

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

MEMOIRIST: BARBARA BALSER
INTERVIEWER: RUTH ZUCKERMAN
LOCATION: ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Tape 1, Side 1>

Ruth: This is Ruth Zuckerman interviewing Barbara Balser at her office at 3490 Piedmont Road NE, Suite 1300, Atlanta, GA 30305. This is June 23 and it's side one, tape one, of a 90 minute tape for the Jewish Women of Achievement Oral History Project, sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women.¹ Barbara Balser is the executive vice-president of Management Compensation Group² and her professional achievements are many: She is Chartered Life Underwriter, Chartered Financial Consultant, Top of the Table Member of the Million Dollar Round Table;³ recipient of The National Quality Award for consistency in business; recipient of National Sales Achievement Award 1978 to 1985; [and] NASD [National Association of Securities Dealers]⁴ Registered Representative. She has memberships, business and professional, in numerous associations such as the Committee of the 200⁵ National Secretary, 1984 to 1985, Southeastern Regional Chair, 1983 to 1984; member, Board of Directors, Optimum Funding Corporation,⁶ Atlanta, Georgia; member, Board of Directors, Quality Solids Separation Corporation, Houston, Texas; charter member, Women's Commercial

¹ 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.

² Management Compensation Group specializes in various executive benefit plans, consulting and administrative services, and client administration services for corporations.

³ Million Dollar Round Table is a global, independent association of more than 66,000 of the world's leading life insurance and financial services professionals from more than 500 companies in 72 nations and territories.

⁴ The National Association of Securities Dealers (NASD), now the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), is a self-regulatory organization of the securities industry, overseeing all stock market operations in the United States.

⁵ The Committee of 200 is an invitation only membership organization of the world's most successful women entrepreneurs and corporate leaders.

⁶ Optimum Funding Corporation, now Optimum Funding Group, specializes in providing financing solutions for high net worth individuals or small to medium sized businesses.

Club, Atlanta, Georgia; member, Women's Business Owners, Incorporated, Atlanta, Georgia, former board member; president, 1983 to 1984, Atlanta Tax Study Association; Atlanta Chapter member, National Women's Political Caucus;⁷ Gold Key Member, American Society of Chartered Life Underwriters;⁸ member, Association for Advanced Life Underwriting; Ambassador member, Life Underwriters Political Action Committee; Atlanta Chapter Member, National Association of Life Underwriters;⁹ member, Georgia Private Sector Committee of Women Business Ownership, 1983; and President, 1981 to 1982, The Atlanta Agents Association. Her community activities also are numerous. She is associated with Leadership Atlanta,¹⁰ 1985 and 1986; Vice President, Executive Committee, southeast region, Anti-Defamation League;¹¹ member, Board of Directors, Atlanta College of Art;¹² member, Board of Directors, Continuum Alliance for Human Development,¹³ Atlanta, Georgia; member, Board of Directors, Alliance Theater Company;¹⁴ member, Friends of Spelman Committee;¹⁵ patron member, High Museum of Art;¹⁶ chair, 1983 and 1984, Business and Professional Division of the Drive for the Girl Scout Council¹⁷ of northwest Georgia; founder and former vice president, Better Infant Births Council, Atlanta, Georgia; convener and former President, Support Atlanta

⁷ The National Women's Political Caucus describes itself as a multi-partisan grassroots organization in the United States dedicated to recruiting, training, and supporting women who seek elected and appointed offices at all levels of government.

⁸ Launched in 1927, the Chartered Life Underwriter is the insurance profession's oldest standard of excellence. Today, it continues to be the credential for practitioners who desire to provide their clients with the security of life insurance and risk management.

⁹ The National Association of Life Underwriters, now the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors, believes that life insurance and other risk mitigation practices should be at the core of a solid financial plan.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States. The ADL was founded in 1913 "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all." Today, the ADL describes itself as "the nation's premier civil rights/human relations agency."

¹² The Atlanta College of Art, originally the Atlanta School of Art, was a private four-year art college in Atlanta, Georgia. Established in 1905, it was founded along with a museum that later became the High Museum of Art. It was absorbed by Savannah College of Art and Design in 2006.

¹³ The Continuum Alliance for Human Development was created in 1973 to allow community citizens to align with the Maternal and Infant Health Council and continue as a voice for Georgia's mothers and children.

¹⁴ Founded in 1968, the Alliance Theatre is the leading producing theater in the Southeast, reaching more than 165,000 patrons annually.

¹⁵ Spelman College is a liberal arts women's college in Atlanta. It was founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, and is one of America's oldest historically black colleges for women. Spelman received its charter in 1924.

¹⁶ The High Museum of Art in Atlanta is the leading art museum in the Southeastern United States. Located on Peachtree Street in Midtown, the High is a division of the Woodruff Arts Center. It was founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association and renamed after the High family donated their house as an exhibit space in 1926.

¹⁷ Founded in 1912 by Juliette Gordon Lowe, Girl Scouts of America is a youth organization that aims to empower girls and help teach values such as honesty, fairness, compassion, and character through various activities.

Schools; and former Vice President, Temple Sinai,¹⁸ Atlanta, Georgia. Barbara was also exceedingly active in the B'nai B'rith,¹⁹ which she joined in 1961 as a bride and newcomer to Atlanta. For the next ten or eleven years B'nai B'rith was the focal point, a major emphasis of her life outside of her family. She held many chairmanships and chapter offices including programming, memberships, [Unintelligible, 4.10] etc. She was also an active fund raiser, attended local and regional training sessions and conventions and in 1968 was elected president of the Atlanta Chapter [of B'nai B'rith]. There was only one those days. Membership was approximately 1,700 plus at that time which, she was told, was B'nai B'rith's Women's largest chapter. In addition to sitting on BBYO [B'nai B'rith Youth Organization] Adult Committee,²⁰ she has participated in every ADL [Anti-Defamation League] Human Relations Award dinner since the first, when they honored Mayor William B. Hartsfield.²¹ **Charlotte Wildman** was chairman of the Operation Stork²² and together they founded the Better Infant Births Council, an umbrella organization of 14 Atlanta Women's organizations, sponsored by the National Foundation March of Dimes.²³ Later, Barbara served as vice president of this organization, the goal of which is to prevent mental and physical birth defects. During Barbara's tenure as [B'nai B'rith] Atlanta Chapter President, the faculty of Atlanta schools was integrated by court order and was asked by the ADL League to attend a meeting of nine leading women's groups representing 50,000 local women. Subsequently, she was elected President of this group, Support Atlanta Schools, which supported the Atlanta School Board as it moved to comply with court order student and faculty desegregation. During the same years, Barbara was very active with

¹⁸ Temple Sinai was founded as a Reform congregation in 1968 and met in a variety of locations before establishing a synagogue on Dupree Drive in Sandy Springs, north of Atlanta. Rabbi Richard Lehrman was chosen as the congregation's founding rabbi. The current rabbi is Rabbi Ron Segal (2016).

¹⁹ B'nai B'rith Women was founded in San Francisco, California in 1909. It was originally a social organization designed to attract young, single adult members with parties, picnics and dances. As women emerged into the public sphere it expanded into cultural activities, philanthropy and community service. Their announced aims are to perpetuate Jewish culture, enrich their communities and ensure the religious survival of their sons and daughters.

²⁰ B'nai B'rith Youth Organization is a Jewish youth movement for students in grades 8 through 12. The organization emphasizes its youth leadership model in which teen leaders are elected by their peers on a local, regional and international level and are given the opportunity to make their own programmatic decisions.

²¹ William Berry Hartsfield, Sr. (1890-1971), served as the 49th and 51st Mayor of Atlanta. His tenure extended from 1937 to 1941 and again from 1942 to 1962, making him the longest-serving mayor of his native Atlanta. It was under his direction that Atlanta became a world-class city with the image of the "City Too Busy to Hate."

²² In a combined effort by B'nai B'rith and the March of Dimes Foundation, Operation Stork was a prenatal care service and education program with an emphasis on informing the public about the importance of early and regular care and to provide medical professionals with auxiliary services tailored to local needs.

²³ March of Dimes is a United States nonprofit organization that works to improve the health of mothers and babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality.

B'nai B'rith Women District five, which covered six states as well as the District of Columbia. The most advanced positions [she] held on the District level were Convention Chairman and Vice President. On the National level, she served as Vice Chairman of Operation Stork and also as National Commissioner to the Anti-Defamation League. At this point, we are going to be taping live. Barbara will be picking up and just taking the ball and running with it and we will see where it leads us.

<pre-recorded introduction ends, interview pauses, interview resumes>

If you want to start, Barbara, with your childhood, or work at this point in time, or go back to your childhood . . .

Barbara: Childhood might be a good place.

Ruth: Why don't we start with your earliest memories of your home life? Your parents, your grandparents, your siblings . . .

Barbara: My earliest recollections are of my grandfather's home in Richmond, Virginia, where I lived with my mother, and my grandfather, and his wife, who was a second wife, not my mother's actual mother. Her name was Erma. In those days of course, I called her grandma, but I have referred to her most of my life as Erma, with no fondness. [We also lived with] Erma's daughter, Mildred. My family background religiously, I guess, is kind of interesting and maybe explains many things that have happened in my later life. I've been blessed with very strong women as influences in my life. My grandmother, whose name was **Bertha Goodman Osias**. I think her middle name may have been Barbara, we really don't know for sure if that was a romantic notion that she took later in her life, somewhere around the time that I was born, or not. Another interesting romantic notion about my grandmother, she was born in Vienna. She was the youngest student, I believe, to have ever attended the Vienna Conservatory of Music.²⁴ She was five, and she went there as a pianist. She came to this country in 1899, and her birth date, she said, was July Fourth. I always thought that that was rather interesting. I don't know if that is true or if that's just the birth date she decided that she liked. She was extremely bright and well educated and spoke English with absolutely not one trace of accent. In fact, in her later years she also taught Speech, English.

Ruth: This was your maternal grandmother?

²⁴ The Vienna Conservatory of Music, now the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, was founded in 1817. Today, with a student body of over three thousand, it is the largest institution of its kind in Austria, and one of the largest in the world.

Barbara: My maternal grandmother. It has been told to me that Bertha, my grandmother whom I called Nana . . . that her father studied for the Reform Rabbinate, and that at some point in his education, he decided he didn't believe in God at all. From that time forth, I guess, he was an atheist, and my grandmother was raised with no religious training. There were certain things she did all of her life, lighting candles on Friday night was one of them. On the High Holy Days, if she did not attend Synagogue, which I don't believe she ever did until very late in life, she would take her prayer book and she would read it. She believed in God, she just didn't seem to follow an organized religion, and I think she thought of herself much more as a Viennese, as an Austrian, than as anything else. The cooking of the region was more of what I remember of my grandmother than *Matzah* balls and chopped chicken liver, which she cooked very well, but she cooked mostly with a German-Austrian influence. At any rate, she married probably around 1907 to **John Lewis Osias**.

Ruth: O-S-I-A-S?

Barbara: O-S-I-A-S. I believe approximately five years later **Irving L. Osias** was born, and four or five years after that my mother was born. I guess five years after. We now call him Uncle Irwin. Maybe we'll come back to that at some tape . . . some point in the tape. My mother was born in 1916.

Ruth: Your mother's name was . . . ?

Barbara: **Vivian Helen Osias**, and at the time of her death her last name was Bernstein. B-E-R-N-S-T-E-I-N.

Ruth: And when did she die?

Barbara: My mother died February 2, 1988 and I just lost her.

Ruth: I know you were very close to your mother.

Barbara: It's very hard for me to talk about, really.

Ruth: Would you not like to talk about her at this time?

Barbara: I'll talk about whatever you'd like, that's fine.

Ruth: If that's too painful, we can . . .

Barbara: it's not really, it's a pain you always have, you know, but I can talk about it.

Ruth: Well perhaps it would help if you did.

Barbara: She was wonderful. She was one of the strongest, most inspirational people I've ever met. She was beautiful, both inside and out. She had a difficult life, in many ways, but was

thankful for every day. She loved life, and [she was] very outgoing, and warm, and beautiful, and competent, and tough, and charming.

Ruth: Getting back to your grandparents, at what point did they decide to come to the United States?

Barbara: My grandmother had come to this country in 1899. My grandfather came a couple of years later. They did not know each other prior to that time. They met and married here in the United States. The story goes that my grandfather spoke no English when he came to the states, and he started cleaning out ink vats for one of the large printing ink companies. My grandmother taught him to speak English. He spoke very well, but if you listened carefully, when he said my mother's name, Vivian, you could hear the little w instead of the hard v. But I don't think people would have thought that he was born in Europe. Neither of my grandparents spoke with any accent. I think he was 16 when he came to this country. My grandmother passed away on October 6, 1960, and my grandfather died sometime in 1961. At any rate, my grandfather was a very dashing character. He loved fast cars. I think he did very, very well. I think my grandparents lived extremely well, and in a very brief, short period of time. I think they had a home in Sheepshead Bay [Brooklyn, New York], and I think they had servants. Again, so many of these stories you wonder if they were real or if they were apocryphal, but I remember being told that my grandmother was riding in an open car with my grandfather, who also legendarily raced a Stutz Bearcat at Daytona Beach.²⁵ [Then] he hit a ditch or a tree and she was thrown from the car during her pregnancy with my mother and that she was then confined to bed, and I guess it was during that time, or at some later time, maybe during or after my mother was born, that he became involved with another woman. The other woman, I believe, was Erma. I think the affair went on for some time. My grandmother was an extremely proud, and difficult woman and when she confirmed this affair was going on, even though it was only 1920, or thereabouts, she told my grandfather that he would have to leave, and he did. Some years later—not many years later, maybe two, or three, or four years later—my Uncle Irving went to live with grandpa and Erma. Erma was, I believe a Lutheran, and my grandparents had no formal religious training, and didn't feel close . . . they didn't come out of a *shtetl*²⁶ environment. They were city folk. My grandfather was from Romania.

²⁵ Daytona International Speedway is a race track in Daytona Beach, Florida, United States. Since opening in 1959, it has been the home of the Daytona 500, the most prestigious race in NASCAR.

²⁶ A *shtetl* is a small town, usually in eastern Europe, with a significant Jewish presence in it.

Ruth: That's very urbane.

Barbara: Very. [He was] well educated. One of his brothers founded the Chair Pharmacology at Rutgers University.²⁷ My grandfather's father was a 32nd degree mason in Romania, so, they were part of the urban setting. I think they thought of themselves more as European and less as Jews. They never felt discrimination because of being Jewish. I think the families came to this country for different reasons, but they had more to do with the political climate or the lack of work, than whatever they wanted to do or their dreams of what America held for them. More to do with that, and less to do with discrimination. I never can recall my grandparents ever talking about feeling discriminated against because they were Jewish, and they really didn't live their lives in the Jewish . . .

Ruth: [Unintelligible, 17.39]

Barbara: Right.

Ruth: What was the reason for them coming to the United States?

Barbara: Well they both were very young. I think my grandmother was only 12 when she came. Her family came so she came with her family, and the same with my grandfather. I think he was only 16. I think the family came as a family, it wasn't like one came and then they sent for the rest.

Ruth: What year was that?

Barbara: My grandmother came in 1899, and I think my grandfather came a few years later. As I said, they didn't know each other in the old country. He was from Romania, and she was from Austria, Vienna.

Ruth: When you say the family came together, who are you referring to?

Barbara: My grandmother came with her parents, and a number of her sister and brothers, or maybe only one brother. I only recall her speaking of one brother. Two of her sisters, at least, remained in Europe. One came later and at least one never came, and died later in the death camps.²⁸ Of my grandfather's family, he too came, I believe, with his parents, and brothers, and

²⁷ Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, is an American public research university and is the largest institution of higher education in New Jersey.

²⁸ This refers to concentration camps in which people are detained or confined, usually under harsh conditions and without regard to legal norms of arrest and imprisonment that are acceptable in a constitutional democracy. In Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945, concentration camps were an integral feature of the regime. The Nazis differentiated between concentration camps, which were used to contain slave laborers and prisoners of the Nazi state, and extermination camps, whose primary purpose was the systematic killing of prisoners; this comment could refer to either.

maybe sisters. He had at least one sister and one brother. I don't know what became of his family. I do know some cousins on that side. He lived his life as a non-Jew after the divorce. He was never a Jew before, but I don't think he held himself out to be anything else. I believe he held himself out to be other than a Jew for the rest of his life after he and Erma took up housekeeping together. I've often wondered, by the way, if they were ever legally married. I don't really know that they were. I know that they lived together for a long time before my grandparents were divorced. I think Erma was a nurse, and she always was that kind of a caretaker, taking care of people all of her life.

Ruth: Was she the nurse to your mother when she had her accident?

Barbara: It was my grandmother that had had the accident.

Ruth: Oh, your grandmother had the accident?

Barbara: No [Erma did not help her]. Interestingly, though, it was help that ultimately brought my mother and I to live with Erma and grandpa, and she did take care of me ultimately. My mother and her mother grew up in a German neighborhood, and they lived in the Ridgewood section of Brooklyn. My mother went to Ridgewood High School. She gave Ukulele lessons and gave manicures as a teenager to earn money. My grandmother never had much in the way of means after the divorce. My grandfather did not help out very much financially. Although he lived quite beautifully. A few years after my . . . just going back . . . a few years after the divorce, my Uncle Irwin went to live with his father and Erma. He was never *bar mitzvah*-ed. I don't think he ever thought of himself as a Jew, and he grew up thinking of himself as a Christian, and has lived all of his life as . . . I think he's Episcopalian. He's very devout, he believes in his religion. I don't think he thinks of himself as having given up Judaism, or turned his back on Judaism. I don't think he ever felt that he was a Jew. I don't think he was ever exposed very much of that background, and certainly he was only about 13 or so when he went to live with his father and Erma, and so he lived the life that he was introduced to.

Ruth: Is he still living?

Barbara: He is still living, and we . . .

Ruth: In New York?

Barbara: No, he doesn't live in New York any longer. He lives in Florida, and he and his children and I have become very close since my grandparent's deaths, which is another story. My mother grew up in this neighborhood, in the Ridgewood section of Brooklyn [New York], and

there were not many Jews in the neighborhood. I think she knew she was Jewish. She never went inside a synagogue. They probably observed the holidays pretty much as I described to you. You know, my grandmother lit the candles on Friday night, and I think she would read her prayer book on *Yom Kippur* and *Rosh Ha-Shanah*. But my grandmother also liked to have a good Christmas dinner. She was an American! I think that was very typical thinking of a lot of people of that generation, too. At any rate, my mother graduated from high school, and went to work, and I think she probably held a number of early jobs, which I don't know a lot about. She might have worked in a Five and Ten Cents Store.²⁹ My grandmother supported herself as a young girl by working in a Five and Ten Cents Store, and she used to play the sheet music.

Ruth: I often wondered about what happened to these people afterwards.

Barbara: Yes, she played the sheet music, and her compatriot behind the counter, selling the sheet music, was Irwin and Georgie [**Unintelligible, 1.32: most likely a last name starting with 'G'**] or, as my grandmother would call them, Irwin and Georgie Gershwin's Aunt and she and this lady, whose name I don't recall right this minute, wrote a song together. Lovely little ballad called, "A Game of Love," and it's a darling little song. My grandmother used to play it for me often. It was not a big hit, but it got published. "A Little Game of Love," I think it's called.

Ruth: Did this have anything to do with your tie in with Marvin Hamlisch?³⁰

Barbara: Probably my love of music. After her divorce, my grandmother made a living doing a number of things. She tried teaching, but she was a very impatient woman. She was a real artist, and I think she did not have the ability to be patient enough with youngsters while they played scales. She played the piano in a silent movie theater, accompanying the film, she played the music for sing-a-longs in the local theater, she cashiered at the local theater, or a number of theaters. She also taught at a school later in life, because I can remember going there with her, so this must have been during World War II. She taught at a school for deaf children, teaching them to speak by teaching them first to sing. Somehow, they would gather around and put their hands on the piano, and learn to mouth words to music. That seemed to be a good methodology, and she held that job until the war was over. Then when the work force was swelled by people with accreditation, she had to resign her job. She was asked to resign her job.

²⁹ A five and ten cent store, also known as a five and dime, nickel or dime, variety, and ten-cent store or dime store (10 cents), is a store offering a wide assortment of inexpensive items for personal and household use.

³⁰ Marvin Frederick Hamlisch was an American composer and conductor. Hamlisch was one of only twelve people to win Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards.

They wouldn't have that place for her anymore. She was not an accredited teacher. At any rate, after high school, these were the kinds of jobs my grandmother did, and after high school my mother probably worked in a Five and Ten Cents Store, too, and then, ultimately, she worked as a hostess in a restaurant, I believe in Manhattan [New York]. And Dick Leibert³¹ of Radio City Music Hall,³² maybe it was the other way around, that she went to work for Dick Liebert, who was the organist at Radio City Music Hall . . .

Ruth: I remember that very well.

Barbara: . . . and then maybe he had an interest in this restaurant, and she was hired as the hostess there. But I think she was really there to look after his interest. I think that being a hostess was really secondary, or it was camouflage. She was there to kind of keep an eye on things, and make sure that nobody was stealing, and if they were, who they were. Somewhere in that episode, my mother married a neighborhood boy. . . man, who I think in retrospect she felt she really did not love, but he was there, and he had a job. He sold shoes in a shoe store.

Ruth: What year was that?

Barbara: I guess she got married in 1937 or 1938, and his name was Harry Brown, and I have his middle name written down somewhere, but I really don't recall it off hand. He was of Irish-Catholic descent, and while I think my mother knew on some level that maybe that might be a problem, it really didn't seem to matter very much. I think that she was anxious to move out of the home of my grandmother, who was very structured, Viennese artist. She was just very typical, and my mother was 21, which was a mature age in those days, and I think that she felt that she might not have another opportunity. So, she and Harry Brown got married and set up housekeeping. I think that they were happy for a time, and then my mother became pregnant with me, and I think that that may have been the first time they ever had a serious discussion about how I would be raised, and although my mother had never been in a synagogue, she didn't feel that it would be appropriate for me to be raised as a Catholic. I often kind of laugh about these things, I don't know what my mother was thinking. Harry Brown's sister was a Dominican nun, so surely the Catholicism had to become an issue at some point. I was born, and probably . . . it's

³¹ Dick Leibert was an actor and musician born on April 29, 1903 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA and died on October 22, 1976 in Fort Myers, Florida.

