

**THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM  
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR  
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA  
JEWISH WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT**

**MEMOIRIST:** BARBARA MILLER ASHER  
**MODERATOR:** JEWISH WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT (GROUP)  
**LOCATION:** ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
**DATE:** NOVEMBER 20, 1985

**INTERVIEW BEGINS**

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

**Moderator:** This is the morning Oral History Project, Women of Achievement, interviewing Barbara Asher on November 20, 1985. Barbara, will you start and say a few words about yourself?

**Barbara:** First of all, when I was called to participate in this, I had been reading about the project and I was really very thrilled and very flattered when the question was asked earlier, "is this a real one or is this a test?" In many ways, I feel it is a test, and I hope that we can work together with it today and that everybody will feel very relaxed. I don't know how far back to go when I start talking. Each year it gets a little bit longer, but I believe many of you have received a copy of what I consider to be the bio of the week, because when you do the kinds of things I do, you probably have more than one kind of bio. The one that I had just retyped, I guess to send to you, is pretty much a chronology, in some ways, of the kinds of community service that I have done. Perhaps that's because I'm just hot off the political campaign,<sup>1</sup> and that's when you really get out there and you try and tout what you've done in the community so other people will try and make some kind of connection. But I think what I would like to do is to go back a little bit, maybe to the beginning, and tell you a little bit about myself and how I got to Atlanta in the first place. I was born and raised in Marshfield, Wisconsin, which is a very small town in the Midwest. We're very proud now, the population is up to about 18,000. Growing up there, my sister and I were among maybe five or six Jewish kids in the entire community. My father's family had been there for a number of years. We grew up in a community where there were not other Jewish people. Where, looking back on it now, I guess there were some things that if I had been more aware I would have been a little upset about. I talked to my father about them now

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Asher's 1985 campaign for reelection to City Council.

because of having become as involved as I have since moving to Atlanta in the Jewish community. But I remember having all but two or three of us go to religious day school every Wednesday afternoon, not realizing that I was really being discriminated against because we had no temple, no synagogue, no kind of religious community in Marshfield, and I used to have to stay and do special projects at school. I guess I thought it was kind of neat at the time, but when I think back on it now, unfortunately it no longer exists, because I guess as an adult I went back and said to my father, “You know this just isn't right, and other children shouldn't be allowed out of school.” When I left Marshfield I was 18 years old and I went to Sophie Newcom College<sup>2</sup> in New Orleans. My father had selected the school for me at the suggestion of someone he was doing business with who told him that he had a daughter my age, and the best thing you could do was send your children to another part of the country so they would grow up. I had never been away from home before, and never really been to camp, never really been away. I got on a plane in Chicago [Illinois] and very honestly, I never went back. Part of it may have been feeling that I had been pushed out of the nest, if you will, but I think also, I was exposed to something totally different than I had grown up with, and I loved it. I loved New Orleans, I loved Tulane [University],<sup>3</sup> and rather than go home to Marshfield in the summer—where my summer job, or my job during high school had been cashiering at a drug store, which I started doing when I was 15 and worked all the way through high school—I went to summer school at the University of Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup> Much of this was my first exposure to other Jewish people, which was quite interesting. When I went to New Orleans, and went to Tulane, I eventually was invited to join AEPi<sup>5</sup>. I was not initially. I was that kid from the Midwest that didn't know anybody, and kind of was not one of their people for the first round. I did have a cousin who was living in Texas and [she] thought that was just terrible. She and another friend got in a car and drove from Dallas [Texas] to New Orleans to let them know that they certainly should invite me to join, which they did, and it became a very important part of my life. In college, I found that it was very important for me to participate in other activities, and I guess maybe that was a continuation of some

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<sup>2</sup> H. Sophie Newcom Memorial College, in New Orleans, Louisiana, was the coordinate women's college of Tulane University from **1886** to 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Tulane University is a private, nonsectarian research university located in New Orleans, Louisiana.

<sup>4</sup> The University of Wisconsin is a public research university in Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>5</sup> Alpha Epsilon Pi ('AEPi' or 'AEPi') is the global Jewish college fraternity with active chapters in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, and Israel with a membership of over 9,000 undergraduates. This includes as sorority chapter at Tulane University.

