmth they might have felt if she had married someone who was softer-spoken. My father also broke away from the Catholic Church when I was very tiny. I’m not 100% sure, but I think he was actually officially excommunicated. He became angry when the priest told him after the first child was born that the child was a "bastard" and that unless he was remarried in the Catholic Church, their marriage didn’t exist, that they were living in sin, and that their future children would also be bastards. My father became angry. He felt that he was married in the eyes of God, and nothing would ever change his mind. The priest basically told him then he was no longer Catholic, and the children, in the eyes of him and his family would always remain bastards. I can remember when we were very tiny, some of the Italian relatives made unkind comments – and hearing comments from some of the aunts or uncles, saying, “Tsk-tsk-tsk. It’s such a shame. It’s such a shame.” Then when I was married the first time – I've been married twice – I was married in a Baptist church. The Catholic relatives would not come because they wouldn’t step foot inside any church that wasn't a Catholic Church. Times have changed



so much. They considered it a sin to step foot inside a Baptist Church, but they did come to the reception, which was not in the church; but they were adamant about not coming to the ceremony. I think, to their dying day, they all believed that we were technically bastards because my parents were not married in the Catholic Church. So I grew up, I guess, initially with a little bit of religious turmoil. My mother was raised as a Brethren, which is a very small Protestant sect but actually a very broad-minded set. I can remember when the schools in Washington, DC, were integrated; I was in elementary school. Half of our neighbors moved out of Washington to a Virginia or Maryland suburb because they wouldn't allow their children to go to school with, quote, "niggers," unquote. I heard my friends talking about how horrible it was going to be to go to school with "niggers." So, of course, we were all terrified. "What are Mom and Dad doing? We're the only ones going to school with these Black people." I can still hear my mother sitting us all down and explaining to us that there was no difference between white people and Black people, except the color of their skin, that there was no difference in the color of their hearts, and that God loved all children of all colors and there was nothing to be frightened of. She certainly was not about to move someplace else because her children would be going to school with children of another color. We accepted that and had friends who were Black from elementary school on. Again, for a woman who came from a tiny Southwestern Virginia town, it really was a very interesting position, but it came absolutely from her Brethren upbringing. But there was no Brethren Church in Washington, DC, where we lived. There was no Catholic church that my father would permit any of us to step into.

SG: "Not stepping in there."

AM: There was a Baptist Church on the corner, which meant we didn't have to cross any big streets to get there as children. Since no big streets had to be crossed, and it was still safe to let your children walk to school a few blocks away, it would be alright for us to walk to the church on the corner, although when we were very small and my mother only



had me and my brother, I remember her taking us to the Baptist church every Sunday.

By the time the third came, she would still take us, but a little less frequently. By the time I was six, I had discovered the children's choir at this church. I didn't know about music, but just to be able to wear the really pretty purple robes [laughter] was just an irresistible attraction; it was magnetic. So, I joined the choir. Then I started going to Sunday School every Sunday by myself and really considered myself a devout Baptist until I went off to college and experienced my first true Southern Baptist experience, where I began to have some problems with what was being preached from the pulpit.

What I eventually discovered was that the Baptist faith is very different depending upon who the minister is and which church you belong to in terms of the attitudes and feelings among the members about God and what God wants us to do. For me, in some ways, the Baptist faith, as I experienced it growing up, was very Jewish in that you prayed before you read the Bible to ask God to open your eyes as you read God's word. Also, as you read the text, it was up to you to interpret what the text meant; Baptists in the church I attended believed in "individual interpretation." You don't need a minister to tell you what the Bible is saying. Not only that, you have a responsibility to think about those words and to find meaning for your own life. Now, that was not my experience when I went South [laughter] to college, but that was my experience up to that point. Actually, I started college when I was seventeen.

SG: Where was that again?

AM: That was at Mary Washington College, which was then part of the University of Virginia, but it was a college for women only. There were three women's colleges of the University of Virginia because UVA was male-only. So there were the three women's colleges, but my diploma says, "University of Virginia." As time progressed, I began to have some serious problems going to a women's college and also with what was coming from the pulpit, but I still went. Then following my divorce, I was told by the Baptist minister that I MUST go back to my husband under the circumstances, regardless of the



reality that the conditions were life-threatening – I'd been hospitalized with injuries – so it didn't take me long to part ways with the Baptist Church. But the problem was that I believed in God, and so I needed to find another ... and I began my quest. Trying to find a faith, a religion was not an easy thing. After I was married I gave birth to a wonderful daughter, and I wanted to make sure that wherever I went, the church would not turn her against me since I was "divorced." I felt it was important for her to have a good spiritual foundation, but I was no longer comfortable with that foundation being what I was hearing in the Baptist Church. We ultimately stumbled upon Christian Science because my daughter was very talented and interested in ballet. That was something I had also studied as a young woman. In fact, I was offered a scholarship to go to what was then called Sadler's Wells ballet company. It was subsequently the Royal Ballet in London.

Ann Buffum: Oh, my goodness.

AM: I had taken the exams that were being given in the United States for the first time and passed them all with honors and was offered a scholarship. I did not go. I didn't see myself being a professional ballerina – ballet was not the only thing in my life – but I sometimes wondered after that decision if I'd made a mistake. Maybe I should have – blah, blah, blah. But I got married. I had a daughter, a daughter who had flat feet, short legs, and a large open diaphragm muscle, but from whom all I heard from the time she was a little child was, "I want to be a ballerina." Of course, we're in rural Virginia.

There's no place for her to study ballet. She never even knew her mother danced.

SG: Isn't that something?

AM: Her father, my ex-husband by that time, hated ballet, hated anything to do with ballet. My dance slippers and everything connected to my ever having been a ballerina had been put in the attic, never to be mentioned again. So, she didn't know. I put her off and put her off and put her off until after my divorce. I went to Italy following my divorce, where I was teaching at the American School in Florence. During that time, she learned



about a ballet school, and so I relented and let her take lessons at a very fine school in Florence, then came back to the United States, returning to Washington DC, [and] she wanted to continue taking ballet lessons. I lived in the DC metropolitan area when I came back and found the wonderful school where I'd studied was still run by the teachers who had taught me.

SG: Oh, that's something.

AM: I was taught by a husband and wife -- Yuri and Elizabeth Yourlo (for Yurloff) both of whom were Russian and had danced with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. When I took my daughter to see what we might work out, I learned he had died, and she was eighty but teaching class every single day. More interestingly, she had a children's professional group. But all students had to be interviewed by her and auditioned. She wouldn't just take any student. They had to meet her expectations. I was sure she would not take my daughter. I mean, my daughter definitely didn't have the build for a dancer, and she still had a flat foot problem, but I thought the lessons would be good for her. Mrs. Yourlo came to me, and said, "I'm going to accept your daughter because your daughter has something you never had ... a determination, drive, and a willingness to overcome all of the obstacles that I have pointed out she has. You were given a gift; you chose to do nothing with that gift, even though it all came naturally to you. I believe your daughter will fight for this and will stick with it," and she did most of her life until Mrs. Yourlo died. But this woman was a member of the Christian Science church, and my daughter's flat feet disappeared. She gave us a series of exercises to do to get rid of them; then her legs lengthened in relationship to her body, and she learned how to control her diaphragm and the large diaphragm muscle she had. It was amazing what Mrs. Yourlo was able to bring out in my daughter, how her body physically changed, and how she developed into a really beautiful dancer. Then one day Mrs. Yourlo said, "I can't help but notice you and your daughter don't go to church on Sunday. Is there a reason for this?" I said, "Yes. I haven't found a church I want to go to." She said, "Well, I'm Christian Scientist, and I



would love to take Dawn with me on Sunday.” To which I said, “Well, I can’t permit that unless I know what it’s about. But I’m happy to go next Sunday with you and find out more about it.” I found Christian Science to be an incredibly positive religious experience as compared to the last years of my Baptist experience, which were very negative. It was all about sin, sin, sin. Whereas within Christian Science, it was all about how we are all perfect, and potentially, all of us have God within us. Again, part of a Jewish attitude, only I, of course, didn’t understand it at that point.

AB: What year was this? When was this?

AM: This was in the early-to-mid-1970s, I guess. Interesting. While I was in junior high school and high school – well, when I went to high school, there was what was called a "track system." There were track one, two, three, and four. Track one was honors college prep; track two college prep; track three was business, and track four probably wouldn’t graduate. I was in track one. On the Jewish holidays, there were two people in class, me and Norman Early, the only "Black guy" in the class (who became the first Black district attorney of Denver, Colorado, who died in 1976 and remained friends until he died. All of our classmates were Jewish. Norman and I and our Jewish classmates all worked together on committees. We worked together on projects. We worked together on the school yearbook, the newspaper, and the talent club. I was never invited to a bar or bat mitzvah in my life. This was Washington, DC. This wasn’t some hick town. [I was] never invited to a single bar or bat mitzvah. I had never been inside a synagogue. Then I go off to Virginia, and you can be sure I was not inside a synagogue. Then I go to Italy, where there was a synagogue where we were in Florence ... but I didn’t even know it existed when I lived in Florence. Then when I returned to the USA, I became a Christian scientist. I’m not looking at Judaism. Then I met my husband in 1975 in New York because my work took me to New York. In 1975, I was a practicing Christian Scientist, as was my daughter. He was not affiliated with any Jewish synagogue. He acknowledged being Jewish, absolutely. He practiced Judaism on the High Holy Days





and other holidays in his own private space. Occasionally, he would take his sons and go to his sisters, who were members of a Conservative synagogue in New Jersey. He paid for tutors to educate his sons Jewishly so they could [have] a bar mitzvah. I was going to church. He was doing nothing for the first two or three years of our marriage.

Then, out of the blue, he started yearning for something more in life. What was the real meaning of life? and other questions forty-year-olds have at that stage of life. He started going synagogue shopping. He was raised in a very Orthodox family in the Bronx. His quest began at an Orthodox shul within walking distance of our home on a Friday evening; when he returned, and I asked him about the service, he said, "It was interesting. They really made me feel welcome. They couldn't understand why I was there if I wasn't saying kaddish because the youngest man other than me was seventy-five. They were all men. It was a small shul. When the time for Kaddish came, the guy kept telling him to stand up, stand up; it was Kaddish. He's saying, "No, no, I'm not saying Kaddish." So then they all wanted him to go to their homes for dinner. "No, no." He had to go home for dinner. He explained that it was warm and comfortable and that he felt at home. But it didn't mean anything to him. It was all the same stuff. For the next few weeks, he makes the rounds in all of the synagogues within walking distance, and then one night, he goes to a Reform shul on Lexington Avenue and 55th Street.

When he comes home, his exact words were, "That was the most bizarre experience I've ever had." I said, "How do you mean that?" He said, "Well, first, the cantor sounded like he should have been on Broadway. There was a choir. They have a pipe organ that's unbelievable. Antoinette, you have to see it?" [laughter] He continues, "The sounds coming from the balcony where the choir was, and the voice of this cantor--he just belted out the songs -- all of the music was just wonderful. And the men and the women were all sitting together, but you could hear a pin drop during the entire service."

That was not his experience of the Conservative temple, where everybody was talking about sports and the shopping spree of the afternoon and whatever. He said, "But then when the rabbi spoke, he only spoke for ten minutes. He was speaking about my life.



He was showing me a Jewish path that I had never seen before in terms of relevance. So, it was the strangest experience. I didn't feel at all comfortable. But I'm going back next Friday night." It didn't take long before it was Friday night and Saturday morning. Then it was Friday night and Saturday morning, and Talmud study on Sunday.

SG: This is all at the Reform synagogue?

AM: All at the Reform synagogue.

SG: Wow.

AB: What was the name of that? Do you remember?

AM: Central Synagogue. So then, I'm thinking, "This is absurd. We're both from divorces. We both have our respective other children living with us. We only have the first and third weekends by ourselves. I didn't feel like he was "with me" on those first and third weekends. One night when I was angry, I accused him of spending "all his time at the shul." So I started thinking about the situation. I thought, "Well, what can I do?" First of all, I can "pray to God" anywhere. So maybe instead of my going to church on Sunday morning, I'll meet him at the temple on Friday night because it was only a couple of blocks from my office. I remember going to the service for the very first time. The first time I had ever been in a synagogue. Boy, talk about a synagogue. Have you have ever been inside Central Synagogue?