³² Radio City Music Hall, opened in 1932, is an entertainment venue located at Rockefeller Center in Midtown Manhattan, New York City. Nicknamed the Showplace of the Nation, it was for a time the leading tourist destination in the city.

just like we talk about the war between the states being caused over slavery, and it was really over economic issues: my mother often thought . . . or the way that I was told the divorce came about, was really because of differences over how I would be raised, and it was probably this was about analogous to the war between the states being over slavery. It was probably really over economic issues. I think my father was making \$20 to \$25 a week, and my mother was probably making somewhere about the same, and they had a one bedroom apartment, or one room apartment somewhere . . . They separated. I'm really not sure how my mother was managing financially. She had the job associated with Dick Liebert. I became very ill. I contracted scarlet fever. This was prior to penicillin. I was born in 1939. October 5, 1939, so this was probably around 1941. My parents were separated. I believe my father had already been called into or had enlisted in the army. He may have been stationed in New York, I don't really know exactly. I do know they were not living together, and my earliest recollections of my father are his being in a uniform. Army uniform. I became ill with scarlet fever, of course I don't remember any of this, so this is all talk [Unintelligible, 8.47] it's very romantic.

Ruth: About what age were you?

Barbara: Two. My mother tells me that I was carried out of the apartment building on a stretcher covered by a sheet. People thought that I was dead. I don't know what hospital I was put into. I was born in Brooklyn Jewish Hospital. I don't know if I was taken to that same hospital or another. I was put in isolation for, I believe, three months. It was, of course, questionable as to whether or not I was going to survive, and my mother always told me the story about how she was permitted, finally, when I was well enough, to see me. I think once a week, or something like this, through a glass, and when the Doctors got ready to release me from the hospital, the way I was told the story, the Doctor said to her, "Barbara Ann is just fine, but she is suffering from a broken heart." I guess, you know, you're in a hospital for three months and you don't . . . total separation from your mother, and probably not a lot of cuddling. We've learned so much in the last 30 or 40 years about caring for ill children. And the Doctor told my mother that they thought I needed a lot of care and a lot of attention. My mother had to work, and my grandmother had no means, and my mother was really quite desperate. I think she talked to her boss, and I think Dick Liebert must have had a large home somewhere in Westchester [County, New York] or someplace like that, and I think he may have offered to mother that I could go there, and someone would care for me, but either mother didn't feel she wanted to take him up on

that offer, or it just didn't seem that it was going to work. Finally, in desperation, she called her father, who at that time had left New York, and he was president of either General Printing Corporation or International Printing Corporation and residing in Richmond, Virginia. So, my mother called him, I think to ask for financial assistance. He had never been very forthcoming with money, or with attention to my mother. Over all the years she grew up she rarely saw him, and I think that there were a lot of disappointments and a real estrangement there. There also had been a total estrangement between my mother and her brother. They never saw each other, they never spoke, and my grandmother was very angry with him, I think for going to live with his father. There was just a total chasm, there. I think, at first, my grandfather wouldn't help my mother, or he said he had to discuss it with Erma, and that he called my mother back and said that I could come and stay with them until I was better. Then I think that they decided to allow mother to come, also, and so my mother picked up and left New York, and we went to live with Erma and grandpa in Richmond. I don't remember any of those early segments, I just remember my life on Newport Avenue in Richmond. My grandfather had a lovely home, and although it was war time, I don't remember doing without anything. He had cars, big cars. We went to Florida. We went to the races. My grandfather always . . . he was a dandy. He dressed beautifully. Never wore a store-bought suit in his life, always had his clothes made for him. Very fastidious. Loved fine wines, good food . . . he was a gourmand. There was always a larder. There was always a huge pantry, there was always canning and preserving, and later in life when there were freezers, there was always a chest, a locker, a huge locker, you know, and there was always a side of beef, and that was the way he lived.

Ruth: Were they very sociable? Did they entertain a great deal?

Barbara: I don't recall their having large numbers of friends. I recall that they had some friends, and that the socializing was probably drinks and dinner, or going to Bowie, which is a race track in Maryland, or that kind of thing. I think that there were a few nieces and nephews, both from my grandfather's family, the Osias' family, that would come and go from time to time, and also from Erma's family. I can't really think of [what] her maiden name was. Her daughter, Mildred, who was older than my mother, also lived in the house on Newport Avenue. It was a large home. I think it was a two story, with a full basement, and the basement had two areas in it. One was for canning and laundry and that kind of thing, and then the other was a beautifully finished, upholstered bar, recreation room. The main floor had maybe half a dozen rooms and a

large screen porch and, of course, we had a victory garden out back, and upstairs were at least four bedrooms, and an immense bathroom that all of us talk about to this day. You cannot believe that this was the early 1940's, and as I said we went there in 1941 so the house must have been built in the 1930's. The bathroom must have been at least 20 feet square. This was a man who loved his creature comforts and always lived beautifully. I don't know, really, what the conditions were when we first arrived in Richmond, but we ended up living on Newport Avenue for four years. It's hard for me to think of my mother as being kind of a nanby-panby, because I always think of her as being very strong and very forceful, but I think she must have been very frightened at this time in her life. She was separated, she was obviously not making enough money to take care of me, and take care of herself, and so if the stories that I recall from this episode are true, they're so unlike certain things I think that my mother did later in her life. I only have to assume that she didn't know what else to do. But I think that there was a real deep hatred between Erma and my mother, and Erma is really . . . you cannot believe, and you can ask almost anyone who is still living today about this woman and you will find that people echo my sentiments. Even my Uncle Erving, who changed his name to Irwin because it was less European, and so today he is Irwin L. Osias. Even Erwin will attest to the absolutely bizarre behavior of this woman. She was something from a soap opera character. She was manipulative beyond anyone's possible understanding. She was very loving and very kind to me. I didn't know any better, I loved her. She was nice to me, and I think I probably was one of the few people in life that really just loved her unquestionably. Therefore, I think, she was wonderful to me, but she was so hateful and such a manipulative and lying person to everyone else. Anyhow, I believe she charged my mother room and board for us to stay there. Obviously . . .

Ruth: That must have made it very difficult for your mother.

Barbara: Very difficult, and I don't recall how much it was, but it was a significant amount of money for my mother to pay.

Ruth: The fact that you loved Erma so, it must have hurt your mother tremendously.

Barbara: Well, I think they told my mother if she didn't like it that she could leave at any time. When my mother tells me the stories, or when she has talked about them in recent years with her brother Erwin, Mildred was a drunk, and used to have different friends in, or be going with different men. Richmond was a mecca for men during the war. There were all kinds of military camps all around within an hour's drive from Richmond, and she would be going with

this one and then with that one, and I think she used to stash liquor in her room so her mother wouldn't know . . . and these were not children. I guess my mother must have been 25, and Mildred was several years older. At any rate, my grandfather didn't mind people drinking, but I think drinking to excess was what was objected to. Somewhere in there, after we had moved to Newport Avenue, my mother had gotten a job as assistant manager, or acting manager, at the Loew's Theater³³ in Richmond. That was a big job for a woman to have, but it was war time and men were scarce. MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer]³⁴ and Loew's, Lowe's was owned by MGM at that time. Mother was desperate to try to earn more money, and to get out from under this very unhappy situation in which she found herself living and...

Ruth: What year was this?

Barbara: This was probably somewhere around 1943 or 1944.

Ruth: This was in Richmond?

Barbara: In Richmond. Somewhere during this time, I would say it must have been around 44, my mother decided she wanted to try to change the situation. She had an opportunity with MGM to work in the Washington [D.C.] area and make more money. So, she left Richmond. I stayed in Richmond with Erma and grandpa, and mother moved to Silver Spring [Maryland]. She took a room somewhere, I can remember going with her on the train and going to this little house where she lived, to see if she couldn't make more money. During this episode, while she was living in Silver Springs, my grandfather, who was not known for his great strength, only for his great lifestyle, called my mother from a court house in New York to explain to my mother that Erma had gone into court. I don't know that he told her the details, but the result was that my mother had lost custody of me, and that my legal guardians were my grandfather, and the court thought, my maternal grandmother. We found later that Erma gave testimony that she was the maternal grandmother. We think that the deal was that Erma promised my father, Harry Brown, that I would be raised as a Catholic, and he was to support the move to get custody from my mother, assigned to Erma and grandpa. I'm not sure if there was money involved with that or not, maybe he was supposed to send his allotment checks to her. I'm not sure, that may have been part

³³ Loew's Theaters Incorporated was a movie theater chain, founded by Marcus Loew in 1904. It was the oldest theater chain in North America until merging with AMC Theaters in 2006.

³⁴ Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc., commonly known as MGM, is an American media company, one of the oldest in the world. The company is involved primarily in the production and distribution of feature films and television programs. From 1924 until 1959, Loew's Theaters Incorporated was the parent company of MGM.

of the deal. Of course, I didn't know the difference, I was blithely going along, and I don't know that anybody told me. It wasn't until years later when all these facts were brought out to me, and typical of my grandfather, he let my mother know afterwards. All this happened, my mother never appeared in court, my mother never gave testimony. She never had any idea of what was going on. So, my mother quit her job in the Silver Spring area, the Washington area, and came back to Richmond, and took up her old post with Lowe's, and went forward from there. My mother and I shared a bedroom. I was enrolled in a parochial school,³⁵ and again, none of this was significant to me at the time. I just went to school. I didn't know that it was a special school. Although in that time, I can tell you, the nuns wore long habits, and I can remember all these women walking around with these black robes, and that it was kind of scary. School was very strict, and you had to learn a lot. I can remember going to see my father's . . . Harry Brown's sister at a convent in Baltimore. I can remember reciting my rosary.

Ruth: I guess religion was stressed heavily?

Barbara: Oh, in the Parochial school, absolutely. It was a Catholic school. I probably was only there a year, and I think I probably went there the year I turned five. That must have been about 1944, so maybe the court action took place in 1943. In around 1945, a Mr. Bernstein started calling on my mother.

<End Tape 1, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 1, Side 2>

Ruth: Now, you were saying in 1945 Mr. Bernstein started to call on your mother.

Barbara: That's right, and that was probably in the Fall. I may be a year off on this, so it may have been 1945 or 1946, let me just think about it for a minute . . . I think it was in the Fall of 1946. October of 1946, and it may have even been for my birthday that Mr. Bernstein brought me a little diamond ring. He just seemed fascinated with me. That must have been for my 6th birthday. Then I was right, it was 1945. I'm having trouble with the years and all adding up, but I guess it will all work out. The Fall of 1945 Mr. Bernstein hung around the house a lot, he and grandpa seemed to get along okay, and then I think, at some point, mom wasn't there. Then one night . . . and I might add by the way, I was sick a lot as a youngster. I think I had my tonsils out, and then they grew back, and I had them out again, and I was constantly getting ear infections. I

³⁵ A parochial school is a private primary or secondary school affiliated with a religious organization (in this case, the Catholic Church), and whose curriculum includes general religious education in addition to secular subjects, such as science, mathematics and language arts.

was sick often, and I can remember once, that Fall, being very ill and waking up and Mr. Bernstein was there with my mother, and **Dr. Sam Silver** and it was the first time that I ever met Dr. Sam Silver. He was a friend of Mr. Bernstein's, and he treated me. I guess it was good Erma was a nurse, because she used to take care of me a lot and I was sick a lot.

Ruth: It was probably due to your scarlet fever.

Barbara: Probably. So, mom disappeared at some point, and I don't think I was frightened or anything because she had been away before, as my history attests. One night in the middle of the night, I was sleeping in the bedroom mom and I shared together and the light went on, and in walked mom and Mr. Bernstein with hats and coats on, and they said, "Come on Barbara, we're leaving." This was near Christmas time, it was around, it was in December some time. Mr. Bernstein had shown up sometime in October, and this was in December. They packed me up with a suit case, and it was dark out and we drove a pretty long ride from Newport Avenue, and we drove to Maplewood Avenue, and we arrived at the home of **Ann and Morris Smeyne**, S-M-E-Y-N-E. Ann Smeyne was an older sister of Ellis Bernstein, and I found out, somewhere in there, that mom and Ellis Bernstein had gotten married, and We were going to live for a time with Mr. and Mrs. Smeyne. This was really weird. Mr. and Mrs. Smeyne ate very strange food, and he read a newspaper with very funny lettering on it, and I couldn't read it. I was a fairly precocious child and at six, I . . . which is not a great accomplishment today, but kids didn't go to school then until they were six, and I read and wrote by the time I was six. Boy, did it kill my mother to teach me those alphabets. We used to . . . I'll just go back just a moment . . . Mother would sit with me with a blackboard at night and try to teach me my ABC's, and we laughed about it so, and my multiplication tables . . . this is before I went to school, because Erma thought that that's what my mother should be doing. So, my mother had to do that, or felt she had to do it to keep Erma off her back, and mother said she thought I was really dumb because I could not learn my ABC's . . .

Ruth: You certainly made up for it.

Barbara: . . . and I couldn't learn my multiplication tables. But I eventually learned all those things and became a pretty good student. At any rate, in retrospect, I can tell you that I went from this Protestant and Catholic background, and I might also add that I think Erma had belonged to the Stuart Circle Lutheran Church, where, of course, I attended Sunday School, and I was an angel around the manger. I have all this wonderful experience, I've been everything: I've been

Lutheran, Catholic and Jewish.

Ruth: Now what is the difference between the Lutheran religion and the Catholic religion?

Barbara: I really can't tell you. It probably has to do with one believing in the virgin birth. I think Catholicism takes the fact that Mary was a virgin as a very important part of the Catholic approach. I just, my understanding . . . I was not that well educated in Catholicism, but just my basic understanding is that the Catholic approach is probably much more like orthodoxy, in that it's far less flexible, where Protestantism is more questioning, and that's why we have all these different derivations. But I can't tell you the specifics, I'm sure I was much too young to learn those kinds of differences. At any rate, there we are living on Maplewood Avenue, which I learned later, was the heart of the Jewish neighborhood in Richmond, Virginia. I'm sure I had never known anyone who was Jewish except my mother, and then, again, never anyone that was Jewish, and a practicing Jew, in my life, until I met Mr. Bernstein. I was six. Morris Smeyne was a [Unintelligible, 6.46: Hassin?], Morris and Ann were orthodox. They kept kosher. Morris spoke English with a very heavy accent. However, he was a scholar, and spoke many, many languages. But they lived their lives according to strict orthodoxy. Where was my bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich, you know? Aunt Annie, as I came to call her later, would want to fix me something to eat, and I would want white bread and mayonnaise. She had never heard of such a thing! Shortly after we moved in, I would say a matter of days or maybe weeks . . . let me just say, immediately I was enrolled in the John B. Cary School,³⁶ which was within walking distance of Aunt Annie and Uncle Morris's house. Of course, to me, they were still Mr. and Mrs. Smeyne. Mother and Mr. Bernstein disappeared again, and I took about one day of that, with the strange smells and the strange food and the strange accents and the strange school, and I called Erma, who was my grandma. I said, "Grandma I'm very unhappy here!" I don't think she knew where I was, I had just disappeared in the middle of the night from the house, and so she asked me where I was, and I don't think I could give her the address because she told me not to say anything to Mr. and Mrs. Smeyne that we had talked, but I think I was able to tell her the name of the school where I was. So, she said, "Well fine darling, if you're lonely, I'll pick you up after school today, but don't tell Mr. and Mrs. Smeyne." So, of course, I didn't and I disappeared again. I think it

³⁶ John B. Cary Elementary School is a historic public school facility built in 1913 and located on Maplewood Avenue in Richmond, Virginia.

probably scared everybody to death. They thought I had been kidnapped or something, until finally everybody put everything together and traced me back to Newport Avenue, where I was happy as a bug in a rug. Mother and Mr. Bernstein had gone off to New York to see what they could do about this custodial problem, and that's when my mother learned that Erma had presented herself as as my mother's mother, and gave sworn testimony as to my mother's lack of good character, and lack of good morals. I think that the judge had decided that someone's own parents and spouse could come into court and say these things about their own daughter and wife, and surely this person deserved not to have a child under her own custodianship. Anyway, Mr. Bernstein instituted the appropriate legal maneuverings, and the court immediately gave guardianship back to my mother, and Mr. Bernstein instituted adoption proceedings. Two years later, I became Barbara Ann Bernstein, which was a very happy day in my life, because it was very difficult . . . it was awfully hard in the 1940^f's when your mother's name was Bernstein and your name was Brown and you had to explain that. Schools were not very cooperative in those days. You couldn't be enrolled under a name different than what your name was on your birth certificate and so my mother had one name and I had another and it made me real unhappy. I can remember all my aunts and uncles and dad calling them all Mr. and Mrs., and for me, as an adopted child into a very, very large family that was quite complete without me. Ellis Bernstein was one of nine brothers and sisters, and they were all quite prolific, and he was the baby, so most of . . . I should say also, Ellis was 10 years older than my mother. He was born in 1906, March 5, 1906. My mother was born March 29, 1916.

Ruth: Are any of his family living?

Barbara: Many of his nieces and nephews are living. He has one sister that has survived him: **Sarah Bernstein Margo Krulevitz** is living today in Tampa. Aunt Sarah will be 92 in July. Interestingly, we often celebrated her birthday July Fourth. I think a lot of people who came to the United States that must have been born around that time decided that July Fourth was a patriotic time to have a birthday.

Ruth: What brought you to Atlanta?

Barbara: Oh, and he's survived by another sister, a younger sister: **Rose Coonin**, who resides in Jacksonville, Florida. Rose must be, I would guess, close to 80. Both women have their faculties. They're of frail health but they're sharp. In 1959, on a blind date, I met **Robert Allen Friedland**. He was born on April 4, 1936. I met Bobby on a blind date and he was

different than most of the guys I had gone out with, and he really . . . he kind of swept me off my feet, I guess. Dad thought it was not a good idea for me to go out with him. He liked Bobby a lot, but he didn't think it was a good idea to go out with him, because he said that Bobby wasn't the marrying kind. I'm very competitive, I never was able to let a challenge go, and I always wanted to prove dad wrong because he was wrong most of the time. We dated through that summer, and we had a very serious romance and, you know, there was talk of love and so on, and Bobby was stationed at Fort Lee, Virginia. He was in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps],³⁷ he was an officer in the Quartermaster Corp,³⁸ second Lieutenant, those were in the days when young men would go through ROTC for four years of college, come out with a second lieutenant's commission, and then they would have to serve their country for six months and then go on active duty two weeks of every year for a certain period of time. Bobby was in his six months of active duty, and it was quite typical for Jewish officers, stationed at Fort Lee, to get in touch with Jewish girls. Those were in the days when Jewish people only went out with Jewish people. It's really interesting how my life went from being this discombobulated Lutheran-Catholic to . . . I became the first *bat mitzvah*, the first woman to ever read from the Torah in Richmond, Virginia. So, my life has been . . . I'm a National Founding member of the United Synagogue Youth.³⁹ I won a scholarship to Camp Ramah⁴⁰ one summer which is a Hebrew speaking camp. Being Jewish, being involved in Jewish activities, knowing as much as I can about Judaism, has been a very important part of my life. My mother said I would have been a good Muslim, anything, you know.

Ruth: Let's get back to your schooling, at this point. We know that you were taken out of

³⁷ The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a college-based program for training commissioned officers of the United States Armed Forces. ROTC officers serve in all branches of the United States armed forces. Army ROTC students who receive scholarships are obligated to fulfill a service commitment after graduation.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ United Synagogue Youth (USY) is one of the official youth organizations of the Conservative Movement. USY was founded in 1951 and has grown from a handful of chapters to an international organization with thousands of high school age members. USY was conceived as a means of meeting the social, educational, religious, and recreational needs of Jewish teenagers. The organization seeks to involve teenagers in synagogue life and help build the Jewish community of the future. As a Zionist organization, it also works to build a relationship between Israel and Jewish youth in America.

⁴⁰ During the 1940's, the Jewish Theological Seminary established several programs to reconnect Jewish youth with the synagogue and cultivate leadership. One of these programs was Camp Ramah, a network of Jewish summer camps affiliated with the Conservative movement. The mission is to create and sustain summer camps and Israel programs that inspire commitment to and engagement in Jewish life. The camps operate in the United States, Canada, and Israel. Ramah camps serve kosher food and are *Shabbat*-observant.

your elementary school, and you went back and lived with Erma.

Barbara: Right, but that was only for a very short period of time, maybe a week or two, so maybe mid-year, maybe the very beginning of 1946, let's say. I really am a little bit confused on my years here. I know I was six when mother and dad got married, which would have made it 1945. I was born in 1939 and they got married on December fifth. I went to John B. Cary. We lived in a little apartment just a few blocks from Aunt Sarah and Uncle Morris on Davis Avenue. It was an apartment that was owned by Uncle Jack and dad, the Davis Avenue Apartments. A number of my cousins lived in these apartments. When I speak now of my family, and my dad, I'm always speaking of the Bernstein family, because this family really adopted me throughout, even down to *Bubbe*, who spoke no English. I think she understood everything because she had come to this country when she was 16, but she never spoke any English at all, and she was 80-some [years old] when she died.

Ruth: So you got to learn Yiddish?