activity in high school. I did become involved in a wide variety of activities, not those that centered at Newcom as much as they did at the university [Tulane], and maybe it was a forerunner for some of the things I've tried to do in the Atlanta community. I was the first president of the University Center. It was opened the year I was a senior and [I] became the first president of that. [I] was president of Campus Night, which was a theatrical production group. I can't sing, I can't dance; they used to let me stand in the chorus, paint scenes and things of that type. [I] was active in the sorority, and [I am] very pleased, my daughter is now at Tulane. She is also in AEPi. She called last night to let me know that she had run for an office, and she is now the ritualist. We're not too sure what that means, but she's excited and so we are excited. But my activities [in college] were primarily as pledge mother and representative to the panel of the council. I was tapped for the Hall of Fame, the Who's Who and a wide variety of organizations. My activities there led to my first job which was in New York, at NYU [New York University],<sup>6</sup> at the Loeb Student Center.<sup>7</sup> As a college student, I was the only one in attendance at a convention in Bloomington, Indiana for university center directors. I interviewed there, then flew to New York just before graduation, and was hired to be an advisor to students at NYU. It really was a situation where I was getting paid for what I had done as a volunteer, and maybe that traditionally has been what has happened in my life. I enjoyed it, it was a marvelous job, I love working with the people. The pay was lousy, it was \$3,600 a year, but I did have free tuition, so I went on to graduate school and worked half way towards a Masters degree in Personnel Administration. I left NYU because I felt I'd been in academia long enough. [I] went to work at Bloomingdales.<sup>8</sup> My college roommate happened to have been a girl from Atlanta, and she also happened to have a cousin living in New York who was also from Atlanta. Norman and I met the first week that I was in New York and he was just horrible. Sally had told me, my room mates name was Sally Elsis, and Sally had told me that he would help us find an apartment. He showed me where to look in *The New York Times*<sup>9</sup> and that was the extent of his assistance. Took about three years to get him in line and we were married in 1963. I moved to New York in 1960. Probably the only two people who were then working at Bloomingdales who both quit work to

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<sup>6</sup> New York University, often abbreviated as NYU, is a private university based in New York City.

<sup>7</sup> The student center at NYU from 1959 to 1999, when it was replaced by the Kimmel Center for University Life.

<sup>8</sup> Bloomingdales is an American department store chain, founded in 1861.

<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times* is an American daily newspaper, founded and continuously published in New York City since September 18, 1851.

get married, and we came back to Atlanta. We moved here in March of 1963. My first introduction to Atlanta was that there was no place to live. There were no apartments available, so we stayed with his parents, took house sitting jobs for people who were traveling until we could move into an apartment. Norman had been born and raised here, been gone for about 13 years when he returned, and southern hospitality took over. We were being entertained by everyone he had ever grown up with. But 13 years can make a difference. I'm not a very good card player, my tennis isn't great, I even tried golf for a while and found that that wasn't really for me. The first organization I joined, after attending an annual Spring luncheon, was NCJW [National Council of Jewish Women].<sup>10</sup> I think then, as now, in any volunteer organization, if you raise your hand and say, "I'll do it!" you get drafted. My first job was bulletin editor, and I really found a place for myself. I think that marrying into a family that was established in Atlanta, had been here for a long time, there was a certain social set, if you will, of people you would be seeing socially. Not being able to fit into many of those niches, not having started a family, I did go back to work. I was working at Rich's<sup>11</sup> in the personnel area. It was what I had been doing at Bloomingdales and found that it was a good fit for me. But that still wasn't enough, and I really wanted to get involved in volunteer organizations. NCJW did give me that outlet and also gave me the pat on the back that I felt that I really wanted, and moved fairly quickly. I think it was two years and I was a Vice-president or something like that. Again, raise your hand and you're going to get elected. Though I joined a number of other organizations, I really feel the base that I began to build in the community came from my involvement with NCJW. I never was very good as a volunteer in a one on one situation, so, I kind of tended to move more toward the administrative, the engineering, if you will. My first child was born in 1965, and when she was 15 months old was when I decided to retire from Rich's. It was more than I could handle. We had just moved into a home. Trying to keep up with a home, a child, my volunteer activities, which I was not willing to give up, and working full time just didn't quite cut it. So, at that time I basically retired. I had a second child, a son, in 1967, and just remained very, very active in the volunteer community. It was a very exciting time for me, because I was able to participate in

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<sup>10</sup> The National Council of Jewish Women is an organization of volunteers and advocates, founded in the 1890's, who turn progressive ideals in advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. They strive to improve the quality of life for women, children and families.

<sup>11</sup> Rich's was a department store chain, headquartered in Atlanta, that served the southern United States from 1867 to 2005, when all locations were replaced with Macy's, another department store chain that had been merged with Rich's in 2003.