SG: No.

AM: It is a work of art. It is a jewel. It is one of the most beautiful architectural, religious spaces. In fact, if you ever read any of the books on synagogues and Jewish architecture, you'll find Central Synagogue in all of them. Of course, I don't know anything about Hebrew. I have no ear for Hebrew. I'm reading everything in English. I remember thinking about what it was like – I couldn't believe it. Everything I am reading



is what I've always believed. The biggest problem I always had with Christianity was that I always believed that the God to whom I prayed spoke to ALL people. I could never understand how a person who led a good life would be condemned to Hell unless they accepted Jesus as their savior, which was what was being preached in the Baptist church, but the Christian Science faith was more "Jewish"! I always thought that if somebody is leading a good life and is a good person, why would God send them to this horrible place called Hell? It didn't seem right. It didn't seem fair. It just went against the grain. I had a problem with this idea that missionaries needed to be sent everywhere to save souls because I felt a lot of souls didn't need saving. I don't know where or how I believed this or ever felt this. I remember feeling it from the very first time I ever met privately with a Catholic priest. After he gave up on my dad, he came to our home for a visit one afternoon – he knew my father wouldn't be there – to talk to Mom about sending the children to Catholic school and having them baptized into the Catholic faith. He told her he would like to speak to each of us, and she should let each of us have an opportunity to speak to him. She agreed to that. I remember his saying to me that I really shouldn't be going to the church on the corner. I remember asking why. He said, "Because they don't teach the truth." I remember saying, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, they don't tell the truth." I said, "They lie?" He said, "Yes. People who go to that church are going to go "down there" [pointing down], not up there [pointing up], implying that down was "hell" and up was heaven. I looked at him and repeated what I thought he had said, and then I screamed at him, "They don't lie; you do," and I ran out of the room.

SG: How old were you?

AM: I was either four or six. I can't remember. I remember I was really little. I went crying out of the room and told my mother I never wanted to talk to him again. So, there was something inside of me that rejected the idea that anyone was going to Hell if they didn't believe the way you believed. So, on some level, even as a child, there was an insight here, and it stayed with me my whole life. I think that galvanized it for me at a



really early age and caused problems for me in terms of Sunday school and listening to sermons in the local church. Basically, I would just ignore them. From the time I was a young woman, I had certain reservations about the idea of a "virgin birth," but I always believed that there was a Jesus, that Jesus existed, that Jesus was a good human being and that Jesus did a lot of good in the world. But I never believed that he was the son of God in the sense of a virgin birth, and he was unique or special in that regard. I always felt he was a son of God in the same way we are all sons and daughters of God, and that if we all turned – if we could find within ourselves the God that is there and listen to that God in all of our judgments and all of our behaviors, the power that would result from that through us, from God to anyone, would be phenomenal. But we're human. We can't do that. So, we fall short. Perhaps Jesus had reached a different spiritual level than I had, or others have, but I couldn't accept that there was this virgin birth, and he was like a human manifestation of God in some particular way. So, the Jesus problem for Christians wasn't a problem for me ever from the start. So, here I am in services, reading the English translation of the service, and being wowed by the fact that Jews are praying for all peoples, that the Bible – they talk about how God talks to other people, how Ruth wasn't Jewish but she's the grandmother of David – this embracing of other cultures and other religions within Torah. Now, what we've done with that, over the years, with organized religion, that's a different story. But the more I studied Torah, and the more I read the service and realized that Jews don't have any expectation that you have to be Jewish to be defined as a good person or to be blessed by God – the more I thought about what I was reading, the more convinced I'd become that I'd found a real "resonance" with Judaism. I was having the most wonderful experience...until we got to the kiddish at the end. At first, I'm really taken with the way this cantor is singing the kiddish, which is just the most beautiful sound. But then, as I'm reading in English, I get to the line in the kiddish that says – I'm paraphrasing – "Thank you, God, for choosing us and setting us apart from the other peoples." It's in the kiddish. But I couldn't believe what I was reading because I wasn't reading the words, I was reading what I'd been



taught the words meant to Jewish people; I heard this instantly through filters of antisemitic brainwashing that I didn't even realize I'd been exposed to, but what the words meant to me were clear: "Those Jews think they're better than everybody else."

SG: Oh, interesting.

AM: "Those Jews think they have exclusive privileges."

SG: The chosen.

AM: The chosen people. Right. I suddenly went from having this beautiful service to being very angry. I felt suddenly slapped in the face – what a betrayal. Here I am, beginning to think I found the perfect religion for me and zap, here it is, buried at the end of the service. So, as we're walking home, my husband (Stuart) said, "Is something bothering you?" "No." He asks again a few minutes later, "Are you sure", and I say very angrily, "NO"! [laughter] Finally, he got it out of me. But then he tries to explain that it was chosen, the covenantal relationship, and that it was not chosen for special privileges denied to anybody else, but rather chosen to bring the message of the one God, to be God's people, to accept responsibilities and obligations, to help make the world a better place, that that doesn't mean God doesn't have a covenant with other people, too, but he has a covenant with the Jewish people. He said, "Antoinette, Christian or not, it's in your Bible." I said, "You're twisting the facts. I read what I read." He said, "Talk to the rabbi about it if you're so upset," so I did. And Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman put it in a beautiful context. First, he was so warm and so welcoming and happy to answer any questions I had. There was never any focus on conversion. I mean, he was just accepting of me. He was always warm toward me when I was there and always warm at the end of services. So, I began to go to services on Friday and then on Saturday and Sunday, and I stopped going to church and I started going to services every Friday. Ultimately, I began to study with him. But it was interesting. I found within Judaism the religion I had been looking for. Then, all of a sudden, I found that terrifying because I was Christian.



My daughter was Christian. My whole family was Christian. We celebrate Christmas. Favorite holiday. We celebrate Easter. Then while I'm having second thoughts, there was a religious retreat that was scheduled by the synagogue. It was on my husband's birthday. Stuart said, "I want to go to this retreat. It's a weekend retreat." I said, "Well, I'm not going. I really have no interest in that." He said, "But the dates are July-something." It was his birthday.

SG: July 25th.

AM: The 25th. That date was part of the weekend. Well, I couldn't leave him alone on his birthday. So, I agreed to go. I made it extremely clear to him; I was going only to be there for him at night, that I was participating in nothing. During the day, I was going to do my own thing. He should enjoy the retreat. I would enjoy being in the Great Barrington area doing my own thing. I went off fishing each day. Then, I would bring the fish back and give them to Rabbi Zimmerman's young son so that he could have them for dinner. [laughter] I even cleaned them. Stuart was furious with me, just furious. "You're not even going to come to dinner?" I said, "Stuart, I don't get all that stuff you guys do before and after dinner. I don't know these people. I don't want to be engaged in conversation about something I know nothing about. No, I'm not going. I told you that before I left. I'm not participating. Leave it alone." And Sheldon Zimmerman didn't tread on this at all. I mean, he acted perfectly. He was so pleasant, and he'd say, "Good morning, Antoinette," as he'd see me with my fishing pole going on my way. No pressure. He never said, "Are you sure you don't want to join us? Come on, why don't you join us? Stuart would really love to have you." No, he left me alone. So, just as we were leaving, probably from guilt, I decided to say something to him. So, I said, "I hope you didn't misunderstand my absence from everything." He said, "I think I understand more than you understand, Antoinette. For example, I know that you have been coming to services for a long time and you enjoy the services. Sometimes, when we have an open discussion, your comments are wonderful and enriching for everybody, and I sense



that you enjoy them. I understand that you told your husband you were not going to participate in the weekend. But I think you have to ask yourself what it is that's really holding you back from wanting to participate in a weekend because I think the tragedy is that you would have enjoyed it very much – for you. We probably would have benefited as well, but for you. I think it's interesting that you didn't want to be part of it. I think you have to ask yourself why." So, the whole week, I was really upset by it, and I started thinking about it. I came to realize he was absolutely right. I was enjoying it too much and I was finding it so terrifying. The way I was dealing with my fear was to try to cut it off altogether. Instead of saying, "Okay, what am I afraid of?" I'm afraid of the impact on my family. I'm afraid of the impact on my daughter. I've wandered through so many other religions. What if this is another mistake? So, when I acknowledged that, I spoke to him, and he said, "The only way you're going to find the answers is to study Judaism more thoroughly, really delve into it. See if it is something you can embrace wholly" – wholly, W-H and holy – "or not." So, we started studying together. So, after studying with Rabbi Zimmerman, I found the more I knew about Judaism, the more I found it fascinating and engaging and in sync with my own basic values and my own basic beliefs. So, then I had another issue to deal with... I talked to Rabbi Zimmerman again and explained: "Here's the issue I have now. If, in fact, I feel that I have discovered that I am Jewish and have always been Jewish in my basic values, there is no alternative except to make the public statement that I am Jewish and go through what is described as the conversion process, but I really resent the term because I don't think I've converted. I don't think I've changed my mind on anything. I think I finally have discovered that my basic beliefs and values have always been Jewish. I just didn't understand them as Jewish because I didn't know what Judaism was about." Whatever you call it, I took a three-month course at what is now called the URJ, the Union for Reform Judaism. It had been the UAHC, Union of American Hebrew Congregations – their conversion course. I studied Hebrew. I learned to read Hebrew. I learned Hebrew prayers. I started learning about the various rituals – many of which I'd learned long



before the "conversion course" – we were lighting candles at home on Friday and making kiddush at home on Friday evening before I took the conversion course. But then I also started really learning much more about the holidays and traditions, the symbolism of the traditions, and the layers of meaning for the traditions. I was formally converted and, in fact, went to the mikvah for my conversion. We did it in an orthodox shul, with an orthodox rabbi witnessing the conversion so that I would be recognized as a Jew even in the State of Israel. It was Rabbi Zimmerman's suggestion that we do it this way. Rabbi Zimmerman also made my husband get a "get" because Stuart was initially married in an Orthodox ceremony ... but he pointed out to Stuart that this was not for him but for me! He pointed out that if I should ever decide to remarry and remarry someone in the Orthodox faith, Stuart, by not doing so, would be depriving me of that right. So, he said, "You will do the right thing. You will get a get." So, he got a get. We had been married, initially, four years earlier, in a civil ceremony. So, we decided we also wanted to get married according to the laws of Moses. Now that I was Jewish, I wanted a religious wedding. I wanted it to be in the eyes of God as well. So we were remarried on our fourth anniversary at Central synagogue with Rabbi Zimmerman, and it was fabulous. It was just wonderful. Then, it's been a Jewish journey from that point. I became very involved with Central Synagogue. I became very involved with Rabbi Zimmerman. When his father died – Central Synagogue had never had a daily minyan -- we learned our Rabbi was going to another synagogue in order to have a minyan so he could say kaddish each day.

SG: Really?

AM: I didn't even realize at that point what a daily minyan was because this was a Reform synagogue. So he was going to another synagogue to say kaddish every day.

SG: He couldn't go to his own.





AM: There was no minyan. So, we organized one. We organized a morning and evening minyan. I was there every day for the morning minyan, and my husband was with me. Sometimes I could make the afternoon minyan. Sometimes I couldn't. My husband usually did if I couldn't. We made sure there was a minyan. The first time we met for the morning minyan, everybody was there. We have about twenty people.

Shelley Zimmerman walks in, and we all sit and wait for him to get up and lead the service. He said, "I'm here to say kaddish." He said, "You guys lead the service." We all looked at one another. "What do you mean? We've never led a service?" He looks at one of my husband's friends, Sam. He said, "Sam, you know Hebrew?" "Yes." "You know how to read Hebrew, and the prayer book tells you what to do. You lead service."

SG: Wow.

AM: He picked a different one of us, including all the women, to lead the service. We started paying a lot of attention now because we knew [inaudible] was coming. Little did we know that one day that was going to be a really important skill that he had taught us because, when we moved to Vermont – first of all, we would never have moved to Vermont if we didn't believe there was a vibrant Jewish community in Hanover. Now, there is now, but twenty-two years ago, Dartmouth or Hanover – Upper Valley Jewish community, which is what they call it – attracted six to eight hundred people for the high holy days, and not two adults showed up at a Shabbat service the rest of the year. We went to services on a Friday evening. We were told they were Friday evening services.