Barbara: I didn't learn . . . I couldn't speak Yiddish, but I understood it when it was spoken to me, and I think she understood English perfectly. She always understood me. There were, I don't know, I guess there must have been . . . I know when I married, which was in 1961, we invited all the first cousins, and I think there were seventy-some of them, and over one hundred second cousins. It was a huge family and I can tell you from my earliest recollections that this family, to today I have never felt like anything but a natural child of this family. They were all very loving and very accepting. I went to John B. Cary for the rest of that school year, and then that year, at some point during that year . . . let's see, we spent a summer, Dad and Uncle Jack owned a home on the river, James River.⁴¹ We spent a summer there, it was called Snoat Harbor, and the family came and went all summer long. The family always came and went, people were always going and coming and staying at our home. I can remember mattresses on the floor when someone would show up with four children, or six children.

Ruth: Sounds like a wonderful family.

Barbara: It was. Very warm, very loving.

Ruth: So you pretty much went through your elementary and high school all in . . .

Barbara: . . . all in Richmond . . .

⁴¹ The James River is a river in the U.S. state of Virginia. It is 348 miles long, extending to 444 miles if one includes the Jackson River, the longer of its two source tributaries.

Ruth: . . . in Richmond.

Barbara: The next year, we moved to a home at 3216 Grove Avenue which was just a block from Temple Beth-El,⁴² where I received all of my Judaic training, and we became members right away. I remember immediately, Ellis, Dad, sent me to services at Beth-El. He never went to services, of course, but he felt since I had had all this Catholic background that it was important for me to get Jewish background. The year that I was turned seven, the Fall that I turned seven, so it must have been 1946, I enrolled at Robert E. Lee School and I went there for, I think one year. Somewhere in there, my mother brought all my notebooks to the school from the Catholic school, from the parochial school, and showed the work that I had been doing to the principal and she said, "Barbara Ann is just,"—Barbara Ann is what is what I was called—"Barbara Ann is bored with the work in school, she doesn't have enough to do." I was always getting in trouble because I was talking so much. I was very big, I was about a head taller than everybody and although I was the young, you know pretty young, I was, I was a big kid. I was probably one of the older ones in the class, because my birthday was in October, and if your birthday wasn't in September and you weren't six you had to wait until the next year. So, the school authorities put me a year ahead. Somewhere in there, I think I skipped the first grade or something. I'm a little confused, but I know I was thereafter always the youngest in my class. But until I was about 13 or 14 I was always the biggest, so it was kind of interesting. When I was in the third grade, somewhere midterm, I think, we moved to the house on Harlan Circle, and that's really the home that I grew up in: 409 Harlan Circle. H-A-R-L-A-N. That was on the corner of Harlan Circle and the five thousand block of Patterson Avenue, and it was really out in the country, at that time, in Richmond. I went to Westhampton Elementary School and Junior High School. I was not a particularly distinguished student, in fact I think my grades were fairly mediocre. I had a few good friends. I don't think I made friends too easily. I was a little on the chunky side. Oh, my brother was born, that's an important thing. Maurice was born I guess in 1946. He is now 42.

Ruth: M-A-U-R-I-C-E?

Barbara: M-A-U-R-I-C-E. Allan, is his middle name, A-L-L-A-N. He was named for my

⁴² Temple Beth-El in Richmond, Virginia, was conceived during a meeting in June 1931, where a congregation was planned which would "adhere to the fundamental principles of Judaism but still be alive to present day thoughts and progress." Temple Beth-El has continued to grow since then, and today hopes "to lead people into growing relationships with Jewish community, wisdom, and practice that help them thrive intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually and that inspire them to build a more compassionate, just, and peaceful world."

father's oldest brother, Morris Bernstein who had died, I never knew him, and for my dad's father Abraham, whom I also never knew. Dad's mother's name was Esther . . . oh her maiden name started with a K . . .

Ruth: This was your father's . . . ?

Barbara: . . . mother. I can't think of her maiden name. It will come to me. When that family first came to this country, they too came as a family. Esther, and Abraham, and whoever the brothers and sisters who were living at that time. I think Ann, who is older than my dad . . . my dad was born in this country, but Ann, I think, was an infant. An apocryphal story about her is that she had contracted pink eye on the way over on the boat, and probably would have had to be quarantined when they arrived at Ellis Island.⁴³ I think the way the family got around that is one of the parents set her down on the table while they were having to be examined or something, and then when that one was passed and they walk through they picked her up on the other side and just kept going. Who knows if any of these stories are true, but they're wonderful. So, I went to West Hampton Junior High School, I entered Thomas Jefferson High School in 1953, I guess, in the Fall of 1953, and graduated from there in June of 1957. In high school, I found out that I was a fairly good student. Not because I studied a lot, but I just started making really good grades. Not great grades, but pretty good grades. I got into National Honor Society.⁴⁴ I was doing a whole lot of things, and I found that the busier I was, the more I did, the better I did at everything.

Ruth: What were your interests then?

Barbara: Everything. Richmond was a very structured society. There were certain things that Jews just weren't expected to do and certain things that Jews were expected to do. Jews were expected to be active at the synagogue. When I was about 11 years old or 12 years old **Rabbi Jacob Milgram** came to be our new Rabbi. I didn't know how young he was, but he was pretty young. I would say he was certainly less than 30, and his wife's name was Jo. I guess they might have been described at the time as being Bohemian. She was interested in getting her PhD [**Unintelligible, 0.48: Nahamal?**], and they had children whom they gave Israeli names to and they were quite avant garde for Richmond but he is . . . I think he is still living. I think they live

⁴³ Ellis Island in New York Harbor was the gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States. It was the nation's busiest immigrant inspection station from 1892 until 1954. Today it is a museum.

⁴⁴ The National Honor Society is a nationwide organization for high school students in the United States and outlying territories, which consists of many chapters in high schools.

in Jerusalem in Israel, and I think he is a teacher at the Hebrew University, and I think she may be too. They were both brilliant people. Anyhow, Rabbi Milgram understood that if he was going to capture the congregation he needed to capture the youth, and he just identified a handful of youngsters that he thought had leadership capabilities. How he recognized me, I don't know, because I think at the time I was kind of a blob and had very few friends. But he certainly worked with me, and he groomed me, and he selected me and a friend of mine, whose name was Joyce Slavin Scher, Scher is her married name, S-C-H-E-R. S-L-A-V-I-N is her maiden name. Joyce and I were born about a month apart. Her situation was fairly similar to mine in school: she was very tall for her age, and I think she had been skipped a half a year, so when I first came to know Joyce, she was a half a year behind me in school and sometime during our high school career, she moved up and was in my same class. So, Joyce and I were selected to be the first real . . . the name is *bat mitzvah*-ed, [Unintelligible, 2.17] *mitzvah*-ed in Richmond. There had been other girls who had been *bat mitzvah*-ed before us, but they just would put on white robes on Friday night, and bless the candles, and maybe sing [Unintelligible, 2.34] and that was the end of it. Rabbi Milgram had instituted a very strict educational criteria that's probably not very different from what's required today at VAA. You were required to attend services on Friday night and on Saturday. You were required to have Hebrew instruction before you could be confirmed, whether or not you ever intended to be *bat mitzvah*-ed, which, of course, set the congregation on its ears that their daughters had to take Hebrew. Of course, for me, I was already in Hebrew school and I was loving it. One of the reasons I think I enjoyed the synagogue so . . . languages have always come easy for me, and even though Hebrew is so different, it's different from any of the European languages, it just was not that difficult for me to learn. I guess somewhere, when I was around 11 or 12, I went to Camp Ramah, and I did fine in Hebrew there. I even continued with my Hebrew education post *bat mitzvah* and I was in the first Hebrew High School graduating class that our synagogue produced. I think there were only four of us, and I became very active in all synagogue activities, USY [United Synagogue Youth], LTF [Leadership Training Federation] leaders, Leadership Training Federation, I think that was the name of it. I became an officer in all these different groups in the synagogue, and I found I had a gift for organization and getting things done. It began to follow into most of the activities I was in that I became chairperson of or president of. At first I was real surprised, because I didn't think of myself ever as a leader. B'nai B'rith Youth was organized in Richmond only for boys, there

were no BBG [B'nai B'rith Girls] chapters. We had two Jewish sororities, one was Iota Gamma Phi,⁴⁵ the other was Sigma Phi Sigma and I pledged Iota Gamma Phi. And that was the best thing I think that ever happened to me when I was invited to be a pledge for Iota Gamma Phi, because the really sharp girls were in Iota and the others were in Sigma. Ultimately, I became president of Iota Gamma Phi, and I became sweetheart of the leading boys fraternity which was called ULPS, believe it or not, Upsilon Lambda Phi. I just might comment to you Ruth, that both ULPS and Iota are going to be having major reunions over the next year or two in Richmond, and I'm looking forward to this so much.

Ruth: We have to follow this up.

Barbara: It'll be fun.

Ruth: Take notes.

Barbara: I was confirmed. Everything our synagogue did was in a big way when it came to ceremony, and I think they had a pretty good captive audience with our group. Richmond was just a little town. Our Jewish Community Center was in a Greek Orthodox Church somewhere downtown, and if you wanted to see your friends on the weekend, other than coming to my house . . . We had a great big house on Harlan Circle with a huge recreation room that easily held 50 or 100 people and everybody used to be at our, at my house. On the weekend my parents thought it was much better for us to be there than out somewhere else. But the Rabbi made a deal with us, that if we would come to services on Friday night, he would get us out in time enough to catch the late show, and he did that. I sang, I love to sing.

Ruth: I noticed that.

Barbara: Yes, and I studied piano, of course. You couldn't grow up in my house and not study piano. I studied piano for seven years, I think, and I just couldn't stand it anymore, and I stopped playing. But I always loved singing and the cantor, who is still living, although he's very ill today, **Cantor Morris Okun** and his wife Helen, were trying to build the choir. They got this wonderful idea of inviting all this young group of girls into the choir, even before we were 16. I don't remember how I would get back and forth to choir rehearsal, I guess somebody would give me a ride. But, at any rate, there must have been a half dozen of us. Cantor's girls, as he would call them. He still, to this day . . . he's suffered a terrible stroke and he's not very well. He can't

⁴⁵ Iota Gamma Phi was an active, Jewish, high school sorority in the Tidewater Virginia area for 70 years, though it has now disbanded.

recall a lot of things, but he can still talk. Cantor will light up, to this very day, if he has the opportunity to talk about his girls. It was his favorite bunch of youngsters, and I don't know any longer how old Cantor must be. Certainly well into his seventies, maybe approaching 80, and he was the cantor at Temple Bethel when I started attending there in 1945 or 1946 and he remained Cantor until his stroke just a few years ago. I just might add, because I think it's an interesting bit of history, and if I can recall the name I will do so, his wife Helen had a beautiful voice and she conducted the choir. Her father had been a very, very famous cantor, last name also started with a K . . .

Ruth: [Unintelligible, 8.37: a last name, Kamonetsky?]

Barbara: I think that's it, and he wrote much of the liturgy.

Ruth: It's **Mayer Kamonetsky**.

Barbara: He wrote much of the liturgy that is used today in the Conservative Movement.⁴⁶ Cantor Goodfriend, here in our community, knows Cantor Okun well, knows Helen, knew her father, knew of her father, he didn't know her. As strange things often go, there is a young, a psychiatrist, a child psychiatrist who lives in Atlanta today who's name is **Phillip Okun**. Phillip Okun is the oldest child of Helen and Morris and I think, to this day, and I guess Phillip must be in his forties, Phil goes back to Richmond every year at the High Holy Days and conducts the Auxiliary Service at Temple Bethel.

Ruth: What sort of Doctor is he, did you say?

Barbara: He is a child psychiatrist, and he is married to Margie. I don't really know what Margie's maiden name was but she has been married several times. Unfortunately, both of her first two husbands died. Her first husband's name was **Ginsberg, Sausmer**, he was one of the two fatalities that was suffered here in Atlanta during the tornado some years ago. He was a young man, and he was sitting in his car outside of **Ditler Brothers**, I believe, or one of the, in one of the industrial parks, and a wall collapsed onto his car. He was in his twenties and left Margie with two babies. Then Margie remarried around the same time that I remarried, in 1978, and she married a guy by the name of **Ed Ginsberg** who had had some severe health problems. She said if I was crazy enough to get married with all the things facing me, that she could do the

⁴⁶ The Conservative Movement seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism. It attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, while preserving a commitment to Jewish observance. Conservative Judaism observes gender equality (mixed seating, women rabbis and bat mitzvahs).

same thing, and unfortunately, I don't think Ed lived out the year. She and Phil Okun got married a few years ago. She owns a business called the Paper Parlour . . .

Ruth: Oh yes, I know it well.

Barbara: . . . with a gal whose name is **Roberta Scheer**, And Roberta Scheer is married to Allan Scheer, S-C-H-E-E-R, from Richmond, Virginia. Again, a little bit of small world trivia here: Alan Scheer's mother was a red head by the name of Mary Scheer, who was a soprano who sang in the choir with me at Temple Bethel in Richmond. Alan Scheer's first cousin is Norman Scheer, spelling his name S-C-H-E-R, who is married to my dear friend Joyce Slavin Scher, with whom I was *bat mitzvah*-ed. Life is very funny. It's so small, and you keep running into people. Education: I graduated from . . . I was National Honor Society, and I think when I became a member of National Honor Society in high school it surprised me. I mean, I knew I was a pretty good student, but I never added up my averages, and I wasn't trying to become a member of National . . . I don't recall trying to be a member of National Honor Society. I remember when we went to the honors assembly, looking around to see if I saw my parents. I didn't look very hard, I didn't expect them to be there, and I didn't see them, and when I was tapped—you know they would go down the isle with a long stick and tap you for Honor Society—I couldn't believe it! I got up and turned around, and low and behold, my parents were sitting in the balcony, or somewhere in the back where I didn't see them. Another time during my high school career, I was approached by the head of the English department and asked to represent my high school, and that was a pretty big high school, about 2000 students . . . asked to represent my high school in a vocabulary test. Apparently, with some of the standardized tests that had been given, the fact had emerged that I had an extraordinarily large passive vocabulary. I was certainly not the intellect in our class and not anywhere . . . you know I might have been in the top 30 or 40 students, but I wasn't number one and I represented my high school in this test. I was a National Merit Scholar, and all of these things kept coming to me as a surprise. It wasn't anything that I was preparing myself for, and my grades kept getting better. I worked on weekends, once I was 16 and able to get working papers I worked in our family store. I worked during the summer time. President of the sorority, vice-president and then president of USY, Hebrew High School, singing in the Choir, very active social life, lots of boyfriends and girlfriends . . . I don't know how I did it all. As a senior, I got out of school at noon, and I went to work.

Ruth: What was the family store?

Barbara: The family store. Well, I always thought dad and Uncle Jack owned everything and I guess, in truth, dad and Uncle Jack did, it just wasn't a 50-50 partnership. **Jack Bernstein, Hilbert Jack Bernstein.**

<interruption by a knock on the door, interview pauses, interview resumes>

Barbara: Perhaps we can come back another time, I want to talk to you about Jack Bernstein. Jack Bernstein was a very important influence in my family's life, and in community life in Richmond, Virginia. A sample: he was a very low-key guy. A little sample, for instance, he bought and donated to the state of Israel, the ferry that used to go back and forth from across Hampton Roads and Virginia. The ferry later became known as the Exodus. So, Jack Bernstein was quite a guy. He brought professional baseball to Richmond, Virginia, he **built FHA [Federal Housing Administration]**⁴⁷ housing after the war, and he was the brilliant Bernstein. He had very little education but apparently was very, very bright, and lots of education, and probably took terrible advantage of his brothers and sisters, at least they all felt so. But they loved him and they admired him and they fought with him, and he ate everybody's heart out and they ate his heart out. But they all loved each other. At any rate, the name of the store was the LaVogue Shops.⁴⁸

Ruth: How do you spell that?

Barbara: Capital-L-A, Capital-V-O-G-U-E. It was a chain of lady's ready-to-wear department stores. It was quite lovely. Not quite as elegant perhaps as Montaldo's,⁴⁹ and in later years, carrying lower and lower in merchandise. Retailing has been so terribly hit. But very nice store, and I worked in that store in the credit department, doing sales, doing whatever needed to be done. I began thinking about going to college. I'd always taken college preparatory courses, my mother really wanted me to go to college, my grandmother wanted me to go to college. I might add, by the way, my grandmother had come to live with us, and that too is another episode. She and I shared my bedroom together from the time I was eight and we moved on Harlan Circle until I was 16 and my mother couldn't stand the fighting anymore, and so she gave me my own

⁴⁷ The Federal Housing Administration is a United States government agency that sets the standards for construction and underwriting and insures loans made by banks and other private lenders for home building. It was created as part of the National Housing Act of 1934.

⁴⁸ La Vogue Inc. was a women's clothing store chain owned for the most part by Hilbert Jack Bernstein. It was sold to Jim Farinholt Jr. after Jack Bernstein's death in 1981. The company has since shut down.

⁴⁹ Montaldo's, a lady's specialty shop, was started in 1919 by two sisters, Lillian and Nelle Montaldo. It was a pioneer in the field of ladies' ready-to-wear and was known for their high quality and personal service. Branches could be found throughout the northeast. In 1995, Montaldo's declared bankruptcy and went out of business.

room. But Nana had quite an influence on my life also. I miss her very much. She died when I was about 20. College considerations, I'll make this quick. Somehow, I don't really remember how this all came about, but I think I was offered a full scholarship to Brandeis University,⁵⁰ and for the first time, dad thought it was a wonderful idea for me to go to college. Otherwise he thought it was dumb, because women are supposed to get married and have children, and why did I need to go to college for, who was going to want me once I had so much education, and [on and on and on.] That was the way he thought, that was why we argued so much. My mother was a very independent thinker, and she thought it was a wonderful idea for me to go to college. So, we went up to Brandeis. This was the spring of 1957. We arrived on the Brandeis campus probably the same year that the beat generation moved from California to the East Coast. There were people on the campus actually with beards and with sandals. I had never seen such a thing. In Richmond, Virginia we were still wearing pink button-down oxford cloth shirts, gray wool Bermuda shorts, and matching pink socks. We were slightly touched by Elvis Presley but we were very collegiate, as we used to call it. The word is preppy today. We were very collegiate, we were only into ivy league schools, and we were extremely conservative and uptight. When I got a load of Brandeis, with black tights on the girls, and long hanging hair, and black turtlenecks . . . you know, really artsy craftsy kinds of people, I knew that it was not for me. My mother was terribly relieved, and plus the fact Brandeis was located way out in the boondocks, and I was probably never going to finish college anyhow, and why did I want to be isolated out there when in Waltham, Massachusetts, when the city of Boston beckoned, filled with great looking people and lots of schools. The other school which I had been interested in was Simmons.⁵¹ I went by there and I think I interviewed, and it was a girls school, and I didn't like women that much anyhow. Then we went by Boston University,⁵² and they had a school of public relations. They were the only school in the country that I was aware of that offered, aside from maybe Syracuse, that offered a degree in public relations. I knew I probably wasn't going to finish college, but if I was going to study something useful while I was there, it should be public relations, from which I learned. I learned about public relations from **Rhoda Thalheimer** who was married to **Morton**

⁵⁰ Brandeis University is a private research university with a liberal arts focus in Waltham, Massachusetts. The school was originally founded in 1948 by the American Jewish community.

⁵¹ Simmons College, established in 1899, is a private, women-focused undergraduate college and private co-educational graduate school in Boston, Massachusetts.

⁵² Boston University is a leading private research institution with two primary campuses in the heart of Boston and programs around the world.

Thalhimer. He was in the real estate business. The Thalhimer family had founded the Thalhimer Department Store⁵³ in Richmond. Rhoda's daughter, Ellen, today lives in Atlanta and she's married to **Jack Holland**, the attorney. Rhoda and my mother worked on a number of community activities together. My mother thought that Rhoda was one of the smartest women she'd ever known, and she had been to college and she had studied public relations. Rhoda told me about public relations, she convinced people to do things they didn't think they wanted to do, that sounded like what I'd been doing all of my life. And you didn't have to take too many sciences. I hated chemistry and biology, so that sounded good. I went to Boston University, and graduated in 1961, Magna Cum Laude, which was pretty fantastic since I had about a 2.5 average my freshman year. I really didn't understand what college was about, and played a lot, and really didn't understand what it meant to study. I know I got straight-As a few times after that first year, and I found that I was a wonderful student, and that I really loved college. Had I not met and ultimately married Bobby Friedland, and moved to Atlanta, where he lived, I probably would have gone on to law school. I still had that aspiration when I married Bobby, but he really couldn't understand why I would want to have a higher education than he . . .

Ruth: Why don't we resume this at another sitting . . .

Barbara: Great.

Ruth: . . . because this is just scratching the surface.

Barbara: I told you it was a big story.

<End Tape 1, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 1>

Ruth: This is the second, 90 minute taped interview with Barbara Balser taken by Ruth Zuckerman for the Oral History Project, Thursday, July 14, 1988. We're going to resume the interview where we left off with the meeting, courtship, and marriage to Bobby Friedland.

Barbara?

Barbara: Where should we begin?

Ruth: Well, you told us about your courtship, when he was an ROTC. You met him . . .

Barbara: Right. a blind date.

⁵³ Thalhimers was a department store in the Southern United States. Based in Richmond, Virginia, the venerable chain at its peak operated dozens of stores in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and one store in Memphis, Tennessee. It was founded in 1842 and in 1992 it became defunct upon merging with Hecht's, which would in turn merge with Macy's.

Ruth: . . . and it was a real love affair. Your father was opposed to it.

Barbara: No, it was actually, it was just the opposite. My father sounded like he was opposed to it, in that he said that he didn't think Bobby was the marrying kind and he warned me about him. He said he liked him very much, but that I should watch out, because he didn't think he was the marrying kind. So that was a challenge, I had to prove my father was wrong. And I did prove he was wrong. He married me.

Ruth: How long was your courtship?

Barbara: Well, we dated for probably two months or so . . .

<beeping interruption, interview pauses, interview resumes>

Barbara: We dated for approximately two months, I believe, the summer of 1959. Bobby was stationed at Fort Lee, Virginia, which is right outside of Petersburg, and he used to make the hours drive in each direction in order to take me out. There wasn't a whole lot to do in Richmond, in those days especially. We played a lot of bridge. He liked to dance. I was impressed by the fact that he knew how to order in restaurants, and he was older than the other guys I had gone out with.