some things that I felt were kind of firsts. Some of the things that I was involved with was the opening of the Grady Child Care Center,<sup>12</sup> which was a very exciting project as far as I was concerned, the Golden Age I & R. I was involved in United Way,<sup>13</sup> and a variety of other organizations. From my volunteer work I was selected for leadership at [unintelligible: 12.33] had the opportunity to be the first woman to be the General Chair of that organization. I think a lot of what I had done had basically put me in a position to be the first either woman, [or] the first Jewish person, in a variety of situations. It has also sent a message to me that sometimes you just have to say yes. It's almost an obligation to say yes, because you may be the one to break a little bit of ground here, or a little bit of ground there. Some of this came home to roost, because I had these opportunities, when a young lady, who is president of a feminist action alliance, and a political crony of mine, got me to meet them for breakfast one morning at the I-Hop on Courtland Street [in downtown Atlanta]. They wanted to start an organization called The Atlanta Women's Network<sup>14</sup> and that probably was the time where somebody just sat me down and said, "you've had a lot of good opportunities, now it's your time to pay back, and we need to form an organization where we have some women who are willing to serve as mentors." That may have been another one of those so-called turning points in my life, but I recognized that I had finally reached a point in my own volunteer career that it was important to begin to pay back and begin to bring other people along. When I decided to run for public office it was really kind of a fluke. I'd been at a fund-raising breakfast for Panke Bradley<sup>15</sup> who is serving on the City Council. It looked like Panke wasn't going to have any opposition and there was a seat that had opened up. I'd been serving on the Zoning Review Board,<sup>16</sup> which was a new creature under the charter that went into effect for the city of Atlanta when Maynard Jackson<sup>17</sup> was elected. Maynard had appointed me in 1974 to serve on the Zoning Board, and I saw that as another volunteer activity

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<sup>12</sup> Grady Memorial Hospital, frequently referred to as 'Grady Hospital' or simply 'Grady,' was founded in 1890. It is the public hospital for the city of Atlanta, serving a large proportion of low-income patients. Grady is the largest hospital in Georgia and has come to be considered one of premier public hospitals in the Southeast.

<sup>13</sup> United Way is a national system of volunteers, contributors and local charities helping people in their own communities.

<sup>14</sup> The Atlanta Women's Network, founded in 1979, is a progressive and focused network of women who stand together to mentor, advance and support professional women in Atlanta.

<sup>15</sup> Panke Bradley, who grew up in Macon, Georgia, was the first woman appointed to the Atlanta City Council. She was involved in the women's movement and served as vice-chair of Common Cause in Georgia.

<sup>16</sup> The Zoning Review Board consists of nine members, appointed by the Mayor and City Council, who meet twice a month to consider property rezonings and special use permits.

<sup>17</sup> Maynard Holbrook Jackson, Jr. was an American politician, a member of the Democratic Party, and the first black mayor of Atlanta, serving three terms.

and kind of enjoyed being around city hall. I just threw out to the group at the breakfast, “What would you think if I decided to run for the seat that had been vacated by Buddy Folkes?<sup>18</sup> There’s no incumbent.” Most of them laughed. It was not a very encouraging breakfast. About 11:00 that morning I was back at home saying, “Well, I’m going to forget it,” and Don Bradley, Panke's husband, called and said, “I think you ought to do it. Panke told me what happened. I think you ought to do it.” I decided I’ll have to ask a few people. Pulled a few folks together, and decided that if I could put together an organization and raise some money I would qualify in the end of August. This was about the middle to the end of July, and qualifying was the end of August, the election in October. I started putting together the volunteer group. Our house was a mess. Fortunately, my kids were away at camp, so, it didn't matter that we had maps and God knows what else all over the place. Started raising the money and made the decision that I was going to run. Panke's opposition, if there had been any, disappeared completely, so the gal that was running her campaign had no campaign and moved over to coordinate mine. But I decided that this was a major step and I needed to let my children know. So, Norman and I drove up to camp to spend a weekend with the kids—it was parent's weekend—to let them know that I was going to run for public office and I was going to run for city council. So, when they came home and saw all these people around the house, they would know what was going on. They were 10 and 12 at the time, had no idea what I was talking about, could have cared less, and thought it was nice that we came up for the weekend. They now tease me about it because they are both voters, and they have both been very active in this campaign, but the first one, they thought it was real nice that we had come to camp to visit them. The first race for the city council was probably the most exciting thing I have ever done in my life. It was fun, starting at 7:00 in the morning getting home at 1:00-2:00 at night. Learned more about the city. Fortunately, [I] had been on the Zoning Board and had some exposure to the city. I knew how I was going to change it, I knew how I was going to make a difference, and now know how naive I was, and how I could convince anybody that what I said had any validity is pretty amazing. It was a well-fought race, I think. I was in a run off, won after the run off, a very long race. Learned a lot about people just during that experience: people that will come on board, and people that will offer you support. My real base

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas “Buddy” Fowlkes was a former Georgia Tech track standout who then serves as an Atlanta alderman and city councilman for nearly three decades.