We get there; there are five students, all guys, davening in a very Orthodox man and clearly displeased that I was present. I mean, they weren't outwardly aggressive, but their body language and the fact that he didn't say hello or wish us a Shabbat Shalom sort of summed it up. I kept thinking, "If we keep going, maybe the others will show up."

On Parents Weekend, there was another couple and us and the students. They looked at us and said, "We thought there was an active Jewish community." So I decided, "Well, maybe people just don't realize that Jews might want to get together for other things and



know other people who are Jewish.” So I talked to the rabbi and asked him at High Holy Days, one year – on Yom Kippur. It’s a forty-five-minute drive in each direction, and there wasn’t an afternoon [service]. They had the morning service, and then they had the evening service.

SG: Did they bring in a rabbi for the holy days?

AM: They had a rabbi. They had a full-time rabbi. But he was the Hillel rabbi. In terms of the broader community, there was nothing. I mean, we could meet. The broader community could certainly have Shabbat service at Rollins Chapel if they want to do, but the rabbi wasn’t really needed for that, and he frequently wasn’t there. So, for the High Holy Days, I said, “It’s really difficult to come from South Woodstock on Yom Kippur.” We fast. “If it’s cold like it’s going to be this year,” I said, “What do you want us to do? Sit on a park bench for the hours between morning services and evening services? We will freeze to death. I’m certainly not going into a restaurant or coffee house. So perhaps if you announced from the pulpit that there were Jewish couples from other communities that were quite a distance away, anyone could just make their home available. The good news is we’re fasting, so no food is involved. Just give us two chairs and a warm corner of a room. Please see me after services.” He made the announcement. And he made a beautiful announcement. Not one couple volunteered their home. I turned to my husband, and I said, “This is not a Jewish community. I don’t know what to call this.

These are people who are Jewish, who gather during the High Holy Days, but where are they the rest of the year? This is not what I expected when we moved up here.” Also, my husband had become involved with Hebrew Union College. They started this institute that was held every summer in honor of Sheldon Zimmerman’s father, called the Zimmerman Institute. It was five days of intense study and learning with the faculty and other leading Jews from all movements, [who] would come and teach. So I’m saying something to Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, who I know started the community in Sudbury, Massachusetts, from nothing. I said, “So, Larry, what did you do? How did you start a



community?” He said, “You just do it.” I said, “But yeah, what is it that you do?” He said, “Antoinette, you just do it.” I said, “I don’t get what the ‘it’ is in that sentence.” He said, “You’re turning to me looking for permission.” He said, “If you want to start a community, you will find a way to start a community, whatever it takes. I can’t tell you. I don’t know what your area is like. You’ll find a way if you really want a community.” I left the Zimmerman Institute, and I said, “He’s right. It’s up to us to do it.” Stuart said, “Look, you have a need; you do it.” [laughter] I said, “Okay. I’m taking out an ad in the Vermont Standard – “Shabbat potluck dinner. For information, call Antoinette Matlins” and gave my phone number. I said, “I’m taking out a display ad.” He said, “Great. See if anybody responds. I think you can have it here.” About thirty-five people responded. I didn’t have enough of a dining room for thirty-five people. So I called around, and the Universalist chapel said we could use their social hall. I was so excited. Thirty-five people from this area are going to get together for Shabbat.

SG: We do have to stop and turn things over. So, you’ll have to pick it up at Shabbat.  
[Recording paused.]

AM: So, my husband and I are driving to the Universalist church. I said, “What do you think we should do when we get there? Should we light candles? Should we sing kiddush? Should we do the long or short form of kiddush? Should we have a service?” Because I had cut and pasted things and had xeroxed twenty-five copies, but then I wasn’t sure I wanted – I thought it might be overkill. Stuart said, “Look, this is the first time we’ve even met most of these people. Let’s just light the candles and say a brief kiddush blessing over the wine, have dinner, and just chat, find out why people responded to the ad, what they would like to do, why they were here?” I said, “Okay. But Stuart, if we’re going to say the kiddush, it’s on the first page of what I printed out. We can just pass out the first page.” I said, “My sense in talking to people on the phone is that a lot of these people are interfaith couples. If their spouse is reading kiddush, they’re going to be really upset unless you explain the kiddush.” He said, “Don’t be ridiculous.



You don't have to explain the kiddush." I said, "Stuart, you can say that because you were born Jewish. I think we have to say something about the kiddush. You've got to explain what the kiddush is about." He said, "You know what, Antoinette? You feel so strongly about it; you can take a minute to tell them about what that 'chosen people' means." I said, "Fine, I will." So we get there, and we introduce ourselves. We put on little name badges. We lit the candles. I asked if anybody would like to light the candles, and nobody volunteered. So, Stuart said, "Well, Antoinette, why don't you light the candles, and those who would like to join her, please join in." I said the blessing. I didn't sing; I just lit the candles and then said the blessing. We were about to say the kiddush, and I said, "But before we do, I'd just like to take one moment so there's no misunderstanding. Perhaps I'm overly sensitive to this, coming from a Christian background myself, but I know there's a phrase that gave me a lot of trouble in the beginning. I want you to understand this is not meant to imply 'chosen-ness' for special honors or privileges or that anybody thinks they're better than anybody else. This comes right from the Bible. We were chosen to bring the word of "ONE God" to the people, but this brought with it resistance, hardship, and discrimination, even so, we persevered and brought God's message of ONENESS to the world. My husband said there was such an audible sigh of relief, he couldn't believe it. It was as if every Jewish person in the room breathed again. It was like they were holding their breath, knowing that their spouses or significant others were reading the English and understanding exactly what the reaction was going to be to that line. So, for years, we actually said something before the service – "Before we start the service, we just want to take a moment to explain this term, 'the chosen people,' so there will be no misunderstanding as you come across it in the service." I sometimes think that if there was one thing we did that was different and truly appropriate – especially in a community where the rate of interfaith marriage is as high as it is in Vermont. On that first get-together in Woodstock, in addition to us, there was only one couple in which both were Jewish. Every other couple was interfaith, and it did make a difference. It removed a barrier or an obstacle. It removed a bone of misunderstanding



before it ever became a misunderstanding. So, we started. That's all we did. Then we talked about why people were coming and why they were there. I was actually timid about asking if anyone wanted to get together again. It was so nice just to come together with other people who were Jewish and have some soul food because everybody brought something Jewish for the potluck. It was fun. But I didn't want anyone thinking I was a zealot or anything. So I just said something like, "Well, would anyone like to do this again sometime?" [laughter] When this young man, a single guy, said, "Yeah, this was great. Let's do it again next month." And everybody said, "Yeah. By the way, I know somebody who's Jewish." I said, "I'm happy to send out a letter, but I don't want to send letters to people who don't want to get the letter, but if you want to talk to your friends, and if you all want to give me your names and addresses, phone numbers, and give me the addresses and phone numbers of other people you think would be interested, I'll do a letter. I'll pick the place and the date." We all agreed. Interestingly, the next time, two-thirds of the people who came to the first one weren't there. We still had thirty-five. We had their friends and a whole different group. We heard from every one of the first group all the reasons why things had come up, and they couldn't be there at the second one. By the third one, we were entering the fall. I remember we went around the room – we had about forty people. Stuart said, "We haven't asked this question since the first time we got together. But I'm really interested in knowing what brings each of you here tonight." We went around the room. One fellow, a young man married to a Christian woman, said, "Well, my mother is elderly. We've been talking about all the positive, wonderful things that you can celebrate together only with other Jews, like Passover, or Sukkot, or a bar or bat mitzvah, or the birth of a child, so many things that we miss in terms of the Jewish celebration without a Jewish community." But he said, "I'm also concerned about things like when a parent dies, or a loved one dies. I want to be able to mourn as a Jew. I want to have a community where I can say kaddish." We all thought that was beautifully said. I was so moved that he even thought about this. The following month, I called because I hadn't heard back from him on



something related to the next get-together, and somebody else answered the phone. No, I thought it was him, and I thought he had a cold. I said, “Mark, are you sick?” The person said, “Who is this?” I said, “This is Antoinette Matlins.” He said, “Well, I’m Mark’s brother.” I said, “Well, is Mark available?” He said, “Can I ask what you’re calling about?” I thought, “Boy, you’re rude,” but I said, “Yes. I’m calling about the” – whatever the event was. [Telephone rings. Recording paused.] So, I explained why I was calling. He said, “Don’t you know?” I said, “Know what?” He said, “Mark’s daughter was killed in an automobile accident last night.”

SG: Oh my god.

AM: Now, he was the one who raised the issue of how important the community would be for him, so he could say kaddish for his mother. His sixteen-year-old daughter was killed in an automobile accident on Route 106. Because we had already come together three times, we organized a minyan immediately. He was able to say Kaddish. His mother was there to say kaddish. We were able to create what he needed for himself at that time. You just never know. You don’t know what one day holds. But that sort of galvanized my determination that we had to create a Jewish community in Woodstock. So we started meetings. We had the Hanukkah party. Meanwhile, the tie back to Zimmerman; it was only because of our learning how to lead morning and evening services that we knew how to lead a service. We were able to bring that gift with us. The group said, “Let’s do full Friday evening services.” So we started – it didn’t have to be in Hebrew. God understands all languages. Most of these people could not speak any Hebrew. Interestingly, in the beginning, some of them were uncomfortable when we started the services because they may have been alienated for whatever reason from Judaism. They may not have been involved for years. But what they remembered, they remembered in terms of the kind of experience they had if they were raised in an Orthodox shul or a Conservative shul or a Classic Reform shul or whatever. Whatever ritual was a part of that experience, that’s what they expected in a service. So, if it wasn’t



what they were accustomed to or used to, it was uncomfortable. Even if they'd forgotten their Hebrew, they knew certain things were supposed to have been said at certain times.

SG: "I don't know what they said, but we should have said it."

AM: "Should have said it." Exactly. [laughter] Or, "That thing's supposed to be said four times. We only said it once." My husband, because of his unique background, in terms of being raised in an Orthodox community— he actually went to Yeshiva, an Orthodox Yeshiva from the time he was four years old until junior high school. They had to translate Torah into Yiddish, into English.

SG: I've never heard that.

AM: Because they felt it was blasphemy to go from the Hebrew directly into the English. So, his understanding of ritual practice within the Orthodox movement, his understanding of ritual practice within the Conservative movement, his understanding of ritual within the Reform Movement, and where it was going because Classic Reformers felt they'd been abandoned because more and more Hebrew was coming into these services. More and more ritual was coming into services. People were wearing kippot. People were wearing tallit. People were laying tefillin. It was like, "What happened to this movement?" But Stuart understood the ritualistic differences, the philosophical differences. He would start services in the most beautiful way and say, "Let us not focus on what separates each of us. Let us focus on those threads that unite us. Let's be respectful of the variety of traditions that create what we know as Judaism" today. He would always invite someone to share some memory they had from a Shabbat or Hanukkah, or Sukkot – whatever – with the whole group. We would have people in their seventies, eighties, and nineties telling us stories from their childhood, and the ritual, and what it meant to them, and why they do certain things still today because of that. Our children are listening to these hundred-year-olds talk about when they were children and



seeing this connection, that ritual can be beautiful, not for the sake of ritual, but when it connects you to your past, and it helps become the bridge to your future. So we focused on sharing these experiences from a variety of traditions. Stuart gradually introduced a little more Hebrew. We would sing the same song – it's become our theme song – "Hinei Ma Tov." It was a simple song to learn. It was a pretty melody. The meaning of the words was so appropriate for our group for it is truly beautiful when people come together in harmony. So we taught this simple Hebrew song to everyone--adults, teenagers, children, and even toddlers joined in. We would start services every single time we met with everyone singing "Hinei Ma Tov." Their ears became attuned, and their voices became attuned, and those who didn't know the words would simply "hum along." Those who knew the words but couldn't sing very well would say the words and just close their eyes and listen to the sounds. That small piece of Hebrew made them feel like "authentic" Jews because this lovely song provided Hebrew in the service. Then, of course, we introduced essential blessings. The kiddush was always in Hebrew. The lighting of the candles was in Hebrew and English. We gradually taught the various prayers generally used throughout services. Sometimes, we'd say them as a congregation in Hebrew, and sometimes we'd say them as a congregation in English because we feel we should never lose sight of the fact that there are ever-new couples joining us. Those couples were sometimes both Jewish, or they were a Jewish and non-Jewish couple. And for the big occasions when extended family would be present, it was the same situation. Gradually Hebrew made its way into services, and while it might not have been the entire service, nor Ashkenazic or Sephardic pronunciation or melodies, it was the joy of being all together as a JEWISH community that brought joy to all present. Our goal was to never make anybody feel they couldn't experience and understand the service. We've always tried to keep a nice balance of Hebrew and English. We've introduced more and more songs and more and more lay leadership. Then, in 1992, we held our first High Holy Day service!