Ruth: How much older was he?

Barbara: He was about three or four years older . . . three and a half years older than I to be exact. I was going on 19, and he must have been about 23. Out of college, and owned his own car, and his own business and seemed really quite the man of the world. Excuse me, he didn't own his own business, but he was in business with his family, and he had traveled to Europe. Richmond was a very low key town, I mean, the worst. The height of gauche was to let anybody know you had money. My uncle, whom I may have talked about on the previous tape, was probably one of the wealthiest men in Richmond, and only drove black, used Lincolns.⁵⁴ Very, very conservative city. So, Bobby Friedland with his silk suits and his two-door Oldsmobile, or whatever it was, I just thought he was pretty slick. Then his stint in the service was over, he asked me to drive back to Atlanta with him, which, in those days, was probably about a 10, or 11, or 12-hour drive, pushing it, because the roads were not then what they are now, to meet his family. When he first asked me, I thought that that was pretty exciting. He had not asked me to marry him, but we were talking, perhaps, longer term, and when it came right down to it and we

⁵⁴ Lincoln, formally the Lincoln Motor Company, is a luxury vehicle brand of the American manufacturer Ford Motor Company. Throughout its existence, Lincoln has been marketed among the top luxury brands in the United States.

actually did make the drive to Atlanta . . . which I could not believe my parents permitted me to do because they were very, very strict, and to allow me to go away, in a car, with a young man, unchaperoned, was just unthinkable. My parents would never have done anything like that before. At any rate, I came to Atlanta and I met Bobby's family, **Jenny and Izzy Friedland**. Jennye's maiden name was Weinstein. She was from Chattanooga, [Tennessee] I think Izzy was . . . and I think his proper name was Irving J., and we just observed his 16th *yahrzeit*.⁵⁵ He died on Father's Day 16 years ago. Jenny is still alive. He was born in Boston, but had come here as a very young man. He was very handsome. He looked a lot like Caesar Romero.⁵⁶ Of course, I guess that every generation has looks that they consider attractive. I remember my mother saying to me, when we would see an old movie she would say, "Oh, isn't that man handsome," and I would think, how could she think that's handsome? And now when I will see a man I'll say, "that's handsome," and my daughter will look at me, you know, she thinks that Bruce Springstein⁵⁷ is handsome. Or better yet, if they're skinny and blonde. At any rate, we came here and we went to the old Progressive Club,⁵⁸ we went to the Mayfair Club,⁵⁹ I met the family, it was very exciting. Everybody in the family liked to dance and I loved to dance so, that part was great, and we all got along very nicely. Of course, I did not stay in the Friedland's home, because when we arrived here, Mr. and Mrs. Friedland were away, I think they were at Lookout Mountain, and it would have been improper for me to stay in their home unchaperoned. So, I stayed next door with the Crystals, Bernard and . . . no, not Bernard . . . **Mary and Seymour**

⁵⁵ *Yahrzeit* means 'anniversary' in Hebrew. Each year the anniversary of the death of a relative is observed by lighting a special *yahrzeit* candle and reciting the *Kaddish*. Memorial services for the dead are also held during the High Holy Days and the Festivals.

⁵⁶ Cesar Julio Romero Jr., 1907-1994, was an American actor, singer, dancer and vocal artist. He was active in film, radio, and television for almost 60 years.

⁵⁷ Bruce Frederick Joseph Springsteen is an American singer-songwriter and musician, known for his work with the E Street Band.

⁵⁸ The Jewish Progressive Club was a Jewish social organization that was established in 1913 by Russian Jews who felt unwelcome at the Standard Club, where German Jews were predominant. At first the club was located in a rented house until a new club was built on Pryor Street including a swimming pool and a gym. In 1940 the club opened a larger facility in Midtown with three swimming pools, tennis and softball. In 1976 the club moved north to Moore's Mill Road near Interstate 75. The property was eventually sold as the club faced financial challenges and the Carl E. Sanders Family YMCA at Buckhead opened in 1996.

⁵⁹ The Mayfair Club opened in 1938 on Spring Street in Midtown Atlanta. The two-story club was a focal point of Jewish life in the city for more than 25 years. The club was founded in 1930 and first met at the Biltmore Hotel. Eleanor Roosevelt, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, mayors Ivan Allen and William Berry Hartsfield, senators Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, and Governor Carl Sanders visited the club. Fire destroyed the Mayfair Club on December 4, 1964.

Crystal, on Oakdale Road in the byway near Emory University,⁶⁰ and my, how things have changed. I'm referring to that it would have been unseemly for a girl almost 19 to spend the night in the house of a young man to whom she was not married, just unthinkable. I had a pleasant trip here, but by the end of the trip I really couldn't wait to get back home, and I think, Bobby and I had made some vague plans about perhaps getting married, or getting engaged that Christmas vacation.

Ruth: Why could you not wait to get back home?

Barbara: I couldn't wait to get back home because I didn't want to marry him. He had not said, will you marry me, but we had gotten to those conversations about, well, maybe we'll get engaged. I couldn't wait to get home and, I tell you the truth, I don't think he could wait to put me on the plane. I think that we were both feeling that we were not ready for this, and I went back to Richmond, and I believe that our understanding was that I would not return to Boston to school. But the minute I got home I packed very quickly, and I went right back to Boston and after I got back to Boston I let Bobby know that I had gone back to school, and that I was not ready for anything like this. He was very relieved, not the least bit hurt, and felt that this was in both of our best interest. I would say several months probably went by and we didn't speak, or correspond, or anything, and then, out of the blue, I think we started writing to each other. I think I heard from him and then he would call me every once in a while, and we became friendly. I had been dating the same boy from New York since I had been a Freshman in college, and now I was a Junior in college and he had graduated the year before. He wasn't there, but I would see him. Maybe he was there for the first six months, I think so. He was there maybe until February. So, I was dating him again. That was also becoming more and more serious. Maybe in retrospect, I was having difficulty thinking about making a commitment at that time in my life. Now I guess I was 19 or 20, perhaps I've gotten my years mixed up, but at any rate, by the spring, Bobby and I had gotten very friendly, where we would talk for long periods of time on the phone, but I really felt that there was no romance. And I had decided that I was going to break off the relationship with the boy in New York and I was going to go into New York to tell him about it. Bobby called me and he said, "Why are you going to travel five hours?" because I would have gone by train, of course, "to tell someone that you're not going to see them anymore? If you're not going to see them

⁶⁰ Emory University is a private university in Atlanta. It was founded in 1836 by a small group of Methodists and named in honor of Methodist bishop John Emory. Today it has nearly 3,000 faculty members and is ranked Twentieth among national universities in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2014 rankings.

anymore, just tell them you're not going to see them anymore." That made such sense to me. Such a simple solution to a painful problem. So, I called the boy and I told him I wasn't going to see him anymore. Of course, that was something he could not believe, absolutely could not believe. He was a very handsome, very vain man.

Ruth: Who did he look like?

Barbara: Probably like John Derek.⁶¹ He was very handsome.

Ruth: That's not bad, either.

Barbara: Very handsome, and I must say, I ran into him not too long ago in New York. Well maybe 10 years ago now, in New York, and he's still handsome and more obnoxious and stuck on himself than ever. So, the school year ended, I went back home, a dear friend of mine had been seriously dating a young man since she was about 15, they were about to announce their engagement. We had thought it would be nice to spend the July Fourth weekend together because I was very close to her husband and to her, her husband-to-be and to her, and my grandfather offered . . . the grandfather that I had been so close to and then become estranged from for so many years . . . I guess I should mention, that in the midst of all this . . .

Ruth: Now which grandfather was this, to refresh my memory?

Barbara: My grandparents had been divorced, my grandfather Osias. I just guess I should mention, when I returned to school for my Junior year, my grandmother passed away, the day after my birthday. October 6, 1959. After Nana died, there was a healing, and a bringing together again with my grandfather because so long as she was alive, she felt, I think that we were betraying her if we had any contact with grandpa. So, as a means of mending fences, grandpa offered, if I wanted to bring another couple and come to his home, which was located just several miles from ours, but he had a pool. I didn't know anyone in Richmond, except for maybe the **Tolheymers** who had their own pool. There were very few of them in the late 50's in Richmond, Virginia. He said that if we would like to come over for the weekend, on Saturday and Sunday for the July Fourth weekend, we could do that. He would cook out for us, and so on and so forth, and I thought that sounded wonderful, but I wasn't dating anyone and I didn't know who to invite. Joyce, my girlfriend and I were talking on the phone one day and she said, "You know," she said, "I bet you that crazy Bobby Friedland is vain enough, he'd come up here if you asked

⁶¹ John Derek was an American actor, director and photographer. He appeared in such films as Knock on Any Door, All the King's Men, and Rogues of Sherwood Forest. He was also known for launching the career of his fourth wife, Bo Derek.

him." That sounded like such a good idea. I think I was concentrating more on the fun of the weekend rather than on the person, and I called Bobby and sure enough, he said he would come. I found myself at the airport picking him up, and wondering what in the world I was doing there. We had a delightful weekend, and maybe we got carried away with the fact that my friends were getting engaged, but again we were talking about getting married. I guess it was a time in our lives more than anything else, rather than the fit being so good, that we felt that it was a good idea to get married. Everything looked right, the formula was right. We were from the right families, the right background, and we seemed to like many of the same things. We talked daily, and he wrote to me daily from that point forward, and that was July Fourth, and then August he came to Atlanta to serve his two weeks in the military, and he drove straight through . . . I say he came to Atlanta, I'm sorry, he came to Richmond . . . and he drove straight through from Atlanta, which was a very difficult drive in those days. He arrived exhausted, and I was so excited, and yet I must tell you that the moment I saw him I felt a letdown again. It was always, I realize now in retrospect, it was the idea was wonderful, but the reality of the person didn't quite tie in. As I said, he was exhausted, he drove to our home. I had been waiting for him, and he said he really needed to go to sleep but that he had something for me, and he handed me the most beautiful diamond ring. It was one of the largest diamonds I had ever seen. It just knocked me off my feet, and I said, "Well, aren't you going to ask me?" and he said, "Yes, will you marry me?" You know, or something like that, it was very casual. He went to sleep, and I went off to look at my diamond in the sunlight, and I didn't want to tell anyone until I told my parents. So, I had to wait for everybody to come home. He arrived at 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, and there was great excitement because my parents were very pleased, they really thought he was a wonderful person and a good mate for me. I insisted on going back to school in Boston, because I was so close to getting my degree. I was 26 hours away or 24 hours away, and I went back to BU and cross registered into the night school and took about 20 credits that semester, 22 credits, and finished everything but two electives. My mother and I, in about six weeks, from the time my finals were over in February [or] end of January, until March 5 when we married, managed to pull together a wedding party of about 350 people and a seated dinner. We always did everything quickly and it was beautiful and it was well organized. I think the only things we had done in advance was engage the club, order the gown, the girls dresses, and the wedding invitations. Everything else just fell into place beautifully. It's amazing how much you can get done when you really set your

mind to it. In between the end of finals and our wedding, my parents met Bobby and me in New York to buy us our wedding gift, which was our bedroom furniture. During that, those few days, Bobby and I were together late one evening in my room, which I might add, was on one side of my parents, and his room was on the other side of my parents, but after my folks went to bed he came around to visit, and I started weeping and I told him I thought it was not a good idea for us to get married because I didn't really think I loved him. He calmed me, and told me something I thought, that made very good sense, that he felt everybody got, is afraid and scared when you're making that kind of a lifetime commitment, and that I would probably get over it. And I thought that sounded pretty good, and went on and married. I moved here to Atlanta and found myself really a lost chick.

Ruth: When were you married?

Barbara: March 5, 1961.

Ruth: Moved to Atlanta then?

Barbara: Moved to Atlanta, following a honeymoon in Miami Beach [Florida] and Puerto Rico. I think we were also supposed to go to Jamaica, but we canceled that part of the trip because, in those days . . . we stayed at the Fontainebleau,⁶² and in those days Bobby's uncle **Bing Wienstein**, who was a bookmaker,⁶³ I believe, had the book at the Fontainebleau, and he had a cabana, full size . . . in fact I think it was two cabanas . . .

Ruth: Now is that Ben Weinstein?

Barbara: Bing, B-I-N-G, because he sang. I think he may still be living. He was quite a character.

Ruth: And how was he related to . . . ?

Barbara: He was Jenny Friedland's brother, and I shouldn't be speaking in the past tense, I think he's still alive.

Ruth: And living in Miami?

Barbara: I don't know if he'd be living in Miami or Las Vegas [Nevada]. He was of the

Damon Runyon⁶⁴ School, you know? He wasn't one of these bookmakers like you see today

⁶² The Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida, opened in 1954. Once considered the most luxurious hotel in Miami Beach, it was designed by Morris Lapidus, and is thought to be the most important building in his career.

⁶³ A bookmaker, bookie, or turf accountant is an organization or a person that accepts and pays off bets on sporting and other events at agreed-upon odds.

⁶⁴ Alfred Damon Runyon was an American newspaperman and short-story writer. He was best known for his short stories celebrating the world of Broadway in New York City that grew out of the Prohibition era.

that run around maybe with a collection goony squad, he was . . .

Ruth: He's a [Unintelligible, 19.00] character.

Barbara: Right! He was a good guy who happened to be a bookmaker, and he was really rolling high. He had a table with a phone in the poodle lounge at the Fontainebleau and this was the week of the Patterson-Johansson fight⁶⁵ and everybody who was anybody was coming to Miami. Frank Sinatra⁶⁶ was entertaining at one hotel and Jimmy Durante⁶⁷ at another, and he knew them all. It was front and center, and big names from Atlanta, and it was like being in Hollywood. So that's how we spent the first week of our honeymoon, I think we cut out Jamaica, and then we just went on to Puerto Rico. I think we had a very nice honeymoon, came back here and I found myself a little bit at a loss. I moved into Bobby's mothers and father's home, because we had not selected an apartment for ourselves. We had not had the time to do that, and I started looking for an apartment . . . or maybe we had selected an apartment, but I guess it wasn't ready and it had to be gotten ready. I guess that was one of my really first bitter disappointments, too, that when I moved here, that my new family didn't at least have the apartment cleaned and ready for me to move in. It was not as if they didn't have the means at their disposal to take care of that

Ruth: That's surprising.

Barbara: I felt very hurt and very disappointed and I did not know my way around the city. My mother-in-law went to business every day, and I was really left very much on my own, and I had never been a housekeeper. I was a college student, you know?

Ruth: What did your mother-in-law do?

Barbara: The family owned a business called . . . there were a couple of businesses, one was called Wholesale Specialties and the other was Specialty Wholesale, I believe . . . gosh, I forget. There was a retail outfit: Specialty Wholesale Company, I think, and it later became Zippy's. It was located on Alabama Street under what is now, or will be again, Underground Atlanta.⁶⁸ I think it was 66, I think that might have been the number. Then there was a wholesale

⁶⁵ Floyd Patterson and Ingemar Johansson boxed the last of three matches between them on March 13, 1961. The two fought over the title of world heavyweight champion from 1959 through 1961.

⁶⁶ Francis Albert "Frank" Sinatra (1915-1998) was an American singer and film actor.

⁶⁷ James Francis Durante was an American singer, pianist, comedian, and actor.

⁶⁸ Underground Atlanta is a shopping and entertainment district in the Five Points district of Atlanta, Georgia. During the 1920's, construction of concrete viaducts intended to relieve traffic congestion in downtown Atlanta elevated the street system one level. Merchants moved their operations to the second floor of their buildings, leaving the old fronts for storage and service. As Atlanta continued to grow above the viaducts, the original street level was raised by one-and-a-half stories, and a five-block area was completely covered up. The lower facades of historic

operation, Specialty Wholesale, [which] sold to the public but it was discount. It looked like it was wholesale. Then if you were a serious wholesaler, we had a wholesale operation and I think that was Wholesale Specialty. That's where Bobby and his brother Ivan worked, and Mother and Daddy worked at the store. Specialty Sales, not Specialty Wholesale. Specialty Sales on Alabama Street. She kept the books and that's what she did every day. She took her work very seriously, she worked very hard. Jenny was also, and is still, very hard of hearing. I think her work also was a release for her because it was very difficult for her to hear, and I realize that probably when I met her she was no older than I am now. I've known her 30 years, and I would say she's probably close to 80, and I'll be 49. And she could not hear then, so I'm very sympathetic too, and she had been hard of hearing for a long time. She had some sort of nerve loss or something early in life. So, there I was, left to struggle with myself, and I had a sister-in-law whose name was the same as mine, Barbara Ann Friedland. But she was a local girl and had arrived here on the scene long before I. Her maiden name was Goldwasser. So, naturally, I just became Barbara number two. And I wasn't use to being number two anything. There were certain hard and fast rules in the Friedland family that I found very difficult to cope with. People didn't speak their minds to one another. I came from a very outspoken family. Everybody had, quote, "their place." It was not my place to tell you something, it was not your place to tell me something, and another one of the rules was that the boys had to be treated equally. Which of course, is never possible, because two people will never see the same thing the same. There was lots of jealousy between Bobby and Ivan, each feeling that the other was overindulged and given too much. I think that's been kind of a bitter lesson, that that's what happens sometimes when you try to be so equal, when you put emphasis on being the same, because you can never be the same. I think that starts rivalry, "is my same the same as your same?" In fact, it started very early with my engagement ring, which was considerably larger than my sister-in-law's engagement ring. Bobby had gone to his parents and told them that he wanted to buy me a ring, and they said, "No, we will give you the ring for your bride as we did for your brother." And he said, "No, I want something bigger." So, they gave him the money, and he put the difference to it. I think Barbara and Ivan always resented that. They resented the fact that I had a bigger ring, or that Bobby had the money to, whatever. That was kind of the way that the relationship started off.

buildings constructed during the city's post-Civil War Reconstruction Era boom remained relatively untouched until the area was rediscovered and opened as a tourist attraction in 1969.

Ruth: One-upmanship.

Barbara: It went that way the entire marriage. Very difficult relationship with both of them, lots of jealousy.

Ruth: I can empathize with that.

Barbara: My observation at a distance was that Barbara was an only child, Ivan was the older son, and I find that often people who are the first, and I'm one who was the first, and who are only children have very similar traits, and you're much better off to be married . . . for an only or an older sometimes to be married to a middle or to a younger child in the opposing family because you perceive things differently and it's a much better balance. Barbara and Ivan had many of the same strengths, which were considerable, but many of the same weaknesses, which were also considerable, so they really didn't help each other well when they came to difficulty and one feeling hurt. The other one immediately felt hurt, you know, in trying to deal with the outside world. My perception, [as] Dr. Balser. So, I started off here feeling kind of lonely, I didn't know anyone aside from my family. I was used to a very supportive extended family, and this family would rife with jealousy and pettiness. There had been lots of pettiness in my family, my Bernstein family, but nobody ever stayed angry. I mean you said your piece and you worked past it. But there was so much jealousy and so many political things, and I kept putting my foot in it left and right, and I kept causing all these people to fall out. But it never happened the next day. Six months later something would come up that I had said, who remembered what I had said? By that time. it had been so re-embroidered, and everybody was angry with me, and I just found it very, very difficult. My first year here was tough. I had always been in school. and I had always worked and I was now keeping house, which was exciting. But we didn't have a ton of money so it wasn't like I could go out and furnish the whole house. We could only do a little bit here and a little bit there. None of our furniture was here when we first got married, so my job each day was to straighten the lines of suitcases which we were living out of, you know. I had a car to drive. I'd never had a car to drive every day at my disposal, and most of the time I did. We only had one car, but most of the time Bobby rode to work with his brother. Most of our friends were settling in northeast Atlanta, but we settled in northwest Atlanta, or in Buckhead, because that way Ivan could pick Bobby up on the way to the office every day, and it would have been inconvenient for us to live on Buford Highway where lots of other people lived. I think it would have been easier for me to adjust, because I think I would have had a network of people, within walking distance

even, and that was not the case. I was kind of isolated.

Ruth: Did you have a large group of friends?

Barbara: It took us a long time to make friends. I was kind of amazed, after a while, that Bobby didn't have a lot of friends. He grew up here, he had been *bar mitzvah*-ed here, he had been confirmed here, he had gone to high school here, his family was a native family. A local family. Not born here, but they had lived here since they were very young, and he did not have many friends. There weren't a lot of invitations forth coming, and I had so many friends in Richmond. I just must digress and say, I hope I can talk about this . . . I just came back from Richmond and I was cleaning out the remains of my mother's apartment. And I took everything that was left, that I felt anybody could use, over to the Jewish home, the Beth Sholom home,⁶⁹ which my family founded 40 something years ago, in which my mother served as president of the women's sisterhood for a number of years, and laid the cornerstone on this building. While we were unloading the cars . . . a friend of mine helped me, we had so much stuff . . . a number of the residents came to the door. They were all my mother's friends, they were all people who were the leaders of the community, and older than my mother, 10 to 15 years older, and they didn't know . . . it's a nursing home now, really. It's really not a residence. I don't know that they knew me, but I recognized some of them, and it had been 20 and 30 years since I had seen some of these people. I had with me a woman who has worked for me off and on in Atlanta over the last 20 years . . . I have a bad back, and she was helping me lift and pack and I had flown her up to help me in Richmond. She couldn't get over how I knew everyone, and there were stories about everyone wherever we went. As we walked out of the apartment building that my mother lived in I think at least 15 people stopped me because they remembered me.

Ruth: It would be wonderful to have a tape of that.

Barbara: I find going back to those roots . . .

Ruth: It's heart wrenching.

Barbara: It was such a loving environment, and I miss it. It was very supportive, and I love this community, I don't think I would ever go back to Richmond.

Ruth: How do you find the environment here in Atlanta today?