was all the people I had met in 14 years at community service. I could go into the Grady Homes Day Care Center and sit down and have lunch with Susie LaBore and the kids. I knew that Susie was going to deliver that housing project. It was the gals from the Junior League,<sup>19</sup> that we had worked with on a number of projects who really were the backbone of my campaign. They were the precinct captains, they were the district captains. It was a unique race, in that all three candidates were Jewish, and the Jewish community was somewhat divided in their loyalties. Serving on the City Council has opened other doors for me. Right after my election, I was selected to serve on the Metropolitan Foundation,<sup>20</sup> which is a five-year appointment by one of the judges in Fulton County [Georgia]. I'm not the first woman to serve on that particular group but I'm now serving a second five-year term and I'm still, I believe, the first Jewish person to serve on that foundation board. I was selected for Leadership Georgia<sup>21</sup> after that, and I also got a job. One of the people I had worked with through Leadership Atlanta<sup>22</sup> asked me to submit a proposal to his firm, which happens to be Deloitte Haskins & Sells,<sup>23</sup> to provide consulting services on an hourly basis in community involvement, which is a very interesting project. I worked with the firm for about three years, primarily with their partners and managers, [and] some of their senior accountants, to begin to help them develop a game plan for getting involved in the community. The individual who asked me to do it was the newly appointed head of their small business department. He is now the partner in charge of the office, the youngest in the firm. He was tapped for that position when he was 38 years old and has done a dynamite job. Under his leadership [the department] has basically doubled in size since 1981. I stopped doing that particular project when I ran for re-election in 1981. Was elected for my second term, 1982 started serving my second term. In 1982 was also the time that I was hired full time by Deloitte Haskins & Sells as their Personnel Administrator. I had, after serving one term on the council,

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<sup>19</sup> Junior Leagues are education and charitable women's organizations aimed at improving their communities through voluntarism and building their members' civil leadership skills through training. It is an international organization with 293 different chapters.

<sup>20</sup> The Metropolitan Foundation of Atlanta was organized and operates to serve the needs and interests of the metropolitan Atlanta community, to benefit and promote the well-being of the people of the metropolitan Atlanta community.

<sup>21</sup> Leadership Atlanta, founded in 1972, is one of the nation's oldest and most successful leadership training programs for young business, civic, and community leaders that have the desire and potential to work together for a better Georgia.

<sup>22</sup> Leadership Atlanta is one of the oldest sustained community leadership programs in the nation. Its mission is to connect and inspire leaders to strengthen metro Atlanta's communities.

<sup>23</sup> Deloitte Haskins & Sells, now Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, or simply Deloitte, is an accounting firm based out of the United Kingdom.

felt that I was spending too much time at City Hall for a part time job and had stopped legislating and gone to meddling. I was frustrated by the way the people weren't performing their job and things of that type and it was not the healthiest, so, I decided I'd better get out of that; my kids were older, and that kind of thing. So, that's pretty much where I am now. I've just been elected to a third term on the City Council, a race that publicly probably didn't look like much.

Internally, with my opponent getting outside funding from where . . . I think I know where but I'm not really sure . . . all of a sudden he appeared on television, all of a sudden, he had a distribution system. I probably took an issue in this last campaign, as a member of City Council, and it was probably the first challenge that Mayor Young<sup>24</sup> ever had, someone questioning his judgement on the APC Skills contract, the fact that the city had opted to go sole source. It will be interesting to see what happens over the next four years, since I have not laid eyes on the Mayor since election day.

**Moderator:** I think it's time to start opening up for questioning, does anyone want to . . . Shirley, go ahead.

**Shirley:** Barbara, you mentioned . . . what you presented to us was your bio of the week. I'm really interested in your early bio. You spent a lot of time sharing with us what you're doing now. What sort of parents do you have—did you have—and what was going on at your house that may have, or may not have, influenced you in what you did in the future?

**Barbara:** I have one living parent now, my mother passed away about five years ago. Growing up in a small town probably, in many ways, helped prepare me for a lot of what I'm doing now. I often said that Grant Park<sup>25</sup> was my neighborhood. That kind of community was my kind of neighborhood. The town I grew up in was 65% catholic, there were a handful of Jewish families. My father had been born and raised there. We lived, or he still lives, in the house that he lived in since 1906. My mother had been born in Chicago, moved to outside of Marshfield to a farm when she was about 12 years old for her father's health, moved back to Chicago when she was 18 to become a secretary. Her family was catholic. When she and my

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Jackson Young (b. 1932) is an American politician, diplomat, activist and pastor from Georgia. He has served as a Congressman from Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> congressional district, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and Mayor of Atlanta. He served as President of the National Council of Churches USA, was a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, and was a supporter and friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

<sup>25</sup> A historic neighborhood of Atlanta that was formed around Grant Park, the fourth largest park in the city.