SG: Where were you meeting then?





AM: Let's see. We met at many places – the Masonic Temple, the Universalist Chapel, the Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, the senior citizen center. [laughter] We were truly wandering Jews. Then, we started the Hebrew school. The Hebrew school met in our guest house for the first couple of years. But getting up our steep mountain "hill" in winter was often a challenge. So, we ultimately moved it to the senior citizen center and other places depending on availability and the nature of the event. As more and more children started coming, we realized we needed a place for a Hebrew school. It was because of this need that we started to realize we had to have "our own" place, and so we started the "place fund," not the Hebrew school fund, not the synagogue fund, but the "place fund," because we felt the community was about people, not buildings. It was the people that made it special. Actually, we had the High Holy Day services first. The High Holy Day services were always held at the Masonic Temple because that was the only structure large enough to accommodate fifty. Then it was sixty. Then it was seventy-five. Then it was almost a hundred ...

AB: You were talking about the place fund.

AM: The place fund. We raised the money. We bought an old farmhouse on Route 4. We had our chapel on the ground floor, which could accommodate fifty comfortably, seventy-five with great difficulty, for services. Then, we had classrooms upstairs. We hadn't been in our own place for two years before we realized we had already outgrown it. There was an attached barn. So we thought we'd just renovate the barn, and we quickly learned it was better to take it down and build another barn. I think you probably passed it.

AM: We should have met there because it's so beautiful inside. Anyway, you'll come and join us one Friday or Saturday or at some event.

AB: Okay. We will.



SG: We will.

AM: That must have been in the year 2000. But we had our first High Holy Day services in 1992. We were terrified of this. We couldn't possibly do High Holy Days without a RABBI, could we? By the way, when we first founded the Woodstock Area Jewish Community, we were very adamant about "area" because people come from a wide area. At the time, it was also the only Jewish community in the area that was affiliated with the Reform Movement, which made the children of interfaith couples feel more at home in terms of the religious education because we heard over and over again – and first of all, you have to understand, I embrace all of the branches of Judaism. I can go to an Orthodox service and find it beautiful and inspirational. I can go to a Conservative service and find the same thing. But I think that a wake-up call needs to be sounded because of the number of people who came to our religious school because they were married to a woman who was not Jewish, and their children were not accepted in the Hebrew school. Now, I understand it. I can respect the rabbi who takes a particular stand and feels that the mother is not Jewish. Therefore, the children are not Jewish, and that presents a certain set of obstacles. We believe in the Reform Movement, which is probably why we are affiliated with the Reform Movement is that they recognize patrilineal descent. So, the children were welcomed as Jewish children; they studied as Jewish children. The only requirement we had was that neither parent insisted on taking the child to a Christian Sunday school because we felt that would make the child feel uncomfortable and very conflicted. But we were still going to the Hanover, New Hampshire community– Stuart and I – and we were encouraging all of the members of the Woodstock Area Jewish Community to go to the Hanover community too, or to go to the Rutland, Vermont community, where there were real rabbis and so that they could also connect with the broader Jewish community and Hebrew school in those communities there if they chose, and we invited the Hanover community to come to the Woodstock Jewish community for certain things. But at that time, the rabbi was adamant that the Woodstock community was, in essence, not a "real Jewish community" because



we DID NOT HAVE A SYNAGOGUE OR A RABBI! He went on to add, "I am a rabbi. If it's important to your community to experience another level of Judaism, it is important that they show their commitment by coming here." So, in short, our idea of being something like "a satellite of the Upper Valley Jewish community, where we could be reconnecting with Jews and getting people interested again in Judaism and understanding the relevance of Judaism to their daily living, to their values, to their work, and to helping them help them to move on to different levels because Stuart and I certainly didn't see ourselves as "rabbis," fell on deaf ears! We saw ourselves as lay leaders, right? So the rejection of our concept was the second strike against the "real" Jewish community in our area at that time! [laughter] I just thought, "This is an attitude I can't comprehend." It seemed to me they felt that we were competing with them. So, after some discussions, we decided we would incorporate independently of them. We would create our own community here. We would do it our way. And the first thing we decided to do was to eliminate all barriers. That meant no dues, no charges for the Hebrew school, no tickets for anything. This community has now existed for over thirty years wholly and completely on voluntary contributions. The parents come and teach in the Hebrew school, as well as learn. The parents don't just drop their children off and leave. They stay. If it's not their turn to teach a class, then they sit in the adult education program that goes on simultaneously. Our Hebrew school director was a volunteer until recently when the school's size and diversity led us to seek someone with extensive educational experience. She has done incredible things. We now have about fifty children in the Hebrew School. We have a beautiful structure. We had no mortgage until the property immediately next door to us became available, and following a fire that did damage to our original building ...

AB: [inaudible] fire or something? I'm sorry.

AM: Yes. We had a fire. We'll come back to the fire. if you're going from Woodstock to Killington, the property immediately to the right of the little house we originally purchased,



you will see what is now our "temple" – it looks like a barn because that's what it was!

We had always known sooner or later we'd need to buy that, too, because we knew we were going to need to expand as we kept growing. So when it came on the market because we're going to need to expand. The property has just around two acres. It came on the market around 2007-2008, and we got together, and the contributions started coming in from everyone, so we were able buy it!

SG: Really?

AM: We had to buy it. We didn't want to buy. I mean, we wanted to buy it. We just didn't want to buy it now. So, we actually did have a mortgage until another generous member paid off the mortgage as a gift to us and to honor someone he loved very much. There is no question we've had some angels. Sometimes, the angel has been someone who was passing through Woodstock, saw the sign and since it was a Friday evening, came to join us ... where they found their Jewish soul "rekindled" for whatever reason. They walked away, reconnected somewhere, and thanked the Woodstock Area Jewish Community by sending a large check. Sometimes, it's a part-timer, the snowbirds who come back, who are very involved in the community during the summer, who just feel they have an obligation to support the younger families who can't afford what they can afford. Each person pretty much determines what they're able to give, and they do. We don't ask for money. We do let people know that the community that's been created was not "free" and that donations are needed and readily accepted to cover the costs. We also stress that we welcome all types of donations: donations of time, donations of talent, donations of volunteerism, and whatever monetary contribution they choose to provide. It is our belief that as long as you are meeting the needs of the people in your community, the people in your community will meet your needs in terms of support of that community. It has always worked that way. People donate in time, talents, skills, and money. It's been wonderful. It's been wonderful to be part of it. Now, back to the fire. We were only a month or two away from the completion of the sanctuary, and everyone



was so excited! It was New Year's Day. It was about two or three o'clock in the morning; the phone rang. My first thought was, "My European and Asian clients don't realize my business phone is in the home, but I wish they'd stop calling me when I'm in such a deep sleep." I groggily picked the receiver and realized it was Jeffrey Kahn, a board member and the about-to-be-new president of the congregation at the time. His words chilled me to the bone: "Shir Shalom is on fire."

AB: I remember reading about it in the paper.

AM: My heart just dropped. I hopped out of bed. My husband said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Shir Shalom is on fire." He said, "You can't get there as fast as Jeffrey can." I said, "Jeffrey's already there." He said, "Has Jeffrey taken care of the Torah scroll?" That was the reason Jeffrey got there before everybody else, to make sure nothing happened to the Torah. He said, "You will only be in the way. Don't go until morning." I said, "This is my baby. You can't tell me not to be there." Only a man would think you wouldn't have to go. When we moved to Vermont, I was the one who felt the absence of the Jewish community because it had become so important to me in New York. I was at such a stage in my own growth and development that I felt stymied without it. I felt cut off without it. I hadn't been on the journey long enough to feel like I could continue on the journey without help and support. So, it was my need that caused me to take out that ad. It was my need that said, "We're going to make this happen." I did all of the xeroxing, cutting, and pasting to put services together. I could never have done it without Stuart, and he was there to support my needs in every way. But I planned the services. I planned the logistics. I did the potlucks. I wrote the newsletter because it was meeting my needs. So I threw on my clothes and rushed to the synagogue ... to see the fire engines there, and the tears streamed down my face. What flashed before my eyes were the children and the parents, the memories of Sukkot, one of the most joyous experiences our community celebrated together because everybody would come here, and the children would come, and they would always bring things from their gardens.



They would pull up the carrots, and they could climb in the apple trees and get the apples, and they could cut the corn husks, and they would dig for potatoes, and they could cut the flowers – whatever flowers remained in the garden. Our caretaker went into the woods and cut the trees he would use to make the poles to support the sukkah, and then we put up the chicken wire. We would make it a potluck event, and we'd sing and dance with "Mayim Mayim." We'd have a wonderful cookout, and we'd shake the lulav. It's such a primeval kind of mystical, ancient tradition of shaking it. When you're standing out here, looking over the mountains of Vermont from your sukkah – and we always built it where we had an amazing view – you could just look right at the view and listen to the sound of laughter and see the smiles on the faces of all. It was wonderful. Now, we build the sukkah at Congregation Shir Shalom, and it's wonderful there, too. I just miss having all the kids in my own garden. We've also done a progressive Sukkot some years going to different homes to build a sukkah. I won't be here this Sukkot, but we're going to come back next year to do it here again. The first bar mitzvah was Sam McWilliams. Now, you can immediately comprehend that he did not have two Jewish parents. His mother was Jewish, Rachel Kurland. Her father and grandfather had both been rabbis. Her son, who was a tall, thirteen-year-old young man with blond hair and with the name McWilliams was, nonetheless, a young man committed to Judaism and to our community, and he still is today! We actually held the bar mitzvah at a lodge in Killington because the owners of that lodge in Killington had become members of our Woodstock Area Jewish Community. So they made the lodge available for the bar mitzvah. The father of one of our children in the Hebrew school, a master woodworker and carpenter, made the ark, the first ark, which has its own special place in the sanctuary to this day, sitting over to the side. The unveiling of our first ark was an especially poignant moment. Also, his mother, Rachel Kurland, hand-embroidered it. Then there's the curtain for the High Holy Days. You should see the Torah cover that she did and how she captured the feeling of Vermont. You can't really tell from this picture. It sits on a stand. It's almost Japanese-y in feeling, but you could take the top



off and then transport the bottom separately so it was easily transportable. So, we transported the arc. We transported the scroll. My husband led the service. We had this our first bar mitzvah. I sat there, and as he read the Torah, I noticed that, among the adults, there was not a dry eye in the place ... because we realized that these children were now becoming Jewish, who, were it not for the establishment of the Woodstock Area Jewish community, would never have had the chance. That became such a motivator for me. We haven't been without some challenges along the way and some personal differences among some of the members, but we got beyond them; healing wounds and helping people became the focus of whatever anyone was feeling because it was good for the community. Such blessings have been so important in each of their own lives.

There were two members of our community who were – to say enemies is an understatement – evolving around a particular incident. After about two years, one of them called the other and said, “I would like you to join me for lunch. I'd like Antoinette to be there.” She called me. The three of us met. The one person who got the call was very hesitant. She was the one who had been on the receiving end of the problem, so to speak, and she felt very vulnerable, she didn't trust this other person at all, which is why they asked me to come. The one person said, “I really want to say I'm sorry. I want you to know it is from the bottom of my heart. I realize how I wronged you. I hope you are able to accept my apology.” The other woman said, “I hear you. I know how difficult it must have been for you to say these words. But I'm not sure I'm ready. I have to be honest about that.” She said, “I can't trust my emotions toward you again, not yet.” But the seed was planted. We talked about it several times, and I encouraged her. I said, “You're right. When trust is broken, you can't just automatically regain the trust. But if you don't start somewhere, that trust can't be regrown. You've got to find a way to accept the apology and recognize that you might get hurt again. The trust may be betrayed, but it might not. If it isn't, you'll be the beneficiary, and she will be the



beneficiary.” They’re now best friends. But it’s watching this and dealing with it. I’m not a rabbi. I don’t pretend to be a rabbi. My husband is not a rabbi.