Barbara: Well, today, I have wonderful friends, who have been, I think, very supportive of

⁶⁹ For more than 70 years, Beth Sholom has been dedicated to providing the greater Richmond community with the highest quality of healthcare. Beth Sholom ("House of Peace") opened in 1945 in the Fan District as the first Jewish home for seniors in the state.

me. There was a physical closeness, because of the physical structure of the community. that is missing in Atlanta, in my years here. I spoke about the network that developed on Buford Highway among my age group who first got married. Buford Highway was just developing. It was probably very close to the Rock Springs⁷⁰ experience a few years earlier. Probably only five years before.

Ruth: Everything was in walking distance.

Barbara: And even if you didn't want to see certain people, or be with certain people, you were. Because they were your neighbors, and you learned to get along with people, and you passed the time with people and you kibitzed with people and you shared concerns, because you were a neighborhood and your children played together. You cared about the quality of everybody's life because it touched you. I lived in a very elegant neighborhood in Richmond, it was not a backyard community, not like the Maplewood, Idlewood Avenue that I described to you earlier, where I lived for a few short months with my new aunt and uncle when my parents first married. It wasn't that kind of a community. It was a pretty ritzy community, it was like Kingswood.⁷¹ You know, the homes were not close. But the neighborhoods were contiguous, and I could walk to almost every friend's house. Now true, we walked miles in those days where kids today, you know, maybe only walk three blocks before they collapse, but you saw your neighbors because you were on the street. You greeted people. There was a neighborhood feeling of pride, concern, and it wasn't just limited to the Jewish community, but what I'm really referring to now, I guess, was the Jewish community that was this bedrock. My mother, when she died, had lived the last two or three years of her life in a building in Richmond called 5100. That's an older building that has just recently gone condo, it's very much in its make-up like the Barclay is here. There were lots of older people who happened to be Jewish, many of whom are widows who live in that building. When my mother lived in that building, I think it kept her alive, all those years that she was there, those last few years, because people that she might not have ever seen had she stayed in her house were in that building. And they were concerned about her, and they would come to the door, "I'm going to the grocery, I'm going to do this," you know, "Can I do something for you?" I miss that, I miss that concern and that caring that comes about because you know you're going to pass my house on your way to the grocery store. It isn't because you

⁷⁰ Rock Springs is a street in the northern Atlanta area.

⁷¹ Kingswood is a neighborhood in northwest Atlanta, near Buckhead.

like me so much, but because it's the human thing to do, and I think that people really are limited by the [Unintelligible, 11.48] it is to get around in this town. and the traffic, and that it is out of the way sometimes to just do a simple thing for people. To run by the shopping center is not a five-minute deal, it's an hour! I think . . . I'm not making excuses for people, but I think that there are physical limitations and people become smaller because there are such pressures to take care of one's self and one's own in this very frustrating high paced, fast paced community that we live in. But I have found this to be, all in all a warm community and I think that's why I stayed here when I divorced. I ultimately divorced Bobby. Anyhow, I'm having a good time reminiscing about a lot of little details.

Ruth: I'm glad you are. These little details are important.

Barbara: Yes, I guess they are, and it's nice to talk about them to a very willing listener. One of the other things that . . . I'm digressing again.

Ruth: How soon after you moved to Atlanta did you become involved with family? Or did you become involved in charity work first?

Barbara: Well, my mother-in-law, in trying to welcome me to the family, Jenny said, "Barbara, I will never be a mother to you, I will always be your mother-in-law."

Ruth: That's nice to hear.

Barbara: Now, in 30 years I've known Jenny Friedland, I've come to know that she loves me to this day, probably as much as she loves anybody else on this earth. But she has a very peculiar way of saying things and I was not wise enough or mature enough to understand. I think she was trying to tell me that she wasn't going to try to take my mother's place, but she's a very poor communicator. She tries to communicate, she'll take time, and wants to sit down and talk things out, but I have a hard time, even now sometimes, understanding what she's really saying, and what she really means. Because we have to remember this was a family where people had their place and you don't say things directly, you speak in circles. I've always had trouble with people who are not direct, and Jenny and I are still very close. I was just with her a month ago, and I speak with her quite regularly. I think I realized that I was not going to have much of a relationship with my in-laws. I did feel very close to Barbara Friedland for a year or two. I think she was very warm and welcomed me very nicely. I think that the inevitable rivalry between our husbands doomed the relationship, and also the fact, that she was . . . I knew her to be a person with a negative attitude about things, who anticipated things not going well. I don't know, I just

can't explain the attitude further, that was the way I perceived it, rightly or wrongly. It wore thin after a while. I found it depressing, and it kind of got me down, because I tend to see the glass as half full. I want to talk about what's going right in my life and not wrong, and after I'd been here a very short period of time, as a matter of fact, several months, a woman who lived here who was from Richmond, a couple of years older than I, called me and asked me if I would like to play bridge one day, which I said I would, and met a woman who was the same age as I, who had just married and moved here from New York. We started playing Jewish geography, because I had gone to BU with a lot of kids from Long Island, and she was from Long Island, and we knew all the same people, and low and behold, we found out that she and I knew each other. We had dated roommates when we were freshmen in college. In fact, she was a senior in high school when I was a freshman in college, which is why we had only met casually, we didn't know each other well. Her name was **Arlene Hoffman Turry**, and she became, after several months of working at it, my dearest friend and has remained my dearest friend to this day.

Ruth: Is that T-U-R-R- . . . ?

Barbara: [T-U-R-R]-Y. Our boys were born within weeks of each other.

Ruth: And when was that?

Barbara: My first son, **Barton J.**, was born on June 9, 1963, and our second son, **Jon David Friedland**, was born on March 23, 1966. Our last child was born some years later, **Laura Gay** was born on February 2, 1972. Laura's name would have been Adam Miller had she been a boy. **Sam Miller**, who was a dear friend, is a dear friend and mentor, had a profound influence on my life. Sam, I guess now must be, I would guess 80. Samuel A. Miller. And when Laura turned out to be a girl, we couldn't name her for Sam, and he had a, he has a daughter, Sam has a daughter named Gay, and so I named Laura, Laura Gay in honor of Sam. The Laura was for my mother-in-law's mother, for Jenny's mother, Lena.

Ruth: Why would Samuel A. Miller have been your mentor? What part did he play in your life?

Barbara: Sam was an attorney. He no longer practices, he founded a firm of Nall, Miller, Cadienhead.⁷² He lives on West Paces Ferry Road, as a matter of fact, in one of the old Caimber

⁷² Nall, Miller, Caidenhead, now Nall & Miller, LLP, is one of Atlanta's oldest, most established, and highly regarded law firms. Tracing its origin back to 1948, Nall & Miller began when A. Walton Nall, Edwin Sterne, and Samuel Miller formed the original partnership and began practice in the historic William-Oliver Building in downtown Atlanta.

homes. His daughter **Gay Miller Kahn** married to Judge **A. David Kahn**. Bubba, as we know him over the years. This is his only child. He was Bobby's attorney, and just a man for all seasons. Bright, and thoughtful, and young, and energetic. I think to this day, Sam still walks or jogs at least four miles a day, and still does the yard work. If you were to meet him, I don't think you'd think he was over 65.

Ruth: And how old is he?

Barbara: He's 80. Turned 80 last February.

Ruth: Wonderful.

Barbara: He's remarkable.

Ruth: You need more people like that.

Barbara: Yes, he's quite a guy. In fact, there was a point where I had hoped he would get together with my mother. That was one of my fond dreams at one point because I just loved this man very much, and he was what I would have liked for my mother. A gentleman, and a man who loved to live life, and easy to be with, but he selected another lady whom I must say, I think is just a wonderful person. I'm just sorry it wasn't my mother. We lived in a little apartment in Buckhead, I kept house, I think I had a maid come in to help with the laundry, and, you know, heavy cleaning once a week. Then, after Barton was born, and he was a difficult infant, he had colic, and I did not know anything about taking care of children. Being a perfectionist, I felt, of course, it was all my fault that he was a colicky baby, and I think when he was about two weeks old, I decided I was going to leave. I think when Bobby came in from work one night, I had my suitcases out, and I was packing them, and I was going to leave. I was going to leave him, I was going to leave Barton, because this marriage bit was just not for me. I could not handle the enormity of a human life, and that's the way I saw it, a human life . . .

Ruth: And how long did that last, that feeling?

Barbara: Until about two minutes ago. No, you know, I just felt so trapped, I just didn't understand what it really meant, having a baby, and I guess I didn't find it very fulfilling because all Barton did was cry. Bobby didn't seem to be terribly interested in him. I think he was delighted to have a son, and I can remember he wept when he came to my bedside after Barton was born and said "thank you for my son." But he was not very caring or sensitive to me during my pregnancy, and he was not a helpful father. He never got up and changed a diaper, or did a feeding. That wasn't his job.

Ruth: I think we're going to have to end this tape now because we're running short and we'll resume at a time at your disposal

Barbara: Good.

<End Tape 2, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2, Side 2>

Ruth: This is side two of tape two of interview with Barbara Balser, taken by Ruth Zucherman for the Oral History Project, on Friday, November 11, 1988. We're going to continue, Barbara, with, where you ended on side one of this tape of your not being able to handle your marriage, or motherhood, that you felt entrapped, and that your husband, Bobby, was not an interested nor caring or sensitive or helpful father. Let's take it from there.

Barbara: That recap is so bleak. I'm sure it was not quite so black and white. But, essentially, I think I felt I had a lot of dreams in me, and I think at that point in my life, my paramount dream was being Mrs. Robert Friedland. That's the way I used to sign my checks: Mrs. Robert A. Friedland. I was a non-person. I was Barbara number two, I had married into a family where there was another Barbara Friedland, another Barbara Ann Friedland, so, I became Barbara number two. I felt I had probably achieved my life's desire. I was married to a nice Jewish boy from a nice Jewish family, and I lived in Atlanta, Georgia, which was just a beautiful place to live, and we were in a family business with hopes of being upwardly mobile, and we had a nice living. We never really struggled. We were not rich, but we did without very little. I worked my way through my postpartum depression, which was obviously what I was suffering from.

Ruth: How long did that last?

Barbara: Oh, I guess about a month or two. I had terrible sadness, and crying spells, and so on. I can't say, in retrospect, that I think I really enjoyed those early years of parenting, particularly of parenting Barton. I wanted to really make that my life's work, I think. But he was not an easy child for me to parent, because he was extremely active, over active, one might say, and I seemed not to be able to give him enough constructive things to do to occupy him. I've never been an overly late sleeper, if I were to get up at six, he would have been up at five wreaking havoc throughout the apartment. He didn't like to take naps, it was just very difficult. I don't think terribly unusual, but he was a very difficult child for me also because as I looked to my peers for help, my friends, my closest friends all seemed to have rather passive children who

were very easy to take care of.

Ruth: Was he an affectionate child?

Barbara: Not very affectionate. He was busy. He was running places and doing things. For some reason, I guess because the standard was to have at least two children, when Barton was about two years old, I decided I wanted to have another child. I think I was much better prepared during my second pregnancy for what pregnancy was going to be like, for what I was going to feel like, which was not good. For the sense of loneliness that I had, because my husband was not particularly affectionate from my perception, during my pregnancy and when, the week that Jon David was born, I made up my mind that I was going to have him on a certain day, and the day came, it was about a week before he was due, the day came and I wasn't in labor and I just was ready to have that baby. I didn't want to carry it anymore, I was ready to have the baby and get on with it. I walked up and down our little hall in our little apartment all night long, and about 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning I finally went into labor. I was just determined I was going to have that baby! This delivery was much easier than the first, and I was a mother before Jon David was born, so I was prepared to respond different as a mother. I wasn't a mother when Barton was born. I had given birth, but I wasn't really a mother yet. So, when Jon David was brought to me, I think I received him differently and from the very outset, he was a very different kind of a child: a much easier child, a very loving child, a much more laid back child. One of my aunts and uncles, who has since passed away, used to call him sunshine, because he just sparkled, he smiled all the time and giggled. He didn't even really try to walk until he was about 16 or 17 months old. Just very easy. By the time he was three he had taught himself, or four I guess, he had taught himself to read. He used to take Barton's books, because I always put high value on reading, and he would take Barton's books into his room and sit down on the floor and look at the words, and somehow, he figured them out. I'm not very good at teaching. I'm sure I helped some, but I think he really did teach himself to read. To this day, the boys, both of whom are caring people, have kept pretty much those same basic personalities. Barton is a difficult personality.

Ruth: Are they close, the two boys?

Barbara: They're pretty close. They live near each other in California. It's difficult to be really close to Barton. Barton's busy. He's full of himself. He's narcissistic. His father is a narcissist, I understand that it's genetically transferable. Whether or not that's true or it's just that

the environment produces it, you know, if you're narcissistic it just goes along. Barton is narcissistic, but he's interesting, he's charming, highly vocal, and Jon David is much more quiet, probably not as naturally gifted, but with good confidence in himself. He's a plugger, he's a doer, he'll get the job done. And he tends to be more thoughtful and more loving, demonstrably loving, than his brother. The boys are three years apart, so Jon David was born in 1966 and a lot of things began to happen in our lives, in our married life at that point. Bobby had made the decision that he was not going to make the kind of money he wanted to make with the relationship with his brother staying as it was in the family business. He started another real estate venture, or a real estate venture, another business, a real estate venture with **Julian Moore**, with whom I think he had gotten friendly on the golf course. In fact, I think the first piece of property that they bought, there were three owners, this is really ironic, Bob Friedland, Julian Moore and **Ron Balsler** bought a piece of property together. Today I'm married to Ronald Balsler. Ron and Julian still own the piece of property. Julian Moore and his new wife Mary just moved in next door to us, I guess last spring, and the two fellows still own the piece of property together. Well, at any rate, there were a lot of family tensions going on. I cannot remember the chronology of a couple of heart attacks that my father-in-law had, and their selling their big house and moving into an apartment on Peachtree Road, and their relationship between my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, and ourselves, becoming very strained, and Bobby trying to do more and more things with Julian outside of Wholesale Specialties and Specialty Sales which were . . . or Specialty Wholesale, I can't remember, the two companies that we owned. Somewhere after we had been in the house, I guess maybe, less than a year, Bobby and Ivan broke off their business relationship entirely, and Bobby went into the real estate business and development business full time with Julian Moore as a full partner. Julian was running his business [**Unintelligible, 10.08**] Bobby handled the real estate side. We started to make a lot of money and that made a lot of difference in our ability to live a little bit nicer and travel a little bit more. We went to Las Vegas a lot, I like to gamble, Bobby loved to gamble, he was a big player. Those were, you know, kind of exciting days. Bobby was not a faithful husband, I think he was probably unfaithful almost since the very beginning of our marriage, and that was not a new element to marriage. My parent's marriage had been similar and my grandparent's marriage had been similar. And I had observed among my father's friends, a lot of faithlessness. I guess, on some level, I thought that that was really the way things were. And I think that what probably

destroyed my love and any respect that I had for Bobby and any trust for him, was not so much the fact that he found other women attractive, and acted on that, but rather, most importantly, I guess, that I don't think he valued me for any of the reasons that I really valued myself. I think he appreciated the fact that I was a good housekeeper, that I was attractive, that I dressed nicely, that I managed money well. I even managed money well in those days. I think the fact that I was bright, that I was outspoken, that I am a leader of people, that I like to be at the center of things, that I enjoy being around men, that I laugh a lot, that I joke a lot, all of those things that kind of made me stand out as a human being other than just as a fixture on his arm, I felt he did not like, much less support or accept. I really don't think he liked me.

Ruth: Do you think that this was jealousy on his part?

Barbara: Maybe. I think, in retrospect, that Bobby is a very insecure person. I don't know today, you know, whether he's the same person. Maybe it was that I was building an independence, an independent life for myself, that wasn't wrapped up in him. Maybe that bothered him more, and I say that only because today he is married again to a very beautiful woman, who is a woman of means, who doesn't need him in that way, but she's not well, and she does lean on him. That's rather fascinating, I think, because my greatest fear was that I might become ill someday and that I didn't feel that he would take care of me. So, whether my assessment of him was accurate or not, those were the feelings that I had, that the thing that he valued in me was that I was this attractive arm piece that he didn't like. The way I thought, we argued a lot about our approach to God, about morality, about so many things. About the way you treat people. We had so little in common, it was amazing to me that we ever fell in love and married, I just don't know what we had really based it on. But at any rate, we had this family and so as far as I was concerned, that was forever. I was very committed to the idea of a marriage, and I had never seen a perfectly happy marriage close up, so, what I had was about the same as what I thought my folks had had, and lots of people in my family, and their friends. I don't think my expectations were for a great deal more, And I lived a beautiful life, as my former mother-in-law used to say to me, "You have a new car, you have a closet full of beautiful clothes, you have plenty of money to spend, what more do you want?" So, you know, I kept saying to myself, "what more do you want?"

Ruth: You had all there is.

Barbara: I really felt like **Peggy Lee**.⁷³ like I was walking around in this dream of is that all there is? I think in about 1968 or 1969, I was president of B'nai B'rith Women's Chapter here in Atlanta, and at that time B'nai B'rith Women was a very large organization here. I would say almost 2,000 women and . . .

Ruth: How is it that you became involved with B'nai B'rith?

Barbara: I became involved in B'nai B'rith as soon as I moved to Atlanta. My sister-in-law, Barbara Friedland number one, was active in B'nai B'rith Women in a chapter called Devotion Chapter and she invited me, I think I was a bride of a month maybe, she invited me to come to a B'nai B'rith Women's installation meeting for Devotion Chapter at the Progressive Club. It was a luncheon meeting, and I went, and I can remember I met, **Lois Blonder** was at my table and she had just become president of *Hadassah*,⁷⁴ and **Murial Rueban**, I believe, was being installed as the new president of B'nai B'rith Women Devotion Chapter and **Esther May Rawnas** was going out of office. My mother had always been exceedingly active in the community, and that was something that I just, again, I think I thought that I was supposed to do and I got active in B'nai B'rith Women, and the jobs I was asked to do, I did well, and the women that I met there, I really admired. Many of them were maybe 10 or 15 years older than myself. Some of the names that I recall from those days are **Helene Fecher**, **Charlotte Wilen** . . . others escape me at the moment. But these were women that I really, those two women particularly: Helene Fecher and Charlotte Wilen were so bright, and so well spoken, and so strong. They never seemed to say, "No, you can't do that," it was just a matter of how you do it. And I admired that so much and Charlotte Wilen really became my mentor. I worked on a lot of different things with Charlotte. The years passed, I became friendly with **Celia Adler**, who was very active in B'nai B'rith Women. Then one day, I think Charlotte was chairman of the nominating committee. I had just been active in the chapter, I don't even know that I had an office, and she called me and she asked me if I would take on an office of vice-president. I think it was still just a small chapter, and I said I would and I was very nervous about it and she was very supportive and I served under Celia. And then I think we brought all of the chapters together and there were about 1,800 or 2,000 women in this

⁷³ Peggy Lee (1920-2002) was an American jazz and popular music singer, songwriter, composer and actress. She began her career singing jazz with Benny Goodman's big band. Her signature song was "Fever."

⁷⁴ *Hadassah*, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer organization founded in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, with more than 300,000 members and supporters worldwide. It supports health care and medical research, education and youth programs in Israel, and advocacy, education, and leadership development in the United States.

one chapter. It became the Atlanta Chapter of B'nai B'rith Women. It was the largest chapter in the United States and I was the youngest president of the B'nai B'rith Women Chapter.

Ruth: How old were you?

Barbara: I was about 28; 27 or 28.

Ruth: It's remarkable.

Barbara: It was 1968, I must have been older. I must have been about 28 I guess. Both the children were born, and I was really looking for something. Jon was, I guess, around two years old, and I was ready to do something else than the mothering thing. So, I got very involved in B'nai B'rith Women, and because of the times, and because of the fact that B'nai B'rith Women was so big, and I was the president for two years at this crucial time in history in our community; it was the time of integration of our schools, as far as the faculties were concerned . . .

Ruth: What year was this?