father married, her family had moved back to Chicago, his family was in Marshfield. There probably was a level of not accepting on both sides of the family, which was quite something I don't think I really experienced as a child, but it was there, and later on I grew older I could sense it. I was born in 1938, there was a war going on. My father enlisted at the age of 42, because it was his war, too. At that time, he had been in the family business. The family business really wasn't much, and we really didn't have very much. My mother, sister and I followed him to Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] when he was in the Quartermaster Corp<sup>26</sup> and stationed there. When that tour of duty was over, we really had no place to live so we went to California. Her parents had then moved to California, and [we] stayed with my grandparents until he could find a house for us in Marshfield. We moved back to Marshfield. Whether there was blatant antisemitism in my mother's family or not I don't know. My father has always felt that there was, that he was never accepted, not by her parents but by aunts and uncles. We were just kind of strange. We were the Jews in the family, and they had people in Germany, people who were members of the Nazi party. It was a very interesting kind of thing because I really didn't sense it. My grandparents were my grandparents, never treated us any differently from any of the other grandchildren. I think there was always a sense in my father's family that my mother had not been Jewish, and maybe that wasn't right. How could we be expected to be Jewish children, we had no formal training. A couple of years in high school they tried to import a Rabbi to come over and help us out to learn about being Jewish. That didn't last very long because that particular Rabbi felt the best way to teach us how to be Jewish was to teach us the Hebrew alphabet, and neither one of my parents thought that was going to mean a whole hell of a lot. Probably the most important thing about growing up, and maybe setting the stage, was that I . . . [was] always told that I was very special, that I was very important, and that I could do whatever I wanted to do and was encouraged to do that. Growing up maybe I thought that my father thought we were better than other people. Maybe that's not so bad when you stop and reflect on it. Not in a way that you would not associate with others, because in a small town you associate with everyone. I mean we had a high school, everybody was there, it was a consolidated high school. Consolidation didn't mean busing other than busing the kids in from the country because

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<sup>26</sup> The Quartermaster Corps is a sustainment branch of the United States Army, with the mission to support the development, production, acquisition, and sustainment of general supply, Mortuary Affairs, subsistences, petroleum, and water, material and distribution management during peace and war to provide combat power to the U.S. Army.

there were no high schools out in the country. So, in a town that size, my graduating class in high school was over 200. I was always encouraged to do things, always encouraged to participate, encouraged to get good grades. There was no question that I was not going to go on to college, of course I was.

**Shirley:** Your answer leads into my second question: what sort of influence do think you have had, or what pace have you set, if any, for your children, who at this point fully understand what you're involved in?

**Barbara:** I think they are very aware of the community they live in. I view my involvement as an opportunity to broaden their horizons. They are achievers. I think that the call that I mentioned last night, that's extremely important. I'm not sure what my daughter got elected to, but that she tried, and she knows that's important. My son is very much the same way. His real love right now is soccer. He's been playing soccer since he was eight years old. He plays 12 months a year on three different teams. He pushes very, very hard. He tries hard, he's good at what he does, he's a good student, these kinds of things. They know that they are to be involved. It's a role model, I guess, and they're living up to it. I mean, there was no question in their mind either, that they came from a little bit different social milieu to know that they were going to go to college, too.

**(Unknown):** Barbara, in your growing up, did you have any particular specific role models that you fashioned yourself after?

**Barbara:** Growing up, I guess, my father. He is a very strong person, very determined, worked very hard. He basically, when he came out of the army, had nothing, and started up a business and built it up. Very strong work ethics. In that way, yes. After coming to Atlanta and getting involved in the community, probably the person I consider most to be my mentor is A.D. Paget, who used to be at Trust Company Bank.<sup>27</sup> Maybe he was a little bit of a father image to me because he was the one who said, "Yes, you can do it," and gave me that kind of encouragement.

**(Unknown):** Did you meet with any resistance whatsoever as being a Jewish woman climbing up the ladder to where you are at this point?

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<sup>27</sup> Trust Company Bank, now SunTrust Banks, is based in Atlanta. The stability and growth of the bank, with branches and affiliates in seven states and the District of Columbia, serves as a measurement of the economic growth of the New South since the end of reconstruction.

**Barbara:** To where I am now? Not really, not really. I think in some instances being a woman was more prevalent than being a Jewish woman.

**(Unknown):** However, apparently that must have had some significance because you mentioned the fact that you felt that it was important, as a Jewish woman, you had an obligation to say yes.

**Barbara:** Yes, I feel that way because sometimes I feel that any group that has been discriminated against will take the posture, "I don't want to participate because I've been discriminated against." I think, at least I feel, that there is an obligation when the door is open to walk in, sit down and take that chair. When the Junior League in Atlanta, and I believe sincerely, wanted to open their doors to young Jewish women who were not just transfers, a lot of this was the outgrowth of the Ann Cox Chambers<sup>28</sup> Confirmation when her confirmation was going to be challenged as the Ambassador of Belgium. I received a phone call and immediately contacted friends of mine in the Junior League. That little brouhaha was dealt with and was over and done with and Mrs. Chambers was confirmed. I was asked to meet with members of the Junior League, four past presidents, to basically identify young Jewish women for candidacy of the Junior League and provided them with names. We got the sponsors, we did the whole bit. I was criticized by some people in the Jewish community saying, "why would you do that?" And my response basically was, and I told the girls from the League the same thing, "some people are going to tell you to take a flying leap, others are going to be willing to open that door, and it's a very personal thing." For me it's a very personal thing. If the opportunity is there, let's do it.