SG: Do you guys have a rabbi?

AM: Today, we have a rabbi and have had one for about ten years now; we started with student rabbis coming from HUC [Hebrew Union College] once a month during the nine months of the school year. We raised the money through voluntary fund-raising and hired a resident part-time rabbi initially and have had a full-time rabbi for quite a few years now. The journey has been amazing. In fact, Stuart’s own company, Jewish Lights Publishing, evolved out of the realization as we tried to find resources for the non-Jews and unaffiliated Jews that were becoming so involved and discovering there were no resources to meet our needs in building our own Jewish community!

SG: So, that’s how it evolved?

AM: Well, it evolved in several ways. Number one – truly the most important – was bringing all these people together who had been alienated and realizing several things: why they were alienated; what they needed to help them regain their sense of Judaism and Jewishness; and recognizing the variety of traditions within Judaism and how beautifully they could blend if people would focus on what united us, what brought us together, what we shared, as opposed to our differences. So as we started looking for resources, there were only scholarly works along with the children’s books. There was really a terrible scarcity of materials to help people who were regaining their interest or wanted to know more but needed to be led into it in gentler ways. Coincidentally, when Stuart made his decision – which also coincided with "the Zimmerman Institute," which was still going on at the time – after founding our community up here, somebody said to Stuart, “By the way, Stuart, you should bring back Larry Kushner’s book. It’s out of print now. It’s a wonderful book, and it needs to be brought back into print.” Stuart said, “Having a wife who’s published one book does not a publisher make.” Yeah, but you





know how to do it now. You could do it. You could do it.” Again, as Stuart – and me, too – learned, little do you know where life’s going to take you! I wrote a book. What was it on? Jewelry and gems. What does that have to do with Judaism, one asks? Here again, it gets interesting; because of a bad experience with my publisher, we took back all the rights. We started our own publishing company for my book, not knowing nobody that was selling it before would sell it now because it used to be with "a publisher," and now it was with a “self-publisher.” Nobody would distribute self-published books. So, Stuart worked out a co-publishing arrangement with a very highly respected publishing company that was looking for a quote, “popular” book for their science division. So, we ended up with this joint publishing venture. Stuart got a taste of what the publishing was all about. Now, there’s this book by Larry Kushner that’s out of print. Stuart looks at the book. It’s a great book. It should be brought into print. He brings the first book back into print, almost just as a favor to the Jewish community, because he really thought it needed to be done, and he didn’t think it would take up that much time. But then, while we were planning this book introduction at the Zimmerman Institute the following year, the decision was made. Stuart and I talked about it after Shabbat service there. I said, “You know what you should do, Stuart? You should put together an advisory board for Jewish Lights. And on that advisory board, you should have leading theologians from each one of the major movements within Judaism so that the publishing company reflects the makeup, not only of what you will be publishing but the makeup of our own community. The fact that we’re affiliated with the Reform Movement doesn’t mean that that’s what the makeup of our community is or that we lead services in the way you would experience them in the typical Reform congregation. I think it would really be an innovative step and be very good for Judaism. So, we did. If you look at the Jewish Lights catalog – do you have a Jewish Lights catalog?

SG: Yes.



AM: You'll see who's on the board. With the exception of the Orthodox movement – from which we don't have an official board member from the Orthodox, but we DO have two advisors from the Orthodox movement –unofficial advisors – and they were at every meeting. From them, all these other materials started to come in. Stuart has an incredible ability to shape the material so that instead of just being some writing – he can target it in such a way that really responds to a particular need or particular insight for how one can come to understand it in terms of their own lives, or values, or work, or whatever. Jewish Lights Publishing now has two-hundred-some titles. It was the largest independent Jewish publishing company anywhere – although there are some with the other "organizations" – in the world. It grew out of our experience with the Woodstock Area Jewish Community in Woodstock, Vermont, and the Zimmerman Institute over the years it took place – and then it has just grown from there. None of this would have happened if it hadn't been for the fact that I wrote a book on gems and jewelry because it needed to be written because nobody was telling people how they were being exploited and where the pitfalls were. I felt people needed to be warned back in the 1970s when Wall Street was talking about diamonds being the greatest investment of all time, and while I was saying investors were going to lose their shirts, and Stuart was saying, "Antoinette, they'll do their homework." "No, no," I quickly countered! "You don't understand. Unless they have a degree in physics or chemistry, ideally both, they can't get a book that will tell them what they need to know." At that time, even the books on gemology didn't explain the types of fraud and misrepresentation that went on –and still goes on. You can't begin to comprehend the creativity and cleverness of the con man in the gem and jewelry field. Nobody can imagine the kinds of fraud. Literally, you can't imagine the things that go on. So, at that time, I was working for a major advertising agency in New York. Stuart said, "So you've been thinking about shifting gears. Why don't you write this book that you think needs to be written?"

SG: Who said this?



AM: My husband.

SG: Ah.

AM: I said, “Because I’m not a writer. I’m not a journalist. Right? I don’t know how to write a book.” He said, “Do you write business letters and business proposals?” I said, “Don’t be ridiculous. Of course.” He said, “Do you have something to say about the subject?” I said, “Yes, I have a lot to say about this.” He said, “Then write the book; if you can write a clear sentence and have something to say, writing a book is no different from writing a letter; you simply make a list of what needs to be said and then write about each of the points you’ve listed!” So, after a bit of thought, I decided I could do it! And I did. That launched me into the whole gem and jewelry field. The publishing of the book launched Stuart into the Jewish Lights field. It reminds me of a book by Larry Kushner called Invisible Lines of Connection. You just don’t know where and what experiences are going to play a role in your journey through this life. To this day, I look back – you look back, and you can see the connections. You just have no idea where they’re going. For me, I’m passionate about my professional career. I’m really passionate about the fields of gems and gemology and consumer affairs and fighting fraud and all that stuff and also teaching people about all the wonderful things in the gem field as well as the bad things. I’m passionate about Judaism. I’m passionate about the Woodstock Area Jewish Community, quite frankly, as a model for many communities, particularly communities where there’s a large percentage of interfaith couples in rural environments. What we have here clearly works. On the High Holy Days, we’ll have over two hundred people at Shir Shalom. We average fifty, sixty, seventy people at a Shabbat service.

SG: That’s fabulous.

AM: Especially the fifty kids in the Hebrew school! It has completed my Woodstock, Vermont experience. Clearly, we were attracted to Woodstock because of its beauty and because of – well, Vermont, I should say – because of its beauty and because of the



character and quality of the people and things that we love – lifestyle.

SG: That's why you moved up?

AM: Yes. We lived in New York City. Our kids went off to college. We no longer needed a brownstone on 64th Street. Why stay in New York? But there was such a hole. My life just didn't feel like I felt it was meant to feel once we moved up here. The big missing thing for me was the Jewish community. So, now my world is really complete. I love the people in our Jewish community. I love the way we celebrate Judaism and Jewish events and life cycle events and holidays. That's it.

SG: Well, that's wonderful. The tape is stopping. [laughter]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Sandy Gartner: This is Sandy Gartner and Ann Buffum, meeting with Antoinette Matlins to record a life history interview as part of the Vermont Jewish Women's History Project. Today is September 28, 2006. Antoinette, do we have your permission to record the second part of the interview with you?

Antoinette Matlins: Yes, you have my permission.

SG: Okay. The first question we want to pick up with was if you could talk about how you went into the family business and became a gemologist. Tell us about your collections and the work you've done around that area, in books and everything.

AM: Well, as I mentioned in the first interview, I grew up immersed in the field because of who my father was. I also had a passion for the field, but I saw it exclusively as a hobby. I went into the advertising/marketing field after teaching remedial reading in



Virginia and Italy (Florence). and those other things I think we talked about in the earlier interview. After a number of years in the advertising industry, I just really felt like I wanted to change gears. I found it was not stimulating anymore and that it had become too much the same thing over and over with just different corporate clients. I started thinking about other things I might like to do at that point in my life. I was reading an article in Fortune Magazine about diamonds as investments and remembered commenting, "Oh, my gosh, they are going to lose their shirts." My husband said, "Why would you say that?" I pointed out that even if you understood what were called "the four C's" (the four factors that affect quality in gemstones) there are no books that explain what can be done to alter, change, or conceal those four C's, OR how many things might look like the stone you think you are buying that are not, in fact, diamond. Equally problematic, unless the investor had a degree in physics and/or chemistry, and ideally both, they couldn't get through a textbook on gemology anyway. Even the textbooks on gemology didn't address the many, many clever frauds that exist in the field. So there was very little an investor could do to protect themselves from being a victim of fraud or misrepresentation. When I mentioned that there were no books available, my husband said, "Well, there you go." I said, "There I go, what?" He said, "You just answered your own question about what you might want to do next. Write the book that doesn't exist." I remember blinking and thinking, "Well, that's an absurd idea. I'm not a writer. I'm not an author." But he insisted I could do it, that since I wrote business letters every day, and business proposals too, that I knew how to say what I wanted to say in writing. The only difference between what I was writing in a proposal and what I would write in a book was the length of the subject matter. If I did an outline addressing what I wanted to say, he was absolutely confident that I would write a very useful and practical book that was very timely.

I started thinking about it. I remember calling my father and saying, "Dad, I think we should work on a book together, the first book to help the public avoid scams and rip-offs in the gem and jewelry world. You and I can write this book." I knew my dad had always



wanted to write a book, but raising six children didn't allow him time to write a book. So I thought it'd be nice to involve him and help him do something he had always wanted to do, and at the same time, make sure my own confidence level was boosted enough that I was up to the minute on all of the critical issues, to write the book. When I first suggested it, he said, "You can't write a book for the consumer on this subject. It's much too complicated scientifically." I said, "Dad, I don't want to write a book for consumers to become gemologists. I want to write a book for consumers to help them become more knowledgeable, wiser consumers, and make better choices. I'll do an outline and a couple of chapters. You tell me what you think after you read them...and he did. He said, "I think you're onto something here." So, I basically wrote the book. He was my primary expert editor and commented if he felt something wasn't explained properly or added new treatments or new scams or something that had come up and new gemstone deposits. So, we worked together. We collaborated. I was still working for the advertising agency. After the first book was written with lots of helpful, practical consumer information.

SG: So when was this?

AM: It was the late 1970s. After the first book was written, I was getting phone calls from some of the jewelry trade magazines, asking if I'd write an article on this, or an article on that, or an article on something else. Then I was getting invited to major trade shows to give lectures, workshops, and presentations. My dad and I developed a workshop based on one of the courses that he taught in his gemology school that could be adapted to a three-hour workshop in several parts. These evolved into a number of different programs involving lecturing and/or giving hands-on workshops, and so on, and we were being called all over the country ... and eventually, around the world too!

Then, one of the major jewelry trade magazines heard about my workshops, which I'd designed to help retailers who lacked scientific or technical training learn skills that would



better enable them to know what they were really buying and selling and also to be able to actually identify many different gemstone materials so they were more confident about what they were selling to their own customers. The magazine editor wanted me to turn that workshop into a series of articles. So, I started writing a monthly series, which was basically what we were teaching in the workshops. Eventually, I started paying attention to the number of people who would attend my workshops asking me if the information I provided was in a book anywhere; when I said no, everyone would say, "Well, you should write a book." I looked at all of the articles I'd written for several years, and I thought, "This is a book." So that was the second book.

By the time the second book was out, I had resigned from the advertising industry altogether because, with the books, the lecture engagements, and the workshops, I also started getting calls from television and radio producers in regard to doing consumer segments on what to look for, and what to look out for! So, I added television segments into what I was doing.