Barbara: It was somewhere around 1968 or 1969. I guess it was in 1968, because the faculties of the schools were ordered to integrate, and a number of women's groups were called together to form a coalition to try to keep peace in the schools. I was there representing B'nai B'rith Women, and the next thing I know I was made chairperson of this coalition of women that represented about 50,000 women. I had always been involved with ADL work, you know, maybe delivering the memo date books, or helping with the ADL dinner from the first dinner when we honored Mayor Hartsfield. But this was my first project that involved things that were happening outside the Jewish community. It was called Save Our Schools, SOS, or Save Atlanta Schools, SAS and it went well, we didn't have any riots at our schools. I'm not saying it was because of this group, but I think this group was one of many that helped the Atlanta schools integrate peaceably. So, I got very involved in that. I started to think about being involved more in sports, I could afford to play golf more often, and I did that some, and I played cards, and *mahjong*, and did lots of things that young Jewish matrons who lived in the suburbs did. I was involved in helping several different organizations and did the best I could to encourage our social life. B'nai B'rith Women turned 25 years old during my regime, and we had a huge celebration with the B'nai B'rith Women chapter here. When the B'nai B'rith Women organization here in Atlanta turned 25 years old, and **Betty Shapiro** who was president, international president of B'nai B'rith Women came to Atlanta and just to show you the kind of community Atlanta was then, and how

it has changed: when she came, when Betty came here, Ivan Allen,⁷⁵ who was then Mayor of the city, Ivan Allen Jr. came to the airport to welcome Betty Shapiro to Atlanta for B'nai B'rith women's 25th anniversary. I'd like to tell you he did it because I did something brilliant, I mean, we just asked him to come and he accepted. I don't think the Mayor of Atlanta would do that for any group today, unless it was a business group or international prestigious group. I just can't imagine it, but Ivan Allen waited with flowers, and welcomed Betty Shapiro to this city. We had a wonderful gala, that was a great event. There were just lots of things that were happening in my life at that time that began to give me a little strength for me not to feel . . . I was feeling like pretty much of a failure, I think in a lot of things, and that I had this one troubled youngster. Jon David was wonderful, but Barton was obviously a troubled youngster, and by this time I think I already had him in therapy. I know now that the doctors really never understood what was the matter with him. It was out at Emory University, you know, it could not have been better care, and one doctor would give him uppers and one would give him downers, and I don't really know to this very day if he was truly hyperactive or if it was just a result of the different drugs the doctors gave him because they thought he was hyperactive, but he was a very unhappy youngster, and I was an unhappy mommy. And, of course, Bobby was not faithful, erratic in his behavior towards me, and I was just, you know, incurably romantic. I would discover these different dalliances and I would confront him with it because that's the way I've always dealt with life, you know: confront, confront, confront, clear the air, and he would tell me it would never happen again, and I would believe him, you know? It's so clear from this great vantage point. At any rate, my brother married, I have a brother who's seven years younger, my brother married at about this same time, and he and his wife moved to Washington [D.C.], outside of Washington where they were both living and working and they seemed very happy. My brother was very young to be married, he was only 20 or 21 and his wife was a few years older. He was a hair dresser, and she was working for the phone company or something, and she became pregnant, and then she suffered an aneurism in about her seventh or eighth month of pregnancy and somehow, she didn't lose the baby. Helen was not from a Jewish family, she was from a pretty low class family, I don't know what religion they were, I guess they were Baptist or something, and her mother was a matron in a women's prison in Virginia, in the western part of

⁷⁵ Ivan Allen, Jr. (1911-2003), was an American businessman who served two terms as the fifty-second Mayor of Atlanta during the turbulent civil rights era of the 1960's.

the state. I think Helen was one of six, or seven, or eight, or nine children, I don't really remember. I think her mother was concerned about her, but her mother had this big family, and her mother had a job, so I think she might have come to the hospital to see her, but that was all that they could do for her. They did not have money, and of course, things being as they were, my brother didn't have insurance, and so my mother and father sent an ambulance to get Helen and they brought her back to their house. They had moved out of their big home in Richmond and they lived in a little, almost a cottage, in Richmond, and my mother brought Helen home to the house so that someone could care for her. It was not such a heroic thing, that is what mother felt she should do. I think Helen probably carried the baby for 10 months, literally, you know, we often hear that but I think because she had lost her vision, her hearing. She was really incapacitated and I think in that condition, she just didn't move around very much and so until she went into labor and gave birth, she was pregnant a long time. She gave birth to a large nine-something beautiful baby girl who is perfectly healthy and normal and after the pregnancy, Helen seemed to get well. She gained her vision and her coordination and a couple of months went by and she tried to go back to work. She had difficulty doing . . . my father had an old-fashioned switch board down at his office, you know, it had the trunk lines that you pull up and cross over, plug into the holes, and she went down there and tried to work for him, and the coordination that was required, the crossing arms and wires gave her terrible migraines so she stopped doing that. I forget what kind of work she went back to doing. She and my brother went into a little apartment, and then they turned around and bought a little house, and although they were living beyond their means somewhat, they were not living in a grandiose style, and my mother was very pleased to see that they were kind of getting their life together and that they were so devoted to one another, and to this little baby. In fact, my mother said to me when I was in Richmond, I guess it was in September of 1970, my mother said, "The only thing is, Barbara, that they turn to me over every little thing, I wish they would learn to grow up". She says, "do you know, Helen had a nose bleed the other night and they called me about it." The nose bleed is a very fortuitous thing. Not fortuitous, it was a telling thing, because two months later we found out that Helen had tumors in her lung, and that she had cancer, and the nose bleed must have come either from the tumors in her lung or the tumors in her brain. She had choriocarcinoma,⁷⁶ and she suffered

⁷⁶ Choriocarcinoma is a fast-growing cancer that occurs in a woman's uterus (womb). The abnormal cells start in the tissue that would normally become the placenta.

terribly from November until she died in March. It seemed like years, but she was terribly ill and just went straight downhill. I tell you all these details about my brother and my sister-in-law because when I saw Helen for the last time, I guess that was in February of 1971, when I started to leave she took my arm, and she was never, she never felt sorry for herself or wept or anything in front of me. She was only 24 or 25. She took my hand and she said, please take care of my little girl. And their daughter, Paula, was about a year and a half, I guess at that point, and I felt so guilty when I left the hospital that I could walk out of that hospital well and that this poor young girl who was just starting to grow up and be an adult was not going to live to have a, to see this child. I think she was pregnant again, as a matter of fact when we first found out that she had cancer, and of course, they did a [hysterectomy]⁷⁷ . . . I guess they did an abortion or a D and C⁷⁸ or whatever. They took the baby. The idea came to me, that it was my mission to take this child and to bring this child up. My brother was always very unstable, and Helen's illness was him watching his beacon . . . what would have been a beacon of light for him, die. I think it just destroyed whatever backbone, whatever vision, he had for himself, and he's really never . . . he's led a very troubled life, let's just say that.

Ruth: Has he ever remarried?

Barbara: He remarried. He is a homosexual. He remarried a woman who knew he was a homosexual. This world is filled with very strange people, Ruth. I can't figure it all out.

Ruth: That's what makes horseracing.

Barbara: It really does. Today his daughter, Paula, will be 20 years old in November.

Ruth: You brought her up since she was two and a half?

Barbara: I thought I would bring her up. That's what I thought I would do, and my brother would have been, I think, happy for me to do that. I had this sense of mission, and I went home and discussed it with Bobby, and he just was totally opposed to it. He thought it was a terrible idea, and I felt that he was being very selfish and that he just didn't want the child because she was my brother's child. So, I called our attorney, who was **Michael Lembeck**, and I spoke to Michael about it. Michael was very kind but he was very firm too. He said that he felt it would just really be a problem. That it was better for my brother, who was young and would maybe

⁷⁷ Hysterectomy is the surgical removal of the uterus. It may also involve removal of the cervix, ovaries, fallopian tubes and other surrounding structures.

⁷⁸ D and C, or dilation and curettage, refers to the dilation of the cervix and surgical removal of part of the lining of the uterus and/or contents of the uterus by scraping and scooping.

remarry, to bring Paula up, because if I brought her to live with me, there would be a continual conflict over who had control of her life. That even if my brother agreed in his grief to give up custody of her and permitted me to adopt her, that the day would come that he would be sorry that he did that, and he would fight me for her. He said all this knowing my family history, and so on. I couldn't find anybody who agreed with me to fight the cause, and since Bobby was so opposed, there was very little to be said about it. About the same time, I guess, this is about 1970, 1971, about . . . probably about the same time . . . I guess it was at a later time. At any rate, then the child who lived across the street from us, a little girl, was killed in a boating accident and it was a very traumatic event, it was maybe a month or two after Helen died. I just had this tremendous desire to bring another life into the world. At this time, Jon was five, and Barton was eight, and I was 30. About 30 I guess, about 31 or 32, and I felt that it was my last time. Today, that's almost a joke, because women don't even begin families today often times until they're in their 30's, but at that time I felt time was running out and I needed to do something about having another child. I guess it was about in May or so, Bobby and I decided, we were . . . our marriage was just in shambles, I might add, with all the tension, with all these emotional things going on around us. Bobby was making a lot of money and it was impacting him in a way that I thought was making him less attractive than he was before. At any rate, we decided we would have a child, I think we tried one night having intercourse with no protection, and the next day, I decided that it was a mistake, that we really shouldn't have another child. I'm one of these people who knows that their pregnant before they miss a period, and two weeks later I knew I was pregnant. Sure enough, I was.

Ruth: You don't fool around.

Barbara: No, I was just, for real, and I went to Hilton Head [Island, South Carolina] for a month or two that summer, I can't remember, with the boys and Bobby spent very little time down there with me. When I came back . . . we argued when he was there, and when I came back I think he moved out of the house. He had a girlfriend then and . . . I don't know, I'm pretty sure that he did. I don't know that it was that he was leaving me for someone or was just [Unintelligible, 14.02] and we remained separated for the rest of that pregnancy. That was probably the unhappiest time of my life. I had, none of my friends were pregnant so I, we were all growing past that, those who had decided to have more than two children had gotten pregnant

within two or three years of their previous child. So, I had this pregnancy, I was Rh negative,⁷⁹ and that was before there was treatment for that, so I was having to go . . . I can't remember how often, but often, to get my blood tested. and I was in mortal fear that tests would come back that there was not a fit between my blood type and the child's blood type. I was just a very, very unhappy. [It was] an unhappy time for me. I felt very alone, very abandoned, and really, I'm so proud: I felt that at this time in my life I should get a divorce. Nobody felt I should get a divorce, including my parents. That it was the wrong time to do that, that Bobby would come to his senses and come back to me, and I didn't want him back if he came to his senses, and that I really did. It was at this time also, that another very important person entered my life. I became very, very close to **Richard Lehrman**, he was our Rabbi at Temple Sinai. Lehrman who built our synagogue, our temple. I was quite an avid temple goer anyhow. I enjoyed the services, I just didn't feel very close to Dick. I thought he was very distant, and kind of unfeeling, but very bright. I had enormous respect for his intellect. There are all kinds of Jews, gastronomic Jews, and emotional Jews, I'm an intellectual Jew. Judaism just really appealed to me intellectually, and I love to hear Rabbis discuss the whyfors and the whereas, on the one hand this, and on the other hand that. I love that. Dick was wonderful that way. I guess I was in the last couple of weeks or months of pregnancy, and Bobby was saying that if we had a boy, that he wanted to have a big *bris*⁸⁰ as we had had for the other children, and there was just no way in the world that I was going to do that. A bris was a time for celebration, and I was going to be very happy if we had another son, but I was not going to make it a social event when my husband and I were living apart. I just couldn't see having the big party. I wanted to have the *bris* but not the party.

Ruth: Did the Rabbi know that you were living apart?

Barbara: Well, it's interesting that you asked that question, because I went to see the Rabbi to ask him his advice. I really, to this day, I cannot remember what his advice was, but it was something sensible like, it would be appropriate for you to consider other things, you can do a baby naming, you can still have the circumcision, but then you can do a baby naming. There are

⁷⁹ The Rh blood group system is one of thirty-five known human blood group systems. It is the second most important blood group system, after the ABO blood group system. During pregnancy this could cause problems, as red blood cells from the unborn baby can cross into the mother's blood through the placenta. If the mother is Rh-negative, her immune system treats Rh-positive fetal cells as if they were a foreign substance. The mother's body makes antibodies against the fetal blood cells.

⁸⁰ A *bris*, formally known as the '*brit milah*' (Hebrew: Covenant of Circumcision) involves surgically removing the foreskin of the penis. Circumcision is performed only on males on the eighth day of the child's life. The *brit milah* is usually followed by a celebratory meal.

ways to celebrate having a baby other than a party, if you don't want to do a party. I felt he was supportive of me without really saying, "Bobby's wrong," and I liked that. Enough people were telling me what a rotten person Bobby was, and he was still my husband, so, you know, it was difficult. But then when I was getting ready to leave, Dick said to me, "You know," he said, "it is my responsibility as your Rabbi to council you and to comfort you when things are wrong and bad in your life, and unless my congregation tells me when they have problems, I can't do my job. Barbara, by not coming to me, by not telling me that you and Bobby had separated, you told me that I was pretty worthless and you didn't let me do my job. It's my responsibility to minister to you when you are in trouble, and by not letting me know, I'm not doing the *mitzvahs* that I should be doing. I need for you to let me know these things." Well I didn't know that there was that side to Dick Lehrman, and I learned to go to Dick with problems, and he was a wonderful consultant and a wonderful friend and I miss him so much to this day. It's hard for me to believe that he has been dead for 10 years. He married Ron and me. And then he . . . well that's another whole chapter, Dick and my friendship with him. I will say, and it's really out of the context of what we're talking about now, that Dick and I had become very, very close, and when he found out he was sick and he had his surgery, the bulletin was put out that he was just fine. But he had **Jerrie**, his fiancée—I don't think they were married yet—call me . . . or maybe they were married, and he got on the phone with me and he told me that the cancer was in his spine and he would not be getting better. I miss him a lot. He was a dear, dear friend. He really suffered a lot too. At any rate, Bobby and I got back together just about the time that Laura was born.

Ruth: What year was that?

Barbara: [It was] 1972. February 2, 1972, and he couldn't do enough to make up for all the hurt and the pain that he had instilled on me. I thought that was all I ever wanted, was for him to come back and we'd put our family together again. We were living a very comfortable life, we had lots of help, and we traveled a lot, and I had a beautiful car, and a closet full of clothes, as my mother-in-law would have said, and I just felt like my life was real empty. I just didn't feel that it was right. I was away on a trip. I guess Laura was . . . this gets very sordid here . . . I guess Laura was less than two years old. I was away on a trip, and a friend of mine, a girlfriend of mine, and I went into a bar for a drink one evening and I was introduced to a man from Atlanta, very handsome, charming man, to whom I felt very attracted, and I think he felt attracted to me. My friend and I had dinner with him, because I wouldn't have thought of going out with

someone, but he was a friend of a mutual friend and we were all together and I really didn't think that I was doing anything wrong or incorrect. But he called me when I came back to Atlanta, and when he came back to Atlanta, and I met him a couple of times for a drink, and I felt very attracted to him, and I felt terribly guilty. Naive child that I was, I told Bobby about it, because I was committed to my marriage and I'd been through hell to maintain it, and I didn't want to do anything that was deceitful. Bobby just took it right in stride, and within a very short period of time, without trying to reconstruct the exact chronology, I discovered that my phone was being tapped, that I was being followed by a private detective, that Bobby had gone to my dearest friends to tell them that I was having an affair, which I was not having, by the way. I should have. Should have, because I stood accused in his eyes, and it would not have made any difference. I'm open to a lot of life's experiences today that I wasn't in those years, I guess though this is what, 1974? And it was the most devastating time of my life, besides from the time that I was pregnant. In the piece de resistance, I think really the light almost went out in me at this point, because I felt so guilty because I did have this . . . as Jimmy Carter⁸¹ would say, I lusted in my heart. And I felt that, you know, what a fool I was, because here I had this man that had come back to me and could have left me, and did, and came back . . . and here I was risking everything for somebody about whom I had no long-term illusions. You know, I didn't think that this was the man of my dreams or anything, just somebody I thought was attractive, And I had an amazing phone call one night, that really changed the course of my life, it set me free. I had a phone call at about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. Bobby had gone to Las Vegas without me, I really think he had picked a fight for me not to be there with him. It was a man that said he had met me in Las Vegas perhaps six months earlier. Months before I had met this man that I mentioned to you, and he wanted to know if it was true that my husband and me were getting a divorce, because his wife was leaving him, or had left him, for Bob Friedland, and that, if there was any way that he could get his marriage back together, he would want to do that, but that he needed to know from me if we were really going to get a divorce. Well, this was news to me, and this man told me this long story after he stopped screaming at me and I let him know we were in the same boat. Bobby and his wife had met when the four of us, this man and his wife and Bobby and I, were in Las Vegas for a golf tournament in September, and this was the spring, May or June, and that they

⁸¹ James Earl "Jimmy" Carter Jr. (1924-) was the 39th President of the United States from 1977 to 1981. He was a Democrat.

had been having this mad affair and that he had given her many gifts, serious gifts, and that she was going to divorce her husband for Bobby, and that Bobby was going to divorce me, and that they were going to get married. I think I probably, Ruth, had not found out about the private detective, or about the tapping of the telephone, all until about this time. In other words, all of this had been going on for months. I was not seeing the man anymore, you know, that I had seen for drinks a couple of times?

Ruth: I'm going to have to stop it right now because we're going to put on another tape.

Barbara: Okay.

<End Tape 2, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 3, side 1>

Ruth: This is side one of tape three of an interview with Barbara Balsler for the Oral History Project, the National Jewish Women of Achievement Program and this is November 11, 1988. We'll continue where you left off on tape number two.

Barbara: At any rate, when I got off the phone with this gentleman, who was calling me in the middle of the night, I felt so vindicated. [I felt] crushed, numb, but so vindicated, because I had allowed Bobby to make me feel so guilty that I had dared think about ever looking at another human being, when for months prior to that event, he had someone else in his life. You know, I don't believe it when women say, or men say, that they are surprised when they find out that their spouse is having an affair, because I think we know. I think we know and we kid ourselves, or we know and we don't admit it to ourselves, because there's no way a person who is loving to you and giving and caring to you can continue . . . I don't think, in my limited experience, that they can continue to be loving or caring to that same degree. Whatever the degree was before, when they're caring about someone else at the same time, they're taking time away from you, time away from your relationship. Bobby was going to Chicago a lot, I thought on business, And I was kidding myself. But I probably sensed that he again was very involved with someone. That may be why I was more vulnerable, and more open to be attracted to someone else. I mean, I think we can all be attracted to people. But it's rare, I think, that people of character and commitment allow that attraction to be more than hello and good-bye, and even go to the extent of having a drink with someone, or dinner with someone, that you might think is attractive because you feel . . . I feel that you want to protect this special thing that you have with your family, with your spouse, and it's easy to be drawn into another situation if you allow yourself to

be put in the circumstance, or you allow yourself to enter into the circumstance. At any rate, the first thing I did when I got off the phone with this gentleman was to call my dear friends **Arlene and Bruce Teurry**. Arlene and I had barely spoken for months, because I knew Bobby had gone to her and told her that I had betrayed him with this man. I knew Arlene doesn't like to discuss anything unpleasant, and I couldn't talk to her about anything else, because my marriage and trying to hold it together, and always feeling so guilty that I had betrayed Bobby by being attracted to this other man, that's all. I was consumed with it. In fact, I think at that point, Bobby and I may even have entered marriage counseling. I think Arlene didn't want to see me a lot either, because she was so upset about me. Of course, she knew that I was being followed by private detectives and she knew, as did another friend of mine, that the phone was being tapped. But what Bobby had done was convince them that this person, that I was attracted to, was a notorious womanizer, who would draw women into compromising situations, photograph them, and then blackmail them. Now you know, Ruth, I don't know if that is true or not. I don't know if that's the kind of a person this man was. He might have been, but whether it was true or not, that's what Bobby Friedland told my friends, and so my friends felt they were acting in my best interest.

Ruth: Well how is it if they were your friends, they did not tell you that your phone was tapped or you were being followed?

Barbara: I really don't know, except that, in retrospect, I knew that as far as the Terry's told me, that Bobby came to their house and wept, and enlisted their confidence in order to try to help me, and they were so moved by this performance of his, because they didn't think that Bobby was that feeling a person, that they stayed silent. I think that it was a painful thing for Arlene to do, and therefore we were distant from each other. I didn't know all of these things at the time, I just knew fragments of them. I called Arlene and Bruce, and I told them that I needed them to come over right away. It must have been 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. They didn't ask why, they just came right over and I told them the story and the three of us sat there and cried together. They felt so angry. They were so angry that Bobby had used them that way. I don't remember, I'm pretty sure it was almost just maybe a week or two or three before that, that I had discovered that the phone was tapped. I had come upon the equipment. The phone company had been out to work on the phone because I kept having difficulty with it, and the maid said that the telephone man said that he couldn't fix the problem, that I had to have the people who installed the special

equipment in to fix the problem. So, I went down to the basement to see what she was talking about. She knew that the equipment was there, too. I mean, I was just in the center of this awful conspiracy. When I found those tapes, I called a friend who is an attorney and I'm not going to tell you even on this tape who that friend was, because he asked me not to ever say that he discussed it with me. But he came to the house rather than meet me in his office, and I showed him the equipment. I think he thought I was nuts. I showed him the equipment, and he was more or less employed by Bob. I didn't have a business, you know, so Bobby Friedland paid the bills, and he had paid his legal bills. The friend took me upstairs . . . this was someone I had known longer than I had known Bobby Friedland, and he sat me down on the sofa and he said, "Barbara you are married to a very sick man," and I started to get very frightened. Do you know Ruth, I am a really loyal and devoted friend. The minute I saw that equipment, do you know what I thought in my childish brain? I thought, somebody has put this equipment in our house, they're trying to hurt Bobby. I could never imagine that he would be doing something like this to me. I think between Arlene and Bruce and myself, we figured out that what Bobby's intent was, was to prove that I had an affair, or affairs, with men, and to divorce me, and have all this as proof so he would not have to pay me any child support or alimony. Maybe take the children too, I don't remember. I have to say I was more frightened than I think I had ever been before, because I didn't have mean, and you know, I was just the little dumb wife. Certainly dumb. I think I called Bobby in Las Vegas. I think he was with this woman. Ultimately, he came back to Atlanta and I don't remember what the puny excuse was, but I think at that point I had . . . I think I had just withdrawn from him, and it really almost didn't matter. At that point, if we had not been in therapy . . . we went into therapy with **Lloyd Mendleson**, I think that was. Or was it Mendle? I think Mendleson. I completely forget . . . and we struggled along with a couple of months of therapy. I had had enormous difficulty whenever I pictured myself being divorced before. I couldn't balance who I was—I was Mrs. Robert A. Friedland—with the way I was going to be if I divorced. I mean, I wouldn't go to the Standard Club anymore, and I probably couldn't even live in my house anymore, and I guess I'd have to go to work, and I had been talking all these years about wanting to go to work, and I had this new baby that I haven't even talked about. God blessed me with a daughter in the middle of all this turmoil. She really only added to the turmoil. She was bald for a year, and then when her hair started to grow in it grew in red, and Bobby just more or less told me that he knew it couldn't be his child because where would the red hair come

from? Unquestionably, of course, she was Bobby's child, but he probably even doubts it to this day. At any rate, Bobby was suffering terrible business reversals, and I felt that it was not right for me to walk out on him, so to speak, while things were going so badly. That I would help him through this period, and I don't think I was really convinced that I was going to get a divorce anyhow. I think I was more angry and hurt and fed up. At any rate, we went to therapy for a couple of months, and the therapy sessions were very difficult, and one day Lloyd turned to me and said, "Barbara, why are you here?" And I said, "I'm here to work on my marriage." He said, "Barbara, why are you here?" I said, "I'm here to work on my marriage," and, of course, Bobby and I were there together. He said, "Barbara, why are you really here?" I said, "I'm here because I want to get out of this marriage and I don't know how." That was probably the truest thing I said the whole time we'd been in therapy, and Lloyd said, "now I think we're getting somewhere. Now we have something to work on." Not that I think Lloyd wanted to see us get a divorce, but that he felt that I wasn't being honest in the therapy, and Bobby was totally impossible in therapy. He went, but he was angry and difficult. So, Bobby and I started seeing Lloyd separately, and I slipped into a really terrible depression because I just . . . I think I knew that I had to get a divorce and I just really didn't want to be a divorcee. I didn't want to have to struggle the way I thought I was going to have to struggle if I got a divorce, and I was very frightened. I had never supported myself financially. Suddenly, as the months of therapy wore on, and I began to realize that I should get a divorce, I started to feel very free, and very liberated. It became very clear to me, what should have been clear to me for years: that I could not possibly get a divorce from Bobby Friedland and leave the life of Mrs. Robert A. Friedland. That I was going to have to lead another life. I mean it's so plain and simple, but there were so many aspects of my life I really liked that I didn't want to give up. I felt that I had to stay married to Bobby in order to have those things: the physical comfort, the friends, the lifestyle, all of those things. And having somebody in your life to kind of take care of you, but I guess the truth of it is nobody was taking care of me except me. I was the only one who was really taking good care of my feelings. Bobby Friedland surely was not. Once I got over that hurdle and realized that I wanted to separate from Bobby and wanted a divorce his business was completely going downhill. He betrayed me again, you know, it was a life of betrayal. You set yourself up, it happens to you, and I'm not saying with another woman necessarily, but we had agreed that we would put a certain sum of money, which was not very much money in those days, in any days. It was not a whole lot of money, but it was

enough money we felt to maintain ourselves on a very scaled down level for a year, if he lost everything. We put that money in our safe deposit box, and I went to the safe deposit box one day and the money was gone. He had taken the money and put it into the business. In fact, my understanding . . . I really don't know because I wasn't there and I never looked at the books, and although he did consult with me and we talked about a lot of things, this was another betrayal of sorts. Bobby and I talked about a lot of things, and the way the different businesses should be structured, and principles that would apply to the business. It's interesting that, although I had never been in business, he sought my advice on a lot of things, and we agreed that each real estate venture that he went into would stand on its own. Therefore, if he hit a bad time, that he wouldn't lose everything. Somehow, in some various dealings, he set it up so that it was like a house of cards, and this was after we had made the commitment that that would not be the way we would do it, and after we made the commitment that the money would stay in the safety deposit box. Everything just started to go. We used to go to Las Vegas every April or May for the Allen King Tennis Club special classic.⁸² It was just a couple of years old, and we'd been there every year, and we made this very clear decision that what we would do is we would go out to the Allen King Special. Bobby had come up with this notion that he was going to go to California. He had met some people in Las Vegas that wanted him to set up some sort of a business. [It] sounded like the mob to me and I didn't want any part of it. Then there was also talk that Louisiana was going to have legalized gambling, and somebody wanted him to be a front man for a casino. I just couldn't believe that anybody thought that they could deal with whoever these people are, whether it's the mob, the syndicate, the mafia, whatever you want to call it.