**(Unknown):** My question really is related to the fact that you seized the opportunity, you walk through the door when it's open, that's a lot of risk taking and my original question was how did this develop? Then when you talked about your moving around the country with your family as a child, that is, getting accustomed to those changes probably helped that, but is there anything else that influenced you not to be afraid to take risks in the public's view?

**Barbara:** Success.

**(Unknown):** That's a good one.

**Barbara:** I'd had that experience in college and that was a totally new environment for me. I

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Beau Cox Chambers is an American media proprietor, who had a stake of interest in Cox Enterprises, a privately held media empire. She was appointed ambassador to Belgium by President Jimmy Carter, and also served as the first woman on the board of Atlanta's chamber of commerce, and as a director on the board of The Coca-Cola company.

mean, just being picked up and moved from what I believe to be a very protected environment and I guess in the mentor question, yes, there was someone there as well. It was the man who was the Director of Student Activities and basically said "you can."

**(Unknown):** You mentioned that you felt very strong about being a Jewish woman. What do you feel in your background, which would seem to have been minimally Jewish oriented, that has kept you identifying with Jewish people? I mean, you married a Jewish man. What influenced you, do you remember at the time, to keep the faith?

**Barbara:** Primarily, I think my parents, who basically said "you are Jewish, you are different," but in a positive way, not a negative way. Maybe that basically said to me, one of the reasons I don't want to go back to Marshfield is that . . . I'm different from those people. Maybe I used that label of being Jewish, not knowing anything about it, that I was different, and immediately got into Jewish activities in college and probably leaned that way. Nothing in terms of formal training would speak to that at all. Maybe it's a little bit of saying, and it's a personal thing, that there is something special about being just a little bit different, and it's a positive thing for me.

**(Unknown):** Can you tell us more about your relationship with your mother and your sister?

**Barbara:** My sister and I are very close. She is younger than I am and I guess after [my] going away to school, of course, she was the favorite child. She was spoiled rotten, she was much more favored than I. We joke about that a great deal. She lives in Chicago, has three little girls. Her husband is diabetic and has had a number of problems related to diabetes and three years ago had a kidney transplant. There was no question in my mind that when he went in for surgery I was there and took care of the children for a month. I just picked up, left my family, and we pretty much have always had that relationship. My mother was a very warm person, and probably one of the strongest people that I would ever see as a role model. She was a stroke victim for five years and I was back and forth all of the time. Every time she would have an episode, I was on the plane and I just picked up and went. There was never any question on the part of my husband or my children. There never has been. That's a role I have played in the family. More or less, when a call comes I'm the one that goes. Her perseverance, her fight at the end was just unbelievable for someone who was so sick for so long. She came here for my son's *bar mitzvah* the September before she died the following March. She was in a wheel chair, we had to have a nurse with her. She would not miss one thing. It was just incredible, and the

example she set, not only for my generation, but for the grandchildren, was just phenomenal. She was always there to support us, both my sister and I. She would be the one. I think I went to Girl Scout<sup>29</sup> camp for one week and she was on the Girl Scout board or something of that type and I had gotten to a phone and called and told her how horrible the food was, and she arrived to do an inspection of the camp with more goodies than you can possibly imagine, which was more or less her way, and was always there for us. I think that makes an awful lot of difference. Even today, my father just had surgery right after the election. He delayed surgery until after the election. He's 84 years old and had a tumor removed from his kidney, a malignant tumor, and my sister and I were there again together . . . and it's just . . . we're there.

**(Unknown):** You said something to the affect that your mother was always there, you can't really say that yourself, can you?

**Barbara:** No.

**(Unknown):** Does it make a difference to your children, the fact that they were only 10 and 12 when you really got totally involved in politics and went back to work etc.?

**Barbara:** Possibly. The first four years that I was on the council it was still pretty much a volunteer thing. That brought them a little bit further along. Their own activities, and I guess going to school in Atlanta, is a little bit different than going to school in Marshfield where you walked everywhere. My son gets home at 6:00 or 6:30 every night, I'm usually home. I think the trade off, at least I hope the tradeoff is that they can identify with what I do, and it has made them more aware of their community. Both of them went to private schools, my son is a senior at **West Minister** right now, which I think is a very rarified environment. I think his exposure to . . .

**(Unknown):** Has he actively participated in anything?

**Barbara:** He was in charge of the art signs, and wrote a paper for School Life, but I mean, he literally recruited the people to put [the signs] up. The only thing he did not do, because the calls have to be made during the day, was to call to get permission to put it in someone's yard. But he recruited the volunteers, he recruited the people to put them together, and we had a lot of teenagers, I mean, it was just wonderful.