Gradually, between the books – I've now written eight books, published in 10 languages – and the media, I began getting phone calls from private individuals who wanted to retain my services to help them acquire a particularly rare or fine diamond or colored gem or pearls, and so on. That led to my developing what I refer to as a gem consulting service, where I advise clients on the acquisition of gemstones and help them determine what they want, what will be involved in locating it, and what it will cost. Then, I search for what it is they want through my global network and present the client with whatever I consider, based on my experience and expertise, the best options available at that time. Then they make an informed choice.

I charge a retainer fee for my services, then deduct it from a nominal fee charged if they acquire something I've located for them. If the stone acquired is unset, since I also work with some of the leading metalsmiths in the country and some of the finest designers, I



can provide additional guidance on setting whatever gem is acquired into a lovely jewel. In fact, some of the people I started working with weren't well-known designers when I started working with them, and now some are big names and major award-winners. So, over the years, what I do has become a multifaceted business ... no pun intended!

SG: But it was good, though.

AM: It is. I still do television segments giving lots of consumer information on such topics as how to make wiser choices on a limited budget; and what ALL the options are to meet the buyer's needs and depending on the event (such as the 10th, 25th, or 50th anniversary or milestone birthdays, and so on) even the type of stone being sought--what color, size, ranking in terms of rarity, and lots of other important consumer information.

Although recently, there has been a notable shift from providing useful, helpful, and important consumer information to focusing almost exclusively on exposing fraud and misrepresentation, especially on the internet! This, too, is important, but I do miss the segments where the focus was on sharing important information regarding what people should be looking for as well-- such as information on new gems, new cutting styles, or new sources producing unusual colors in "known gems" gems such as the amazing "neon-colored" tourmalines discovered in the 1980s near Paraiba, Brazil, and called "Paraiba tourmalines." [It should be pointed out that other sources of tourmaline of similar color to those from Paraiba have been found in Mozambique and Nigeria. These stones, however, even in the finest material, usually lack the vividness of color seen in the finest material from Brazil; this is why "Paraiba" stones usually sell for much more. This has also led to material from other sources being misrepresented as being from Paraiba in order to justify higher prices].

The most exciting area for me, however, are the many wonderful "new" gems to look for! Gems that have been discovered relatively recently, including "tanzanite" (discovered in 1967 near Tanzania) or "tsavorite" (green garnets, even rarer than emerald, discovered





in Tsavo National Park in Kenya in the 1970s), or "aquaprase" a new bluish-green relative to aquamarine, discovered in Africa in 2015, or perhaps the rarest of all recent finds, discovered in the USA in the state of Utah, is a RED variety of the gem we know as "emerald." It should be noted that "red emerald" (its trade name) is the second-rarest gem on earth, and the only known source of this extremely rare gem is the state of Utah. The only rarer gem known is the "red diamond."

It is also important for the public to have information about things to look out for, including diamonds that have been laser-drilled to improve "clarity" or lab-grown diamonds (made by machines in factories) often misrepresented as "the same thing" as those grown in nature, and inseparable from natural -- both untrue. Unfortunately, the list goes on and on.

My favorite gem work today includes providing gem and jewelry consulting for private individuals, writing, lecturing, and giving workshops both within the industry and to various consumer organizations. And I've also been involved in several mining ventures.

I have also served on the Boards of various companies, including a North Carolina emerald mining company and the company that was mining the only known source of gem-quality red emerald, including the justification for calling it red "emerald" since "emerald" is green. I quickly point out that there are valid precedents for calling this extremely rare gem "red emerald," even if "emerald," as we've known it in recent history, has always been green.

For example, when I was growing up, there were only two "popular" gems from the "corundum" mineral family: in red, we called it ruby; in blue, we called it sapphire. All "sapphires" were blue, and only the rarer, costlier, red variety was called "ruby," which was also much rarer than blue sapphires. No source of sapphire in any other color existed in the market...until a source of "pink" was discovered, but it was not as rare as "ruby" nor was it formed in the same way, so it took on the "sapphire" name and became



"pink sapphire." Then yellow corundum was discovered, and it was called "yellow sapphire," and so on.

The case with emeralds is similar. Emerald belongs to the "beryl" family, and it is the rarest member of the beryl family. Other beryl gems include blue aquamarine, pink morganite, colorless goshenite, golden beryl, and the iron-bearing greyish green, called green beryl." Emerald was never called "green beryl" which is a different, much more common, and much cheaper variety. Then suddenly, we have a new gem enter the market -- one that is identical to the green variety we know as "emerald" -- in the way it forms, in its crystalline structure, in its internal characteristics, it is much rarer, and demand goes up with each passing day! It is red, it is rare, it is now the costliest member of the "beryl family," and so, for me, naming it "red emerald" makes sense; it is the fastest way to communicate, especially to the public that does not have extensive gemological knowledge, What it is ... the rarest, most costly gem within the beryl mineral family! And if that is not enough, the definition of "emerald" in a gemological dictionary defines "emerald" as "beryl colored by chromium"...and thus, since red beryl also contains chromium and is rarer than the green variety, it makes sense to connect it to the member of "beryl" family to which is it most similar: emerald!

Anyway, I was on that board. Then there is a company on the West Coast that produces cultured pearls from abalone. I was involved with them, and I was involved with the Mexican Sea of Cortez Pearls – a project started by university marine biology students in Guaymas, Mexico. Some students found some spat of a species of mollusk that was thought to be extinct. They probably would still be extinct because they never had a chance to really grow up because they were always being devoured by the big fish. But this particular species was the species that had produced these amazing, rare, natural, iridescent kind of black to purple pearls in the fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and 1700s that were taken from this area of the world to King Philip of Spain and Queen Elizabeth the first, and all of this type of thing. Some of the finest natural pearls in the world came from



this area, which has not been producing pearls – not this century – because there were no mollusks left due to over-fishing! Then, the waters that had been producing fine natural pearls taken by the early explorers to European royalty, were no longer able to produce pearls because the mollusks were eliminated due to over-fishing. Then most of the large fish in the area left since a source of food for them was also gone, and the entire area was depleted of pearl-producing mollusks, big fish, little fish, coral reefs ... everything!

SG: Because there's nothing to eat.

AM: Exactly. They didn't have anything to feed on. The coral reefs deteriorated, and so on and so forth. This group of three students, when they found this baby spat and identified it, decided to start raising the spat in protected areas. It's a whole fabulous ecological story because now the coral reefs have come back. The fish are back.

Guaymas is now a thriving little fishing village when it had not been a fishing village in literally a century. Anyway, the pearl itself is a unique pearl. The way it's produced is a unique production process. So I was involved in helping them at each stage of their growth and evolution and building a business with the wonderful "cultured" pearls of Guaymas.

So, to sum up, I love diamonds, colored gemstones, natural pearls, and fine-quality cultured pearls, and I've also had a lot of experience at the mining level. I love to write and educate anyone and everyone involved with, or interested in this ever-lustrous, sparkling, and ever-changing world. I travel to other countries as well to help miners know what they're mining, and one of my favorite visits was to the only country in the world that still provides NATURAL pearls: Bahrain. I met with leaders there in the natural pearl world and hope to do more there in the future.

I like to think that by teaching people around the world, I am playing a role in helping them better understand what they have, how to protect it, how to represent what they are



selling so that the public gets what they are told they are getting...and by so doing, to help keep the sparkle and beauty in the overall gem and jewelry industry!

SG: You said you published eight books. Is that through a different company than Jewish Lights? Is it a division of Jewish Lights?

AM: The first book was actually published by Crown Publishers. It was not what I'd hoped it would be. I had experience in consumer marketing and advertising – based on all the years I'd been a senior-level executive with a major NYC ad agency – which no one at Crown could match, and yet, they wouldn't listen to a thing I had to say in terms of the marketing and promotion of the book, not even what the title should be or what should be on the cover, or on anything! It was incredible to me, the author, the person who wrote the book. I understand authors are perceived by most publishing companies as being nothing but a pain-in-the-you-know-what. Nonetheless, my background was different from most authors. However, I learned quickly that once you sign the contract and they have the property, you'd better stay away from them because they know best ... just stay out of their hair. That's the attitude. They don't want to hear from you ever again. I got myself on The Today Show when the book had first come out. They got me on The Joe Franklin show!

AM: Franklin Show at two o'clock in the morning.

SG: He was there when I was working in New York as an actor. I once came out and helped him host a couple of shows.

AM: Great guy. He has a really loyal audience.

SG: Absolutely.

AM: I was on his show probably ten times. They got me the first interview with The Joe Franklin Show.



SG: That's so funny.

AM: One of the real old-timers. I don't even know if he's still alive.

SG: I don't know either.

AM: But I just sent a pitch letter to a producer at The Today Show. There had never been a book on the subject. So, they jumped on it. I had an eight-minute segment.

SG: That's huge.

AM: Even then, it was huge.

SG: It's huge.

AM: On The Today Show. It was Memorial Day weekend. I will never forget because lining up the jewelry pieces to take with me to show—I had to get them before the long weekend--was a major issue because of the value, insurance, and security! Anyway, we did it. Then, after the show, I went into the bookstores on Fifth Avenue following my appearance. I was in bookstores when people came in asking for the book they heard about on The Today Show. They held up the book, the title of which was, The Complete Guide to Buying Gems. What's the title of the book? Do you have a split second to see it? And because of the title my publisher chose, and the cover design my publisher chose, the title that viewers saw was the one huge word spread across the front of the cover: Gems!

SG: Gems.

AM: Gems. So people came in. Everybody was asking for "Gems." So the salespeople in the bookstore would go to the microfiche (at the time, that's how they knew what books they had in inventory and where to find them). There was no book called Gems. Finally, the store personnel would say, "If we have it ..." (Because who's going to remember my



name – Antoinette Matlins – and if you did, no one spells it correctly!) “If we have it, it will be on the shelf with our other books on jewelry and antiques and collectibles, which is blah, blah, blah.” Well, no, it isn’t there because on the cover of the book, in addition to its awful title: *The Complete Guide to Buying Gems*, was a drawing of three unmounted stones--one white, one green, one red! It wasn’t even a photograph of real gemstones. It was a line drawing of three unmounted stones on a black background. My book was on the shelf under Science and Nature because it didn’t show jewelry, and it said "gems."

Right? I watched as four people came into one store while I was there, asking for this book, ready to walk out when they couldn’t find it, and I referred them to "Science and Nature" because that's where it was, but I was the only one in the store that did! Now, if this was happening in one store, how many others? I assumed that was happening in every store! So, I started doing bookstore checks all over the city, in all the different chains, and in other cities that had different bookstores. All of them had them under Science and Nature if they had them at all. So nobody could find the book because people were asking for it – across the country -- by the wrong name: they were asking for a book entitled: *Gems*! And none of the bookstores had a book by that title!

So I actually thought it was absolutely astounding that the book sold at all because people who were looking for it couldn’t find it. People who were looking under Science and Nature who could have gone in for something else could see the book and buy it, but somebody who was actually looking for it couldn’t find it.

So my publisher was very happy when it sold seven thousand copies the first year, and they were going to a second printing. There were also some significant changes, like the IRS changed its guidelines related to how gem and jewelry appraisals could be handled in terms of valuation and how they were basing their fees (at the time, fees were based on a percentage of the appraised values, providing an incentive for the unethical appraiser to show a highly inflated value). The IRS said it was wrong to charge fees based on value due to the incentive this provided to exaggerate the actual value. So



they said, "You can't do this anymore." Well, in my chapter on appraisals and the fees for appraisals, all of the organizations prior to this IRS ruling had done it as a percentage. So the reality was that there was a serious error in the book. And when the appraisal organizations changed fees to fix the issue and went to an hourly rate fee, I could change the book or make any edits! When I pointed out that the book was now wrong, they didn't care; it didn't matter. "It's selling well," was all I heard, along with "When it stops selling well, we'll reconsider your suggested changes."

So, they wouldn't change the title. They wouldn't change the cover. They wouldn't let me put any additional corrected information in the text. I just reached a point where I couldn't stand thinking about my editor. Just her name would create stress for me. So, again, my husband got involved; he talked to the president of the publishing company and succeeded in getting all the rights back, including the film. We took over. Another company, Van Nostrand Reinhold, which was very well known in the science and technical fields, were looking for a "popular" book, and mine just fit perfectly. So we worked out an arrangement with Van Nostrand Reinhold, where we took over the publishing of the book. I changed the title. I changed the cover. I did all the corrections I wanted. Then they did all of the distribution. While this was going on, while Van Nostrand Reinhold was distributing my books, and we would talk with them about other ideas I had for other books, Jewish Lights was forming.