Ruth: Big time.

Barbara: Big time gangsters, whether or not this was a legitimate business, I mean, that's who's in back of all this stuff. I couldn't imagine that he really thought he could outsmart these people, that he could be their front man and stay clean, you know? That kind of thing. So, he decided he would go to California, and we would use this time apart to see what we would do. I knew that he knew he was leaving and leaving for good, he took every bit of clothing he owned and so on and so forth, and I knew that I would never go to California. But we never said those

⁸² The Alan King Tennis Classic was a men's tennis tournament held in Las Vegas, Nevada, from 1972 to 1985. The event was hosted by American comedian Alan King and was played on outdoor hard courts of the Caesars Palace hotel.

things to one another. He shipped all of his clothing out, and the car was sent out, I owned the car, I owned everything at that point. One of the things that we had done, that my attorney friend saw to was that when Bobby and I went back together after Laura was born, the house was transferred to my name, and it was a gift from Bobby to me and the attorney felt, and convinced Bobby, that it was the appropriate thing to do, to give me a feeling of security. I owned the cars, but of course I let him . . . he bought the cars with his money, it wasn't like I bought them. He took his car and he had it driven out to California. When I came back from that trip from California, I slept well for the first time in years. I had had a chronic stiff neck, for which I had been taking therapy once a week to try to work at this, I had just awful pains down my back into my shoulders. It went away.

Ruth: He was literally a pain in the neck.

Barbara: He was literally my pain in the neck. And I was scared to death. I was particularly scared because, in the midst of all these **sores**, Bobby, who had always been a big player and a big winner in Las Vegas, went to Vegas and lost a bundle of money. We needed the money so badly. I guess that's why he played foolishly, took unnecessary chances, and he dropped a lot of money. I remember the name of the pit boss at the . . . you won't believe it when I tell it to you, at the Desert Inn where we used to stay, his name is **Blackie Dardeen** and he looked like something from a Sam Spade novel⁸³ or something, you know? He was just a great looking, slick kind of a guy, and he was always a charming gentleman. I didn't know Bobby had lost all of this money, and Blackie called me. We had been going to Las Vegas maybe once every six weeks for two or three years, so I knew these people well. Blackie called me and he wanted to know where he could get in touch with Bobby, I think he needed to call Bobby's marker, that Bobby owed a large five figure number, and I really got scared. More frightened than when the tape recorder was found, and more frightened than when I found out about the private detective. By the way, I have to tell you a funny story about that very quickly. One, not funny, just fact: I think I heard reports, I think Bobby told me, that he spent about \$20,000 on private detectives and tapping the phone and everything, and he never got anything that was anything because I wasn't doing anything! It was very boring. Before I found out about the tape recorder and the private detective, one day when I was taking a walk, or running, or something near the house, I saw a car

⁸³ Sam Spade is a fictional private detective and the protagonist of Dashiell Hammett's 1930 novel, *The Maltese Falcon*. Spade also appeared in four lesser-known short stories by Hammett.

parked a few doors from my house with a young couple sitting in it. I went out, and when I came back they were still there and that troubled me because I live down a dead-end street. So, I called the police and I told the policeman that there was a strange car sitting on our block with a couple sitting in it and that it made me anxious, would he check on it? And he went and checked on it, and he came back to the house, and he said, "Mrs. Friedland, don't worry about it. Somebody on the track, on the block, is having marital problems and it's a private detective who's been hired to follow the wife." I knew at least three or four other couples who it had to be, it never dawned on me, Ruth, that this private detective was following me. And I'm supposed to be smart. Well at any rate, when I heard that Blackie and Las Vegas were looking for Bobby, and that they didn't know where he was but they knew where I was, I got real scared. I don't know that anybody ever does anything about those outstanding markers, but I had visions of men coming at night with stockings over their faces, or something, looking for money. I needed money desperately. Bobby was not able to send me any money, I was not working. So, I decided I needed to get a job, and I needed to sell the house, and I had better sell the house right away, because if Bobby ended up declaring bankruptcy that it was possible that people might sue me. While I didn't think they would win in court because they didn't have any legal case against me for anything, it could tie up my only resource for dollars. So, I put the house on the market, and it sold very quickly. I bought a little condominium, a very nice condominium, in Sandy Springs.⁸⁴ I never knew anything about how to do those kinds of things. Arlene Turry was my agent on both items. I got very well educated very quickly, and in 1975 the children and I moved out of our Vernon Springs home, where we had lived for nine years, into a little condominium on Hammond Drive in Sandy Springs. We started another whole episode. I had gone to work at a bank, I had gone to work at Mercantile National Bank,⁸⁵ I guess in August or September, and the house was sold, and we moved out in October. Boy it was very different. My life became very different. It was very hard. There wasn't much time for me. I had this job, where I think my gross pay was about \$10,000 a year. I was doing public relations and customer relations for Mercantile National Bank, which was a bank that had been started mostly by Jewish people, had a lot of Jewish men on the board. I got that job by a happy turn of events. You remember I mentioned

⁸⁴ Sandy Springs is a city in northern Fulton County, Georgia, United States, and part of the Atlanta metropolitan area.

⁸⁵ Mercantile National Bank, also known as MCorp Bank, served customers around the country before facing failure in the 1980's financial crisis and being acquired by Banc One.

that I had met a man out of town several years before that kind of precipitated all these things happening in my marriage, and after Bobby and I separated, I contacted this man. He was also interested in real estate development and he had a deal that he was trying to develop out of state and he needed money. This was early mid 70's, as I say Atlanta was just in terrible shape financially from real estate deals, and nobody had money to put into any real estate deals, but I knew somebody who had money to put into any kind of real estate deal, I knew **Steve Selig**. So, I called Steve and I asked if he would see me, and he said he would, and I went to see him with this real estate deal. I presented it to him, and the idea was that if I would get the funding I would get a certain percent of the deal. Steve was very polite and listened to everything that I had to say, and he explained to me that he did not invest, his company didn't invest, in deals outside the state of Georgia, but that he'd have somebody to look at it for him and advise him. Then he said, "You know", he said, "I thought you were coming here looking for a job and I was trying to think what I could offer you", he said, "and the only thing I could offer you would be a job out here at about \$6,000 a year because that's our starting salary for secretarial help," and you know, I didn't know how to take short hand or any, I type but that's about it. He said, "but while you were sitting here it came to me, that there might be something else that might be really good for you." He said, "I sit on the board at the Mercantile National Bank, and the bank is in trouble," as many banks in Atlanta were then, they were over loaned on all these bad real estate deals.

Ruth: What year was that?

Barbara: [That was] 1975. He said, "We really need to bring some new deposits into the bank, and I think you're the person to do that, because you know people with money and you're not afraid to ask people for money." I've been raising money for all kinds of organizations for years. And I, as nervous as can be, I went down and I interviewed with the president of the bank, and he hired me. I couldn't believe it. Here I was, about 34 years old, or 35 years old, I guess, I had never worked for anyone since I was a kid, and I got this job. It paid me a gross of about 10 grand a year and I think I was taking home about \$750 a month, And I think, Ruth, that my spending money before that time, I think I used to get about \$2,000 a month before my divorce, before I separated. That was to feed and clothe myself and the kids, and to pay the housekeeper. I didn't have to pay the house note, or insurance, or medical bills, that was just to do my thing, so to speak, and here my take home was \$750 a month. I don't know how we did it. Well, I know how we did it. I sold the car, I tried to sell jewelry, I couldn't get anything for my jewelry, but I

had a brand-new Mercedes⁸⁶ that I sold. I had lent my mother-in-law, at that time, Bobby and I had lent her an older car that I had. I asked her for it back. That was a very hard thing to do. Neither of us were in good shape, but she was in better shape than I was, and I just had to do that. I sold the house, and I had a little equity in the house. In fact probably a considerable amount of equity, and Bobby knew that, and understood that, and didn't fight me for that. He felt that he wasn't earning anything and that was mine. That would be mine to help me take care of the children. By the way, in the interim, he wanted to reconcile, and get back together, and I did go out to see him. We met in Lake Tahoe. The reason we did that was because he was living with someone, I don't know whether it was a male or female or what, but if we went to Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe the casinos would pick up the tab, because they always did for us, and we wouldn't be at any expense. We didn't have any money to pay for it, and that was the trip that he lost so much money on, on which he lost so much money on. So, we saw each other, and I just did not want to be with him, I didn't want to share my life with him, and I felt very clear about it. I came back kind of zealous about starting my own life, and while I felt I was probably over the hill, and I had lived the best years of my life, after all I was 34, I had had my family, I had lived beautifully, and I would probably never live like that again. It would be hard, and it would be a struggle but I was going to make it. But it wasn't going to be fun. I was just going to get through it somehow. My oldest child was 12 years old, and we would just struggle through this.

Ruth: Well how did the children take all this friction between you and your husband?

Barbara: Well, badly. Bobby was not one to sit down with the children and try to explain anything. When we separated, of course, I had to explain it to them. In the interim, probably a year or two before we separated, our oldest son Barton had gone into Georgia Mental Health Institute⁸⁷ for observation because I had felt that he was being over medicated, and the doctors from Emory thought it would be a good idea if I would allow them to observe him on a 24-hour basis, because he had been in therapy for five years and they couldn't tell me what his problems were except that he was unusual.

Ruth: Do you think if that were today that they would diagnose it?

Barbara: I don't know. Again, he was my oldest child I feel, you know, I'm so much wiser

⁸⁶ Mercedes-Benz is a global automobile marque and a division of the German company Daimler AG. The brand is known for luxury vehicles.

⁸⁷ The Georgia Mental Health Institute was a psychiatric hospital which operated from 1965–1997 near Emory University in Druid Hills near Atlanta Georgia.

today. I would question so many more things than I did. I think that, at that point in my life, I had allowed the years to go by because I thought I was an inept mother, and I didn't know any better, and that it must be me, or me and Bobby, that had produced all these problems in Barton. When the day came for him to go into the mental health institute, of course, I had to tell him and of course, I had to take him. Bobby wouldn't take him. That was a sad day. Thirty days turned into sixty, and sixty turned into ninety, and they still couldn't tell me anything so I just took him out. I think we took one more brief stab at therapy, and then we just stopped. At any rate, the children were terribly hurt. They loved their father very much. Jon barely spoke to me for almost a year. Bobby was desperate, he wasn't able to get anything going in California. I don't think he could get a job. I really don't know what he was living on. People were telling me that I was being fooled again, that he had left with a lot of money, that he took money out of these different deals, from real estate deals that they were in, that he was in, and that I wasn't facing facts on that. I have to say, I don't believe he took anything. I think Bobby is unethical, probably most of all with himself, but I don't think he would ever steal a dime. It's a big difference between somebody who's unfaithful, and doesn't have much self-respect, because I think that's what drives someone who behaves the way that he does. My analysis of his situation, was that he was constantly looking for reassurance and praise and so on, and I must have not been able to deliver back to him on a level that helped him very much. In fact, probably being married to me was the worst thing in the world for him. It certainly was not good for me. Anyhow, so I worked at the bank, and I took the kids to school every morning and that was good, because we had that time together every day. I had a wonderful woman who had started working for me the year before whose name was **Barbara Burton**. Barbara Burton learned to drive, and got her driver's license, and drove car pools for me. I had two cars: I had an old station wagon, and another old car. It was an elegant car of course, we wouldn't have had a beat-up car. I had an old Mercedes.

Ruth: Probably a collector's item today.

Barbara: Probably, if it's still around. And the kids went to the AA [Ahvath Achim].⁸⁸ **Sol Singer** was very helpful. This was everybody at the AA, I didn't have the money to pay the kids

⁸⁸ Ahavath Achim Synagogue was founded in 1887 in a small room on Gilmer Street. In 1901 they moved to a permanent building at the corner of Piedmont and Gilmer Street. In 1921, the congregation constructed a synagogue at Washington Street and Woodward Avenue. The final service in that building was held in 1958 to make way for construction of the Downtown Connector (the concurrent section of Interstate 75 and Interstate 85 through Atlanta). The synagogue moved to its current location on Peachtree Battle Avenue in 1958.

tuition and they permitted the children to attend there, and all I had to pay was their lunch money, whatever it was to feed them lunch. it was \$250 a year or something, and that was a good safe haven for them at the Epstein School.⁸⁹ I felt it really lent some structure to their lives for the next two years.

Ruth: So they did receive a Jewish education?

Barbara: Oh yes, and of course, we were very involved in Temple Sinai. There are lots of ways to handle being alone, for a woman to handle being alone. It was very trendy then for women to go to bars. It's where the young scene, it's where a lot of people were going.

Ruth: It still is.

Barbara: I guess, I never did that. I used to go to synagogue every Friday night, and I went to Temple Sinai, and I went to adult education classes if they were held at night, and I went to temple on Saturday morning. I'd had an extensive Jewish education anyhow, and I think we talked about it on an earlier tape and I felt I'd come home. Bobby never got out of temple what I got out of temple, and I was free now to really enjoy that. Dick Lehrman had announced to our congregation that he was getting a divorce, and there were just a rash of divorces in the congregation. I think everybody felt, well the Rabbi's doing it, we can do it too. There was a whole group of us who would see each other on Friday night and kind of take each other's pulses. It became very clear to me that if you hang out at bars you end up hanging out with a whole different kind of person, and having a different kind of estimation of yourself, and if you hang out at temple . . . you know, it's a silly thing to say this, very obvious, that obviously you're thinking about, instead of shall I have another drink and get drunk? Or go home with the guy next to me, or go pick up the guy over there? Instead of thinking those thoughts you're thinking, well, what did Maimonides⁹⁰ do about being called before Pharaoh to treat him? You know. I got a ringing endorsement for the Temple board, I had been elected vice-president of our temple. I think I was the first woman elected vice-president of, certainly of Temple Sinai, perhaps of any temple in Atlanta, I'm not sure. I had been asked to serve as membership chair, and when I

⁸⁹ The Epstein School (also known as the Solomon Shechter School of Atlanta) is a private Jewish day school in the Atlanta area located in Sandy Springs. In 1973, Rabbi Harry H. Epstein and the leaders of Ahavath Achim synagogue wanted to create a Conservative Jewish day school. The first campus was housed at the synagogue. In 1987 the school moved to Sandy Springs.

⁹⁰ Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides, and also referred to by the acronym Rambam, was a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.

decided I was going to get my divorce I went before our little executive committee and I offered my resignation. I said that I felt that Temple Sinai had kind of a negative connotation in this community as it was, because our Rabbi was divorced, and that was a shock, and we had so many divorces going on in the congregation and that if I were going to be the membership chair, that maybe it was better for someone other than a divorcee woman to take that position. The gentlemen on the executive committee seemed to feel it was a question of whether or not I could do the job, and if I felt I could do the job they wanted me to stay on. And I did, and those were great days. Temple Sinai was really starting to ride the crest of a wave, we had a waiting list of people who wanted to get in. We would interview each family very carefully. Not for their pedigree, but to see if they really were going to be involved in the temple, because we didn't want to fill up our rolls with people who just wanted a place to say they belonged. That was a judgmental thing, I don't really know if a synagogue has the right to do that, but those were the judgements that we made. Those were good days, I met a lot of new people, and the work I was doing as a volunteer was really valued. All the volunteer work I had done before, I had been very criticized by my spouse and that was the voice I heard most, he never understood why I did it, and here now my peers at Sinai thought what I was doing was terrific. I felt I really belonged, I had this extended family. I'm pretty bright, I love debating things about *Torah* and *Talmud* and I spent a lot of time doing that. I love to sing. We didn't have a full-time cantor at Temple Sinai in those days, and Dick valued my Hebrew singing. Again, that was something that was not appreciated by my spouse. And he asked me to act as Cantor for the temple, which I did quite a bit. **Sid Gottler** was our avocational cantor at the time, and when Sid wasn't available I would conduct services. Those were good times, in terms of helping me through what was a very sad time in my life. We divorced . . . I think the divorce became official in January of 1976. We stayed married through the tax year of 1975, because it was a good thing to do tax wise for both of us. Bobby came to Atlanta. On the day we got the divorce, he came by and got me at the bank and we walked in the rain together to get the divorce, and we cried. We got our divorce in chambers from **Joel Fryer**, Judge Joel Fryer [**Unintelligible, 18.45**] and afterwards we walked back to the bank, tried to go back to work in the rain, and we cried. This was January 7th of 1977, 1976. But it was a very sad day, it was really over. I continued to argue, and then stay close with Bobby because we were so tied together, and I wanted to maintain a nice relationship with him, and I guess I needed him on certain levels, and from time to time he really needed me. I lent

him money, because I had a little money left over from the house, and he so desperately needed it. I tried to help him in various different ways. He didn't see the children very much at all unless he came to Atlanta, which was very rare. He didn't have the money for them to come out there. When they did go out there, he was not very attentive to them.

Ruth: Where was this, in California?

Barbara: Yes, and he still remains in California today, which in retrospect, I must say, I think has made the divorce much easier for me, because he was really out of my life.

Ruth: Did he remarry?

Barbara: He has remarried. He remarried a year or two after Ron and I were married. I guess he's married about eight years, or he'll be married eight years.

Ruth: So how long after your divorce did you meet Ron?