**(Unknown):** Have you future political ambitions other than City Council?

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<sup>29</sup> Girl Scouts of America, founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Lowe, is a youth organization that aims to empower girls and help teach values such as honesty, fairness, courage, compassion, character, and citizenship through various activities.

**Barbara:** Possibly. Possibly, and I think that you never say no.

**(Unknown):** You [Barbara] never say no.

**Barbara:** You never say no when you're an elected official, but the political climate and the opportunity . . . I'm also not a masochist. Depending upon what the climate is four years from now, I may decide to run for either president of the council or mayor. It depends upon who's in the race.

**(Unknown):** What about your husband, is he active politically, and how does he feel about never seeing you?

**Barbara:** I don't know, I forgot to ask him. Norman is a very interesting person when it comes to relating to the kinds of things that I do. Maybe some of it stems from just being involved in organizations. He recognizes that this is something that's very, very important to me. Out of respect for each other, he does what he wants to do that relates to my activities and that's it. If he doesn't want to . . . what I try and do with any invitations that come in, of anything that comes in, [is to ask,] "is there anything here that you think you might like to go to?" and if he says yes, we go, if he says no, then I identify what I think is important and I go. And it's just been that way for twenty-some years. Part of it, I think, is that when we married, we both had been working, we both had led fairly independent lives. I'd been living in New York for three years when we got married, on my own, had a job. I worked after we were married, and had something else out there. I think that may help to lay the foundation. I sense that there are times when he is very frustrated, because he thinks I'm involved in too much, and there are other times when I think that I sense a great deal of pride. I had not read the Southern Israelite<sup>30</sup> when I got up this morning. There, right there on the middle of the table, is the article about what was happening this morning. When I woke up he said, "do you know you have a meeting at 9:30?" It's that kind of thing. I try not to let it interfere. During an election it's impossible not to, and he deserves a medal after this one. We did not open a head quarters, everything was at home.

**(Unknown):** Is he himself, does he have his. . . is he himself active in the community?

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<sup>30</sup> The Southern Israelite, now the Atlanta Jewish Times, is a newspaper with the mission to create a sense of community throughout the geographically dispersed Jewish people of greater Atlanta through the timely dissemination of local and national news; support of local synagogue, nonprofit and cultural endeavors and events; thought-provoking dialogue and debate on current issues and Jewish ideas; and the strengthening of the bonds and understanding of Jewish culture, tradition and family.

**Barbara:** No. He has from time to time done different things. He's served on the Boys Club<sup>31</sup> board. When we were members of the Standard Club<sup>32</sup> he was on the board there and shared one of the committees. He has served on a number of other community boards. Norman doesn't like meetings and becomes very frustrated by going to meetings and sitting through them. He much prefers acting, and one board that he served on, he didn't like the project of the organization, and basically pursued it very tenaciously and the organization no longer exists. So, I don't know how many invitations he's going to get.

**(Unknown):** In terms of the volunteer activities and the political, do you feel there's a difference between how demanding [it is] of you and your family, being involved with volunteer community things, or being involved politically? Or is there no difference?

**Barbara:** There's a difference, but not in the demand as much as the public scrutiny. That may be the most difficult thing for any public official's family.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

**(Unknown):** To summarize my question, when one is very active in communal affairs and active politically, there are demands on time, focus, and interest. Is there a difference between those kinds of demands on your time?

**Barbara:** The actual time and demands on time, probably not. It is the difference, when you do communal volunteer activities and your picture is in the paper, it's usually because someone is patting you on the back. When you are an elected official and your picture is in the paper, it is usually because somebody wants to take a pot shot at you, or is criticizing what you have done. That's the toughest on anyone's family. The first time I was in a political cartoon was shortly after being elected to my first term. I was crushed, I was hurt, my kids were still young, I didn't know what kind of teasing they were going to get and maybe what happened with that was to say a little bit more about Norman. He took the cartoon and had it framed.

**(Unknown):** Good for him.

**Barbara:** And said, you know, "this is what you're in for." He said, "You got to learn how to

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<sup>31</sup> The Atlanta Boys Club Inc. was established to address a growing trend of youth delinquency in the South Atlanta area. In 1956, it changed its name to the Metropolitan Atlanta Boys Club to reflect its growing metropolitan reach.

<sup>32</sup> The Standard Club is a Jewish social club that started as the Concordia Association in 1867 in Downtown Atlanta. Its present location is in Johns Creek in Atlanta's northern suburbs.

live with it. This is what you asked for.”

**Moderator:** We're going to just have about three more questions. Ronnie, do you have one?

**Ronnie:** You've mentioned many men as mentors, role models, aside from your mother, have there been any women that have been role models?