AB: What year is this?

AM: '83, maybe. '84. Somewhere in the early to mid-'80s. I should point out that when we took over the first edition of my book – The Complete Guide to Buying Gems – and Van Nostrand did the distribution, we changed its title to Jewelry and Gems: The Buying Guide. We believe that the title should tell what the book is about. The original publisher had sold fourteen-thousand copies of my book in two and a half years; we sold seventy-five thousand copies the first year.



SG: Wow. Amazing.

AM: Yes, but the original publisher did not want any of my marketing inputs. They didn't want to hear squat for me. I kept saying to my editor, "But if it's sold seven thousand copies when we know no one who wants it can find it, imagine how many it might sell if people who asked for it could find it."

SG: Novel idea.

AM: "You don't understand Antoinette," they kept telling me, "This is selling very well for a niche book." Anyway, Jewish Lights is now coming on the scene. They had a couple of books, and then they had a couple more books, and then they had quite a nice list. They are now distributed in all of the major bookstore chains and so on and so forth. They understand niche marketing very well. Meanwhile, Van Nostrand Reinhold was acquired by a conglomerate – a big one – and they don't want to deal with popular books. Their specialty was technical books, so they were no longer interested in GemStone Press books, which was the name we gave our end of the business.

By this time, we no longer needed Van Nostrand Reinhold for distribution because Jewish Lights has distributed it, and it's considered the same company. So, Jewish Lights then opened the door for all the distribution of GemStone Press. So, GemStone Press came under the Jewish Lights umbrella. Then, SkyLight Paths [Publishing], and so on.

SG: A smaller brochure?

AM: SkyLight Paths is a smaller imprint. It does books on general spirituality and living and so on. It's not necessarily from the Jewish perspective...–

SG: Perspective?





AM: – perspective.

SG: I didn't realize that.

AM: They have something on Buddhism and inside a mosque, inside a Catholic church, and so on – they also have something called the “Inside” series, and they have what is probably their best seller – How to Be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in Other People's [Religious Ceremonies]. There are two volumes. Volume One covers the world's top fifteen or twenty religions or so, and it covers every event you would experience within that religion.

SG: That's a neat idea.

AM: It's a great book. A lot of other things that are related, but not from the Jewish perspective exclusively. That was because the editor-in-chief whom Stuart brought in for Jewish Lights, who happened not to be Jewish but knew the publishing industry really well, was very into religious publishing because his father had been a publisher at one of the religious publishing houses. He had all of these ideas for more general spiritual stuff and started that imprint. He's gone, but the imprint thrives. So it's Jewish Lights, GemStone Press, and SkyLight Paths. The GemStone Press imprint is still the smallest of the imprints, but with Van Nostrand Reinhold, we did Jewelry and Gems: The Buying Guide, which was the renamed Complete Guide to Buying Gems. We did the Engagement and Wedding Rings book. We did The Pearl Book. We did the Gem Identification Made Easy book. Then, within GemStone press, we did Colored Gemstones: The Antoinette Matlins Buying Guide, Diamonds: The Antoinette Matlins Buying Guide, and Jewelry and Gems at Auction: The Definitive Guide to Buying and Selling at the Auction [House & on Internet Auction Sites]. I think that's all. Of course, we keep all the others' imprints and the various editions of them. The other thing – it's interesting. Stuart would never have started Jewish Lights were it not for his having to get involved with me when I was having problems with my original publisher and was so



unhappy. He helped me get the rights back. Then we found out you can't get distribution by yourself. He helped me find Van Nostrand, but in the process, he was learning a little something about publishing. When people in the Jewish world knew his wife had published a book and Stuart was involved, they said, "You know about publishing. You should bring back Larry Kushner's book. It's out to print." Based on his experience with me, it didn't seem to be all that complicated. So, just on a lark he said – "Okay, let's bring back a couple of books we'll put together. It shouldn't be so hard to distribute them." So that started the Jewish Lights imprint. Jewish Lights grew. So when I would have been dumped by Van Nostrand when they got rid of "popular books" -- while

I'm sure some other publisher would have been interested – by then, Jewish Lights was an established imprint. So, it was natural for me. It's been a really interesting circle of coincidences if you believe in coincidences. I believe that it's all meant to be. Well, not meant to be in that sense. I'm not a fatalist. You make certain decisions along the way. Those decisions –

SG: Lead to others–

AM: – yes, lead to other things that somehow come full circle.

SG: I know you mentioned you worked as a remedial reading specialist and also in marketing. There was one other thing you mentioned – educational consulting. Was that something you did?

AM: Yes, I consult with companies about their training programs – what should be included versus what is a waste of time. Like a major jewelry store chain that has a thousand stores – I help them put together their training program – what it should include, what gemstones should be included, what treatment should be included, care, anything, and everything to make them a better salesperson in terms of providing reliable information to customers and helping them understand what they're selling ... in short, to



help their customers, the consumer, understand what they're buying, as well as training to their own people doing the gem/jewelry buying for the stores, in terms of what's going on in the marketplace and things like this. Sometimes I would even write the training materials.

SG: Really?

AM: But usually, I just would consult with them in terms of what should be included, what a thorough training program should provide in today's market, what aspects of the trade need to be covered from the legal issues, FTC [Federal Trade Commission] regulations, treatment issues, what gemstones are now available, jewelry design issues, metals, care, all of this stuff.

SG: I want to go back to a couple of things about Judaism as well. You're a Jew by choice. In that position, how do you identify with the history of the Jewish people? How do you relate back to that?

AM: Actually, I think of myself as a Jew by discovery, as opposed to –

SG: By discovery.

AM: Yes, by discovery as opposed to a Jew by choice!

SG: Jew by discovery.

AM: Jew by discovery. Because what I discovered as I learned about Judaism is that my basic values and beliefs have always been Jewish; I just didn't understand it as "Jewish." So, for me, it was very easy to make the transition into Judaism, theologically speaking. Of course, as we all know, being Jewish communicates many layers. There is the cultural Jew, the ethnic Jew, if you will. I can only connect to the religious aspect of Judaism in the sense of my early years. I embraced Judaism as a religious path, a



spiritual path. For me, Judaism is the right spiritual path. The cultural aspects were much more difficult because, as a non-Jew culturally, December was a really big month because of Christmas. I think that is the biggest obstacle any Jew by choice experiences. There is so much invested in Christmas, in terms of your family, in terms of your friends, in terms of the majority of the people in the Western world, the rituals, the songs, the foods. You start planning for it from the moment Thanksgiving's over. It is such a powerful experience overall. You can step away from Christianity in terms of what you believe with regard to Jesus and all of the stuff that's celebrated at Christmas. It's not difficult to distance yourself from that aspect of the quote, "Christmas season." But separating yourself from all of the accouterments of the Christmas season is very difficult because, on the one hand, you don't want to celebrate Christmas when you're no longer Christian and you're a new Jew, so to speak. You want to be Jewish. So, you're suddenly feeling very torn at Christmas because on the one hand, you're really mourning the loss of all of these things that have been such a joyous part of your experience. Hanukkah just doesn't do it. Hanukkah is not a Christmas substitute. It really isn't.

SG: It's a minor holiday in essence.

AM: It's a minor holiday within Judaism, for sure. It's a fun holiday and all the rest of that, but it's not Christmas.

SG: Christmas.

AM: Then, of course, being around family, who is still Christian, who celebrates Christmas, made it really complicated. Over the years, I worked through that. Over the years, I was able to, whereas, in the very, very beginning, I really had to distance myself from celebrating Christmas with my family because I felt too conflicted. I dealt with it very easily. We just went skiing in Colorado at Christmastime.

SG: [laughter] That's one way to do it.



AM: We got ourselves in a comfortable hotel room and just didn't think about it. It gave me the breathing room I needed to be able to experience the fun and joy of the Christmas holiday with my mother and father and with my brothers and sisters and my nieces – well, I didn't have any nieces then – and nephews. My nieces are all Jewish (from my husband's side of the family) through Stuart – and still be able to embrace Hanukkah during that time and feel we could blend it together. Now, I'm perfectly comfortable.

Then, once, we had a moment where my granddaughter was coming to stay with us for the first time alone over the Christmas holidays. Normally, she would spend Christmas with her parents in Virginia and come up after Christmas, or she'd be here before Christmas, and I would send her back on the 24th. So we never had to deal with something like Santa or a Christmas tree or anything else. This particular year, she was about five, and she was coming – and it's complicated since, at that age, the belief in Santa Clause is all-consuming! She was going to be here from Dec 23rd through New Year's. My husband said, "Well, she knows we're Jewish." I said, "Yes, she knows we're Jewish." "So she understands there won't be a tree." I looked at him and said, "Are you crazy? Of course, there will be a tree." "Well, we don't have a tree. We don't celebrate Christmas. You don't celebrate Christmas."

SG: This is Stuart saying this?

AM: Yes. I said, "The child is five. The child knows we are Jewish. But the child is not Jewish. The child is Christian. The child celebrates Christmas. The child expects Santa Claus to come because she believes in Santa Claus. So, not only are we going to have a tree, but Santa is coming. She's going to have Christmas here." To resolve it, the Christmas tree was put up in the downstairs den. There was no Christmas tree on our main floor. Santa came downstairs and put the presents under her Christmas tree. She came upstairs excited. It was a little tree. It wasn't a big, big tree. We didn't go



gangbusters because I helped her understand that there was this little bitty tree at the Christmas tree lot that looked so sad because it was being ignored by everybody else – poor little Christmas tree. So she agreed she wanted this ugly, poor little baby Christmas tree. We were going to give it such a joyful night, the best life it could possibly have for its brief period. She came running upstairs – “Santa had come. Santa had come.” She looked at me, and she said, “I’m really sorry that you and Stuart are Jewish because if you weren’t, I’m sure Santa would have brought you something, too.”

SG: So cute.

AM: She understood we were Jewish. She didn’t understand exactly what that meant. She understood Santa didn’t come. We didn’t have a Christmas tree in our part of the house. That worked. That was okay. Stuart was all right with that because it was clear; there was a delineation. But we didn’t deprive this child of her belief structure either, and certainly not at age five when she believed in Santa Claus and wouldn’t have understood. We were able to reconcile that. I even typed up the letter from Santa and signed it and everything, all these little things – how sorry Santa was that she was not with her mommy and daddy on Christmas, but not to worry. He gave them some lovely presents, too, and so on and so forth. The bell from one of the reindeer fell off in her room.

SG: Nice.

AM: The little jingle bell.

SG: Sure.

AM: I’m a terrible, terrible grandmother and mother because I liked embellishing the myth.

SG: I think it’s great.



AM: I loved the fact that she believed in Santa Claus. I believe it's important to believe in something good. Then, when you reach an appropriate age, you transfer that something good to the less tangible and to the more conceptual when, I think, they're ready to understand there's not a Santa Claus. But that doesn't mean that the spirit of the season isn't alive and well. Then, of course, they expand the spirit of the season to include Jewish observance as well and freedom and so on and so forth. We've actually blended nicely in that regard. So, distancing myself from one culture and finding another – his family, Stuart's family, was always wonderful. I got very involved in celebrating Pesach and Rosh Hashanah and these things and learning the foods. He taught me how to make certain things, and his sisters taught me how to make certain things. As I became more and more proficient at preparing foods, that helped me connect, and I love these Jewish cookbooks that tell stories about the various holidays and the traditions that they had in their own home. I think about those traditions, and some of them I was familiar with, and a lot of them I wasn't familiar with, but it opens your eyes to understanding the vast tapestry, if you will, of wonderful traditions within different cultures within [Judaism] – the Sephardic Jewish traditions and the Ashkenazi, and then whether it's Moroccan or Italian. There are differences within the cultures and the foods and so on. Through food, I have found a connector to the cultures and to the traditions.

Through observing certain rituals – when we lived in New York and when we moved to Vermont too.