**Barbara:** One is, when I was in college, my major professor. I majored in psychology and I thought I was really pretty good. She didn't really think that I was all that great but was there for me when I was doing some of the volunteer activities and I had the dubious honor of being, as I mentioned, the first president of the University Center. But I also had the opportunity to have to fire a volunteer, and this is the person I went to. I said “I need advice, I need help, I need guidance,” and she was marvelous. When it came time at the end of my senior year to write our comprehensive examinations, which we had to do in our major field, my grandmother—my mother's mother—and grandfather had decided to take a trip to Germany to go back to see where they had come from. My grandmother died in Germany. My mother had never traveled abroad, was terribly upset, and this happened right during comprehensive exams. I went to pieces, and it was this particular woman who just saw me sitting there with all these blue books, and I couldn't do anything, and it meant whether you graduated or not. [She] came in, pulled me out, told me to go back, take a nap, take a shower and be in her office at 1:00, which I did. I sat there with tears streaming down my face saying, "And I wanted to write with distinction," and she looked at me and she said, "You were never the student to write with distinction, just go ahead and finish it." Wonderful woman.

**(Unknown):** Barbara, do you help other women, I mean do women come to you now, and how do you reach out and advise other women?

**Barbara:** I probably have more resumes than most employment services. I try and meet with them, council with them, help them to analyze. Maybe it's not as altruistic as we would like to think about people who are in volunteer work. Why do they want to get involved, and how do they see this fitting into their lives? I also work with a number of women who want to reenter the job market, either on a part time basis or a full-time basis, and try and work with them, helping them to determine what kind of position they may want to pursue. When I hear of volunteer openings that seem to be a good fit, or even job openings that are a good fit, I try to pull the people together. Right now I'm reviewing some resumes for a part time executive director position for a non-profit.

**(Unknown):** Barbara, you had mentioned earlier that you were involved in helping to open up the League. I'm wondering how you see the Jewish community in Atlanta [unintelligible: 5.38]

**Barbara:** How I see it and in what perspective?

**Dot:** Yes, do you see the Jewish community isolated, ghettoized, or do you see the Jewish community becoming more integrated with the general community?

**Barbara:** From my vantage point, I see more Jewish people involved in more activities. Maybe that's just where I'm looking at it from. I'm seeing something that's very close to you, Dot, the involvement in your own neighborhood where a lot of the leadership is Jewish, and this is a community or neighborhood organization that's out there doing battle with zoning and a lot of other things. But there is more of that kind of involvement. More boards and commissions. Some of us look very specifically for that, which is something that I do. I feel that I have an obligation, if I have an opportunity to nominate, to nominate women and very often Jewish women, very often Jewish men. But for programs where I'm in that position, whether it's Leadership Atlanta, Leadership Georgia, International Business Fellows,<sup>33</sup> things of that type, because I really believe that there is a genuine desire to have more Jews and more women involved, but it's the same old, "Gee I don't know any!" Well, I'm going to introduce you to some.

**Moderator:** Do you have anything more you want to say as a conclusion, or one more good question?

**(Unknown):** How does that apply to the negro political segment? Does the same issue apply to the negroes as well as the Jewish segment?

**Barbara:** You mean whether I would nominate and promote people who are black?

**(Unknown):** Yes.

**Barbara:** Yes, I would.

**(Unknown):** Or is there more negro political action today that you are confronted with?

**Barbara:** I work, when I'm in city government, in an almost, I won't say 100%, but about a 90% black environment. I guess I'm so used to it, and I'm so used to being in a situation where I may be the only white person. Part of your political dues that you pay in the city of Atlanta is to go to black churches when you're on campaign. I'm not real hard to spot, and I may be the only one there.

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<sup>33</sup> International Business Fellows is a global organization of peer leaders, CEOs, senior executives and professionals committed to leadership training and support.

**(Unknown):** Has your Jewishness ever been a problem in the black community at all in recent years, since there have been some problems between blacks and Jews in Atlanta?

**Barbara:** Not terribly blatant, I think the Farrakhan<sup>34</sup> thing has made things a little uneasy. As I jokingly will say to some of my colleagues, “just remember if you're addressing a Jewish group don't say ‘some of my best friends are Jews and other white people,’” that kind of thing. But, no, that's probably more of a Jewish [and] Christian thing, because of the predominantly Christian nature of the black community than it is black [and] Jew.

**Moderator:** Thank you very much. I think we all have really enjoyed this morning.

**Barbara:** Thank you.

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**

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<sup>34</sup> Louis Farrakhan, Sr. (born Louis Eugene Wolcott, 1933) is the leader of the religious group Nation of Islam (NOI). He has been criticized since the 1980's for remarks that have been perceived as antisemitic and anti-white. Farrakhan disputes this view of his ideology.