There was something really powerful for me when I moved to Vermont, for example, about lighting candles on a Friday night when alone, on top of a mountain, without another Jewish soul anywhere close. You're lighting these two little candles on top of a mountain, and you feel alone. I remember when we did it the first time – perhaps because being on top of a mountain, you feel more closely connected to the heavens-- this image came to my mind. I imagined God being up there in the heavens, and I was lighting my candles. Just imagine, being up so high and seeing an image that as the sun goes down around the world, these candles start flickering, and you see this image of



candles, being lit worldwide. and it occurs to you, if you broke that chain of light, what a loss. So, you couldn't not light candles because by lighting the candles, you were creating this wonderful chain of light, creating the special symbolism that "light" that communicates. The act of lighting the candles reminds you of what it is you believe and who you are. It connects you to this tradition of lighting candles that came along. It's one thing I can do that makes me feel connected to the generations before and to the generations to come...and to all the people who were standing, as I was, lighting candles, to create a light that encircled the entire planet Earth. For me, lighting candles is one of the most important and powerful ritual observances that we embrace. I'm not sure I ever saw it in that context in New York.

SG: The continuity.

AM: It's the continuity. It was feeling alone, but knowing I wasn't alone, knowing others were lighting candles. That's where this image of others lighting candles, along with me lighting candles, and knowing others, in the future, will light candles that, gave me this insight ... that for one night, God was just watching the world...and suddenly there are little candles flickering, but also from ages past to ages future, this continuity-- I just thought it was important. So embracing certain rituals, I think, does make you feel connected. Then over time, in Woodstock, wherever we are, we're creating our own traditions. We're creating our own culture. The rural experience is somewhat different from the Jewish culture in major urban areas. When we build a sukkah -- with the things we just cut down in the forest and brought to the sukkah from our vegetable gardens, my husband jokes during High Holy Day Services -- that he doesn't think he ever saw or was under a sukkah that wasn't connected to a brick wall or a cement wall until he moved to Vermont. All of the early Sukkot observances, for the first ten years at least, were held at our home, on top of a mountain, with no neighbors in sight, in the field near my vegetable garden, under the apple trees!





SG: At your house, wasn't it?

AM: Yes, and maybe it was for the first twelve years – that building the sukkah and having meals in it were done at our house. Going to the garden with the children, and helping the kids climb the apple trees, and helping the children pull up the vegetables, and having the parents go out into the woods, and cut down the tree limbs, and bringing in the corn stalks – so all this stuff – and doing the lulav and etrog thing and taking a meal inside the sukkah – that was the most joyful observance. I felt more connected to Sukkot than ever before! I felt Sukkot was very truly my holiday when I lived in Vermont. It's more challenging now, but it's still a very powerful holiday for me. Again, being in a rural environment and actually harvesting made it mine in a way I don't think Sukkot is for people who have been Jewish all of their lives living in a city, nor is it the same thing for me where I am today. But I embrace the ritual wherever I am ... and one day, I may be back in a rural environment reliving such wonderful observances of Sukkot!

AB: Let's stop for a second. We have to change the tape. [Recording Paused. End of Track One]

SG: Okay. You can talk. Here we go.

AM: Just to finish up on the culture thing and the traditions.

SG: Yes, I'm sorry. Absolutely.

AM: So, it was easier to connect to some of the traditions by beginning to observe certain ritual traditions. Then, as time goes by, and certainly in our community, we created some of our own traditions. For example, the young children in Vermont who started in our Hebrew school at age four, five, or six, or have been coming since they were two or one, experience certain observances in our Woodstock Area Jewish Community not normally observed elsewhere. For example, when we say kaddish, they all know that the first people who will stand are those who are saying kaddish, meaning



someone has died during the past month, and they say the name of the person(s) and their relationship to them and remain standing; then those stand who have lost someone in the past year and who also share the name/relationship of that person to them, and they remain standing; and then those who are observing a yahrzeit ... and who they are and relationship, and they remain standing... Then we will ask for all to rise, to say kaddish for those who have no one to say kaddish for them.

SG: That's very nice. I like this.

AM: At certain times of the year, like during the High Holy Days, we also would ask anyone to rise who would like to rise to bring into this moment the name of someone else they would like to remember, for whatever reason, at this time and to mention the name of that person, and then everyone will rise.

SG: That's great.

AM: So, for our children, that sort of a tradition – and I'm sure they'll be very surprised when they go to other places, and it's time to say kaddish, and it's not done that way.

SG: Right. Three people stand up or something.

AM: Exactly. But we don't concern ourselves with that. People, visitors, whomever, will learn soon enough what's appropriate in other places, but in our community in Vermont, they find it particularly meaningful; and people who have come from other places, especially adults, find kaddish has become a very powerful experience for them, when it had not really been very meaningful in the past unless it was that moment of a yahrzeit or they were saying kaddish themselves.

We tried to do things in Woodstock, in certain ways, that were respectful of a variety of different Jewish traditions because people who observe Judaism here may come from a Conservative background, or an Orthodox background, or an ethical or ethnic



background, or a secular background. They have varying levels of knowledge. They have varying, ritualistic experiences. So, we try to weave them together in interesting ways, and it results in some traditions, our minhag. [laughter] For example, to set the tone for weaving a variety of traditions together, we begin every service by singing “Hiney Ma Tov” and reminding people what that means. By being part of the creative process of creating a Jewish community in a place where one has never existed before, I feel very connected.

SG: And create your own history and traditions.

AM: Exactly. It’s connected me in a way to Judaism, to the past and to the future, that I don’t think I would ever have felt as a Jew "by discovery" anywhere else.

SG: Yes. The other thing I want to ask is that you had said that you had been involved in some activities, we know, with AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] and with Israel over the years. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about that and also if you have some feelings on what is happening now in the Middle East? Which, I know, seven hours later, we’ll be finished with this work!

AM: We are very connected to Israel and very committed to Israel in terms of doing whatever we can to help Israel remain a viable and flourishing country. We do this through AIPAC. We do this through trips back and forth to Israel. I remember right after the first serious intifada, what, ten years ago, twelve years ago – I can’t even remember the date. The biennial international book fair that is held in Jerusalem every other year was scheduled. Every American publisher canceled except for me and Stuart. We were the only American publishers who physically went to Israel. Other companies hired local people to have a booth, but they were too frightened to go. Perhaps it’s because of our basic Jewish values, but we have a deep belief in the existence of God, my husband and I both. We believe that when you do the right thing, that good comes of it. The right thing may result in death. We certainly hope not. We can’t pretend to comprehend the



great cosmic beyond or any such thing. But if we let terrorism or fear stop us from going on with what it is we do, then the terrorist has the victory; fear dictates how we live our lives. We won't permit fear to stop us from doing what is important to us. The only way to overcome fear is to look it in the eye and do whatever needs to be done in spite of feeling fear. Did I not think about walking down the street in Jerusalem and wondering if a bomb was going to go off? You can't help to on some level. It doesn't occupy your mind all the time. But at a certain moment, when you realize you're the only person on the street, and it's dark, and you're near the Arab – does it enter your mind? Yes. Do you let it deter you? Stuart and I don't. We believe in actions. Judaism is about the way we act in our lives, the choices we make about how we live our lives. It is about living life as God would want you to live it. We're publishers. We are Jewish publishers. The Jerusalem book fair was taking place. Not being there was simply not ever a consideration for either one of us. It was an amazing experience because people in Israel responded to us with such incredible gratitude. I called the hotel because I wanted to come in a night earlier. When I called the hotel, I said I was calling about my reservation. The young man on the other line said, "You're canceling." I said, "No, I want to add a night." He said, "Oh, you want to add a night," with a "smile" in the tone of his voice! The occupancy rate was something like four percent in the hotels. Right? Every time there's an intifada, every time there is a terrorist act in this part of the world, tourism simply dies, and so does the economy of Israel. We feel we have an obligation. When there's an Intifada, and we're going to take vacation, we will take it in Israel. I mean, it's just the reverse of everybody else we know, but we will. When we got to Eilat – I think it was the next intifada. We were there probably for another book fair. I can't remember. Maybe something with Hebrew Union College, which has a Jerusalem campus. So, we will also go and support the college and trips and so on. We went to Eilat for a few days because I have an archeologist friend there. So, we wanted to go out to some of the sites he was working on. Our last day, just as we were getting ready to drive back to Jerusalem or to Tel Aviv, technically, I realized I had a flat tire. So, we pull into a gas station. They tell us where to



go to get the tire fixed, and we go to get the tire fixed. We ask what we owe, and the man said, “No, we owe you. This is a gift. He would not let us pay for fixing the tire. He said, “We are so grateful that you are here.” That was the attitude. When you realize in these moments when there are so few Jews from any other part of the world who ventured to go to Israel, the warmth of the local people is so tangible, and the love that they feel in the platonic sense, for people who dare to come, and the appreciation they show you -- just because you were there. You see a side to the Israeli that you often don't see any other times. Israelis can be aggressive. They can be curt. They can be all of those things. But then, if you were living on the edge all the time –perhaps you would be too!

SG: I'd feel that way, too.

AM: I was also going to say you don't have time for things that are inconsequential. I mean, you just don't. There is a spirit about living, and there's a joy about living. Some of the holidays that you experience there can't feel like this anywhere else. So, we love Israel.

SG: What about the current problem in the Middle East?

AM: In terms of the current situation in the Middle East, it is very sad. It is also much more complex than most people realize. The reality is that Jews feel connected to the land of Israel and feel it is their legitimate homeland. Jews were rarely accepted in any other country and were separated from the greater population. So when Israel was created after World War II by Europe, the US, and the United Nations, it was not questioned. It was done. The Jews were given this plot of land called Israel. We came, and we worked hard, and we turned it into something wonderful. Then, more and more Jews from the neighboring countries to which they had fled over the centuries began to increase as Jews began to "return" from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia.



Then, unfortunately, many of the Palestinians felt they had to flee and thought they'd be welcomed by neighboring countries, where Palestinians had also been living for many years. What about their "right to return" to the homelands of their own families? They thought they'd be especially welcome in Jordan, where there were many Palestinians living at the time, many having lived there over a long period of time historically. But shockingly, their fellow Palestinians living in Jordan denied the Palestinians entry ... they were denied the "right to return" to the countries from which their families had originally emigrated. The same was true in Syria and Lebanon; Palestinians were denied entry into these countries. In short, the policies of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon seem to me to be the principal reason there is such a deplorable "Palestinian problem" today.

Palestinians were denied by Jordan, Syria and Lebanon any opportunity to try to establish new lives for themselves; they were, incomprehensibly to me, rejected by their own people. It seems clear, if one examines the history, that Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon share blame for having made the Palestinians the impoverished, poorly educated, and destitute people many are today, many having lived as refugees for decades, in squalid in refugee camps!

It is very sad, but it also seems to me that the "Palestinian problem" today is not so much the responsibility of Israel -- certainly not of Israel alone -- as it is a problem created by the policies of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and that these three countries should share responsibility for helping to correct the problem, eliminate the refugee camps, and help the Palestinians assimilate into the general population. It is possible, but more than that, it seems to me that it is imperative that these countries accept responsibility to "right" the wrong that has continued for so long.

SG: Do you have any final thoughts on the Middle East situation?

AM: For many years, Arab countries turned their backs on the Palestinians but this is changing today. Israel has also tried to create a more amicable situation. The two-state



solution is still young, but it offers hope. But it cannot exist if the two-state solution includes a state within Israel's boundaries from which they can conduct terrorism. It creates a very, very tense reality. Unless there is strong, positive leadership on both sides, with leaders who understand the complexities and who truly want peace, and really believe peace can exist ... and are willing to take whatever steps are necessary to make that peace a reality.

SG: Good way to say it.

AM: That's the reality of the situation. That's what makes it so sad. Are all Israelis good people? Absolutely not. Are all Palestinians evil people? Absolutely not. Are all Arabs evil people? Absolutely not. Are all Jews wonderful people? Absolutely not. People are people. Most people want the same thing. They want peace. They want to have a roof over their heads. They want to have food in their bellies. They want to feel loved.

People are people everywhere. I still have hope that peace will prevail in Israel. I don't think there is anyone who wants peace more than the average Palestinian mother and the average Israeli mother. And I just hope one day it will be so throughout Israel.

SG: Is there anything else you want to add, or have we pretty much covered –?

AM: I think I've covered everything unless you think of anything later.

SG: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]