Barbara: I had known Ron Balsemer and the Balsemer family ever since I moved to Atlanta in 1961. When I thought about . . . I was working for the bank and I started working for the bank, I guess maybe like in July or August of 75. I worked a 9:00 to 5:00 job I didn't have any work that I had to take home with me. I worked hard while I was at the bank, I did good, I brought in a lot of accounts. When I worked the first Thanksgiving weekend, and I had to come into work on Friday, and I couldn't go out and call anybody to try to open an account, because either businesses were closed or else it was the busiest retail day of the year. I was trying to figure out why I was there, why should I come to work when there wasn't anything productive I could do there and my children were home alone without me? I started wondering what I was going to do about making enough money to survive, because I wasn't making enough money to survive. I was making enough money to pay Barbara Burton, and that was about it. So, what could I do? I started thinking about different things I could do. I was dating someone. I had started dating someone, and this person was in the advertising, public relations, media business. As a matter of fact, I guess you'd say historically significant, I was dating **Jerry Rafshoon**, who went on to handle the publicity side of Jimmy Carter's campaign. Those were exciting days to be involved with somebody like Jerry Rafshoon, because I was going out with Jerry when they won New Hampshire, and the whole race started to change. At any rate, Jerry thought I would be great in selling almost anything, and he encouraged me to look into selling TV time and radio time which I did. I went to see a lot of people in town, including **Diane Harnell** who is now Diane Harnell Cohen. Diane was head of sales for WHEA, channel Five, and she explained to me that Atlanta

was a very hot market, that experienced people were trying to move here from all over the country, that there was a very narrow market and that it was almost like landing goldfish, that it was so easy to sell time here. That it almost sold itself, and that you really needed to be highly experienced. There was no need for them to hire someone and train them, and that if I was interested I should start in radio. I looked into that and I couldn't make as much money as I was making at the bank. Then someone else said I should sell cars, and I looked into that. Somebody else thought I should go into the retail business which I looked into, and I really didn't want to do, and something that kept coming up again and again and again was that I ought to sell life insurance. I didn't know anything about life insurance, and so I just kept putting it off. **Allen Soden**, who now is at ZEP Manufacturing,⁹¹ he's the vice-president I think in charge of marketing for ZEP Manufacturing, was at that time in charge of sales for WSB radio,⁹² and I used to buy radio time for the bank from Allen. I don't know how old Allen is but he's certainly younger than I am, maybe he's about 40 today and he seemed to admire me a great deal, and he used to come around to the bank and talk to me and encourage me, and he suggested that I think about selling life insurance. I just couldn't, I didn't know anything about life insurance. And it just kept coming up from a lot of different people that they thought I ought to sell life insurance. I remember saying to someone, "I don't know anything about life insurance!" "Well what did you know about banking?" I said, "Well, I didn't know anything about banking." They said, "don't worry about it, you'll learn whatever it is you need to know about life insurance." Allen asked me if I would see a friend of his and talk to them about life insurance. I said I would. I went and I interviewed with a man whose name is **John Wall** and he was the general agent for Northwest Life Insurance Company⁹³ here in Atlanta, and it was a successful agency. I went for what I thought was going to be a kid like Allen, but this man was an established person, and he was trying to recruit me into the industry, but I thought I was trying to sell him, you know. All I

⁹¹ Founded in Atlanta, Georgia in 1937, Zep Manufacturing Company manufacture industrial cleaning products. The Company produces a full line of sanitation and maintenance chemicals, such as detergents, disinfectants, hand cleaners, degreasers, deodorants, lubricants, and floor finishes. Zep serves customers worldwide.

⁹² WSB, branded as "News 95.5 and AM750", is a commercial radio station licensed to Atlanta, Georgia, broadcasting a news/talk format. It also uses the slogan "Atlanta's news, weather, traffic, and Georgia Bulldogs station."

⁹³ The Northwestern Mutual is an American financial services mutual organization based in Milwaukee. The financial security company provides consultation on wealth and asset income protection, education planning, retirement planning, investment advisory services, trust and private client services, estate planning, and business planning. Its products include life insurance, disability income, and long-term care insurance; annuities; investments; and investment advisory products and services.

wanted to know was can a woman make it in this business. Now you have to understand, up to this point I had literally begged people for jobs, and I was seen as over the hill, too old to be of much use, or to be worthwhile training, and suddenly this man wanted me badly in his agency. We talked for three hours and when the conversation was over, he got angry with me because I wouldn't sign an agents contract. But there was this voice inside of me that was saying, "hey, you know, if this guy wants you so bad, you've got to have something you're not seeing, and maybe, that have talked to some people to make sure that this is the right place for you to go." I made a list of about 12 people, and on that list were the names of **Meyer** and Ron Balser, I couldn't decide which one I should go to see.

Ruth: Alright, we're going to continue this on side B of tape three.

<End Tape 3, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 3, Side 2>

Ruth: This is side two of tape three of interview with Barbara Balser at her office on November 11, 1988. We will continue where Barbara has just met with Meyer Balser.

Barbara: No, as a matter of fact, I was going to meet with Meyer. I knew Meyer better, Meyer had served on the board at the Mercantile [Bank] and he was always so friendly and sweet and outgoing. I knew Ron. Ron had divorced shortly before I had, he was married to **Temmie Barkin**, and I thought they were both rather strange people. Not terribly friendly or outgoing, and really marching to a different drummer. They were contemporaries of Bobby's and mine but we rarely saw them socially. So, my first thought was to go to Meyer because he was much more approachable than Ron. But I found out as I went around town talking to different people whom I thought were bright and could give me some good insight, that as I would ask different ones whether or not they thought going into the life insurance business was a good idea for me, the younger men were very enthusiastic, or would have alternative suggestions of something they thought I would do as well in. The older men [all] had the same song, it was all, "Oh Barbara, why are you concerned, honey? Don't, it's such a hard way to make a living. Don't worry about working so hard, somebody's going to come along and take good care of you, don't worry about that." I'd already been taken care of about as much as I wanted to be taken care of in my lifetime. I'd learned a bitter lesson from my own experience, I had watched my mother, I had watched my grandmother. Ain't nobody going to take care of you but yourself, and you better

know how to do it and I was never. I mean I was like Scarlet⁹⁴ in that scene where she's out in the cotton fields, and she bends down and she picks the dirt up in her hand and she says, "I'll never be hungry again!" Well I was never going to depend on another man to take care of me again! I've stuck to that. I think it's made me a better person, and I think it's made this marriage a better marriage. But before the marriage, on my list of people, I shied away then from Meyer Balsler, and I finally gathered my courage. I had seen all 11 people and some of the 11 thought that . . . the older men thought that it was not a good idea to go into the life insurance business, they didn't know any women. I think **Rosalee Mayor** had been in the life insurance business. There was not another woman who had sold life insurance that they knew of.

Ruth: Do you think they saw this as a potential threat?

Barbara: Maybe, but I don't think any of them would have felt threatened about it. I think that it was just untoward for a woman to be thinking . . . for a woman with three children, whom they thought to be attractive, to be thinking about a career. If you're a good-looking woman, somebody will come along and take care of you. If you want to be practical and say all that's true, what happened if I had an accident the next day and my face wasn't pretty anymore? I mean, you know, that's so superficial. I had gone to see **Gene Oberdorfer**, who had a property and casualty agency. He and I had served together on the Temple Sinai board, and he had been very kind to me and when I divorced, he had called me and he said, "if there is anything that Sarah Lynn and I can do to help you, please let me know." Not many people did that. Another couple I should mention though, that did do that: my dear friend **Charlotte Wilen**. She and her husband **Ikie** . . . what a name. Israel's a beautiful name, I don't know why he doesn't like it. She and Ikie had taken me out for dinner one night shortly after Bobby and I had separated, and when Ikie had gone to put me in the car, he said, "Barbara, Charlotte and I want to help you, if there's anything you need. If there's money," and he named a figure, he said, "if you need it, you got it the next day." It's those kinds of things, and so many more instances that I could never recount here, or that I could recount on many tapes, of people coming forward and letting me know that they cared about me, that really gave me the strength to go on. I guess I should mention to you,

⁹⁴ Scarlet O'Hara is the main character of *Gone with the Wind*, a famous film based on the book of the same name by Margaret Mitchell in 1926. The film was made in 1939 and is an epic historical romance produced by David O. Selznick. It tells the story of Scarlett O'Hara, the strong-willed daughter of a Georgia plantation owner, from her romantic pursuit of Ashley Wilkes, who is married to Melanie, to her marriage to Rhett Butler. It is set against the backdrop of the American Civil War and the Reconstruction era.

and I'll get back to Ron in a moment, that during this period of time my parents divorced. It was something that was 30 years in coming, and my father wanted me to move back to Richmond and move in with my mother because he didn't like it that I was by myself here in Atlanta. He felt I would be taken advantage of, and my mother felt that if I moved back to Richmond, that I would just be closing the door on any real opportunity that would be presented to me. At one point, when Bobby and I first separated, I called her and I asked her, I told her that I wanted to come home, and I wanted to go into her business with her, and that we could expand the business and I would do the work. I wasn't afraid of the work. I just couldn't see how else I was ever going to get a toe hold anywhere, I didn't have the kinds of funds to start my own business, and she said, "Barbara, you can always come home. Give it a year, and if at the end of that year you still want to come home, you can come home. You can live in the house with me, whatever." Dad and mother were fighting over who should get the house, and Dad said, "If you go home and live with your mother now, I'll give up my claim to the house. We won't argue about it anymore." It was very difficult. But my mother, as usual, was right. I admire my mom a lot because I think she really would have liked me to be home with her. It would have been a good time in her life to have me home with her. Maybe not having three kids under foot but having me there, and she gave me wonderful advice because by the end of the year, I had made a decision to go into the life insurance business. I had gone to see Gene Oberdorfer, and Gene said, "Barbara, I think you'd be great in the life insurance business," he said, "but let me tell you: if you're going to go in the life insurance business, I wouldn't go with Northwest. I think I'd go with Mass Mutual.⁹⁵ I'd go with Mass Mutual because they are a very successful agency, they're the number one agency in town and there is a reason for that. Go to them, get their training, and in a year, if you want, I'll give you a job here, in my life division," which had always been like a one- or two-person division. Well, gosh, that made me feel pretty good! Now somebody was offering me a job in this new career I picked. Then I went to see Ron Balser. I called Ron for an appointment, he was very businesslike, he told me he could give me 30 minutes at noon one day, and this just further underscored the fact that he was strange, I mean, he didn't even offer to take me to lunch, or have lunch sent up. I mean, you know, he was so businesslike, and kind of a cold fish. So, I went up to his office to see him. His offices were spectacular, I was very impressed, and I already

⁹⁵ Founded in 1851, Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company is an American mutual life insurance company serving five million clients.

knew that Ron was an outstanding businessman, and that he had an excellent reputation. I knew the Balsers well, Roslyn and Meyer. They had been invited to Bobby's and my wedding, and I had seen them over the years at the club many times. They were very close friends of Izzy and Jenny Friedland, I didn't know why. But I did respect him, and when I told him what I thought I wanted to do he asked me a couple of questions and he got real enthusiastic about my coming into the life insurance business. He said, "I think this is a good idea," I never knew he had this much personality, Ruth. I mean I never knew he could be animated. He said, "I'm going to call my good friend **Ken Frye**, he's a young man and he's going to be made general agent of the Mass Mutual Agency, and it's right here in the building, and I think you ought to go down and interview with him." and I said, "Oh, I couldn't go with Mass Mutual, you and your father are already with Mass Mutual, and you know everybody in town that I know. At least if I went with another agency maybe I could sell insurance on their children, but I couldn't compete against you!" And he said, "Barbara, you haven't met your best clients, so don't let that worry you," he said, "you have not met the people you are going to sell to," and I thought that sounded very wise and it was what I wanted to hear. So, I went downstairs and I met Ken Frye, and he was so different than John Law, I always describe Ken as saying that he held me with a velvet fist, you know, he said, "Look, you should interview with a lot of agencies because we think we're the best, we think we have the most to offer, and if you go somewhere else we haven't lost anything because we never had you." And I liked everything he had to say.

Ruth: You had a lot of people rooting for you.

Barbara: I really did! So, I went through their interview process and they made me an offer. At the same time, I had been volunteer with B'nai B'rith Women for so many years. I had bought a program called Operation Stork here to Atlanta, and gotten **Charlotte Wilen** to take that under her wing as part of the B'nai B'rith Women volunteer program, and Charlotte is still involved in prenatal care to this day. That's what that program was all about. I got very involved with the March of Dimes⁹⁶ because the program was co-sponsored by B'nai B'rith Women and the March of Dimes, the National Foundation March of Dimes. I met an outstanding woman who was the head of their volunteer services, and at this very moment I cannot think of her name. Very dramatic New Yorker, who's just a stunning woman, and fabulous. Very dynamic woman, she

⁹⁶ March of Dimes is a United States nonprofit organization that works to improve the health of mothers and babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality.

made Charlotte look like Charlotte should be eating Pablum.⁹⁷ I mean this woman was fabulous, tough and very outspoken, very handsome, very tall, very dramatic, and she was thinking of retiring and she was very fond of me. She knew I needed to work, and she recommended me to be her replacement, which would have meant my moving to New York with three children. Agencies don't pay very much to their help, and I would not have made very much money. A lot more than I would have made, twice more than I would have made at the bank, but that wasn't enough money to go and live in New York, and I was kind of vacillating back and forth. Then the National Foundation [March of Dimes] said that they would create a job here in Atlanta for me for almost as much money, and I would travel with that job. It was as much money as I thought I could make in my initial year selling life insurance, and I felt, well, this at least starts to reverse the process of so much of my equity that I had built up in the house was fast going out the door. It was not really going to be enough to support the children and myself, but at least, it would be a better step. I was really leaning towards taking it, because it was a salary, where life insurance was a commission, and I didn't know if I could make it. To make a long story short, Ken Frye called me one night in June, Barton had just been *bar mitzvah*-ed, and he told me he was going on vacation, and had I made up my mind about what I was going to do. I said, "Well, I'm leaning to the National Foundation." He said . . . it was the best sales job anybody's ever done on me, I think. He said, "Look Barbara, I can well understand the security that you're looking at," he said, "but you will never make much more money than what they're going to pay you when you first go there," he said, "I just know in my bones you're going to make a success in the life insurance business." I was still working at the bank, and he said, "Give it a chance. Give it six months," he said, "at the end of that time, or at the end of the year, if you're still not doing well, you can always go to the National Foundation," he said, "but I think it would just be such a mistake," he said, "I really think you've got it." He didn't offer me more money, or try to put the screws to me, you know, to go into the industry, and I don't know, I like a challenge and I am a gambler, so I signed a contract to go with Massachusetts Mutual. Or I agreed to sign a contract. In the beginning of July, I guess it was July Fourth. The week of July Fourth I started with Mass Mutual in my training. Now I must very quickly turn to the romance side of my life, and that's to tell you that I had been dating Jerry Rafshoon for about six or eight months, and it was a very

⁹⁷ Pablum is a processed cereal for infants originally marketed by the Mead Johnson Company in 1931. In a broader sense, the word can also refer to something that is bland, mushy, unappetizing, or infantile.

exciting time. The country was obviously turning to Jimmy Carter. It was almost a predetermined fact that he would win the convention, and the convention was the first week of July in New York. Jerry Rafshoon who had orchestrated all the television, radio spots and the whole PR side of the campaign that had sold Jimmy Carter to the American public was going to the campaign, and he thought I should come to the campaign, the convention with him. He was going to the convention he wanted me to come to the convention with him, and I couldn't believe that I couldn't go. But I couldn't go, because I had to start this new career. Timing is everything in life. It was the end of my relationship with Jerry. Not because I didn't go to the convention, but because he was entering another plateau that was taking him to national acclaim, and to anything that was far away from a woman with three children, who was trying to find a secure path for herself. After all, he had divorced his wife with four children, to leave that being tied down feeling, and my children were very young. My children were three and nine and twelve, or maybe by this time four and ten and thirteen. Again, I entered a rather lonely, dismal time in my life because I was entering an industry I didn't know anything about, my class was five people: me and four guys who were fresh out of University of Georgia.⁹⁸ I was 35 I guess or 36 and scared to death again. Wondering if I could do this, and just really poured my whole heart, soul, everything into learning this business. I signed my contract after my couple of weeks in school, and began my life in earnest as an agent of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company. I was not in the top five new producers in the country that year, but I did very well. The life insurance industry measures production from January 1 to December 31. I wasn't on the street until August, so I didn't have a full year of production to weigh anything by, but I did very well. There's like a draw that is given to you if you qualify, or it was given to you at that time in the insurance industry, and the draw was not against anything that you had to pay back, so long as you kept up a certain minimum production that you had agreed to when you first joined the agency, you got this additional . . . it was a decreasing amount each month that was to make up for your first year, as your first year's commissions started pouring in. I made quite a few good sales to people who had been previous customers at the bank, and I kept gaining confidence and I felt that the most important thing for me to do was to get very professional as quick as I could because I could see that it was very hard for people to take me seriously, people who had known

⁹⁸ The University of Georgia, founded in 1785, also referred to as UGA or simply Georgia, is an American public research university in the city of Athens in the U.S. state of Georgia.

me for a long time to take me seriously. They admired what I was doing, but everybody goes into a life insurance business at one time, I know they have such a high fail ratio, and I don't think people really thought that I would really stick with it. I felt that people were tolerant, but I didn't really feel that they were taking my advice seriously, and I was very serious. I really believed that life insurance was a great purchase, and I wanted people to buy because it was right for them, and I knew why it was right for them, and I wanted to be able to explain it better. I took every course I possibly could to learn as much as I could about life insurance. In the fall of that year I was a commissioner, I was an ADL commissioner at that time. I really didn't have much money, but I really felt like I needed to get away. I had been in this pressure cooker for a couple of years, with my marriage coming down around my ears, and then getting into a new job and then a new industry, and I was doing pretty well. In November, I guess it was 1976, there was a National Commission Meeting, and I was on the National Commission and I wanted to go, and **Judy and Jerry Dubroerk** who had been friends of mine for a very long time were going up to the meeting and they encouraged me to go. They also encouraged me because they wanted me to meet some friend of theirs, and I wasn't dating a soul. I thought that that might be fun. So, I went to New York, and I had a lot of wonderful things happen to me. I might say before going back, just going back just a little bit, I think the relationship that I had with Jerry was a really good one for my psyche. It was a very free flowing, very easy relationship. Not a lot of demands, nothing much expected from each other except to be respectful and nice to one another, which we were. We didn't argue, we got along, we had a good time. He's a very, very bright man. We had a lot of intellectual and challenging conversations. I felt I grew a lot as a person, and I began to see myself as a very loving, very giving person. I just discovered there was a whole lot of stuff out there that I never knew existed because I had never been single as an adult before. I went to New York, and someone introduced me to a friend of theirs who was extremely attractive, and extremely well off. He had his driver come and pick me up in his, whatever it was, and took me to some private club for a drink, and he was very attractive. I can't tell you what his name was, but at any rate, he told me that it was a shame that I lived in Atlanta, he lived in New York, and it was too far away. But he certainly enjoyed being with me, and I with him. Then I was introduced to this friend of Jerry and Judy's who was the chairman of the National Commission of the Anti-Defamation League and his name was **Maxwell Greenberg**. He was from Los Angeles, and he was an attorney. Extremely bright, and a nice-looking man, over six feet tall. These are things my

mother would have thought were important: nice-looking man over six feet tall. When I first saw him at a distance, that's because he was conducting a meeting, I thought, oh, he's quite a bit older than I, I don't know why Judy and Jerry would think I would be interested in him. But he gave a very nice talk, and afterward Jerry and Judy introduced me, and it was one of those scary things that ought to be like in a movie. Maxwell took my hand and looked deep into my eyes, he had very piercing blue eyes, and I knew immediately that we were going to know each other very well. I think he was going to Europe or somewhere the next day, Israel on a mission, and we spent a good part of the evening together, and he just kind of swept me off my feet, and he called me every night from wherever he was in Europe and in Israel. I don't know if he sent flowers or if he didn't send flowers, I don't remember, but it was really quite thrilling.

Ruth: I think everyone should have that experience.

Barbara: I kind of, “wow!” I felt. The nice thing that happened to me, and I know I'm going into all this infinitesimal little detail, but . . .

Ruth: No, I'm glad you are.

Barbara: . . . these are important things, I think, that happen, particularly in women's lives, because I think we suffer differently than men. There were a lot of little things that helped me to become whole again, that helped me become a winner again. I was a defeated person who allowed a lot of things to happen to myself, and all these little things kind of helped me realize that different people value different things in me, and that I was a person of great value. At any rate, I stayed in New York over the weekend, I ended up seeing a young man that I had dated through college, and by happenstance we ran into old friends that I had not seen since college, and all of that was so wonderful. It was nostalgic. After the meetings were over, I stayed at the apartment of a girlfriend who had been another close college buddy, and my dear friend Irene Steinberg, whom I think I mentioned earlier in the tapes—I roomed with her in college, we had grown up together in Richmond—came up, and the three of us spent the weekend together. You know, just promenading together down 5th Avenue having a wonderful time. The last day we were there, we said good-bye to Allison, Irene and I were walking along 5th Avenue, and I was feeling like about \$5,000,000. I was in a new career, I was taking care of myself, there were lots of attractive men in the world, my kids were doing as well as could possibly be expected, I had them in a Jewish Day School. I wasn't uncomfortable about allowing the community to support my children in that school, I had done for the community what I could, and I would again, and

my mother was ok, you know, and everything was alright. We were walking down the street and an actor, what was his name, Barry Newman⁹⁹ came along walking in the opposite direction and caught my eye, and after we had walked about a block or two, someone walked up next to me and slipped his arm through mine, and it was Barry Newman. He walked along several blocks with Irene and me, and he was just chit chatting away. Irene kept looking at me, and she kept saying, it never changes, it never changes, you know. Somehow, different men seem to be attracted. I think we were going to the Russian Tea Room, and we walked over to the Russian Tea Room and he walked with us, and he said "could we get together for dinner tonight?" And I was thinking about it. I mean, here I was feeling like Wonder Woman, that I could do anything, maybe I would just do that, and Irene said, "Oh no, she can't do that we're catching a plane home in just a little while! She can't do that," and he said, "Oh well." and he left, and that was it. It was probably just as well, but I looked at Irene and I said, "This is my life! This is my life, don't do these things to me!" It really made me feel good. It probably made me feel much better that I didn't stay, that was a chapter left unread and left to the imagination.

Ruth: You graduated.

Barbara: I graduated. I went home, and Maxwell Greenberg came into my life, and Max was just what the doctor ordered. A very wise, very, very well educated man, dedicated to many of the same Jewish causes that I was dedicated to. Fun loving, free thinking, wise beyond, in many things. Foolish in others, but wise in many things that I needed someone to be wise in. Most of all, I think Max understood that I was still a wounded bird and that I needed to get on my feet, and take hold of my life, and that I was really in a pitched battle to do that. One of the financial decisions that I had made when I went into the insurance business was to assess how much money I thought I could make, and how long my money could hold out, and I figured I had about 18 months. That if I wasn't fully self-supporting at the end of 18 months, my money would be gone and then I would really . . . I don't know what I was going to do. I couldn't deal with what I was going to do, I just could only think about that I had to make it, and I think Max understood that. He also understood my need to do it on my own.

<interruption from a knock on the door, interview pauses, interview resumes>

Barbara: I don't want to . . . I fear that I will sound typically female . . .

⁹⁹ Barry Foster Newman is an American actor of stage, screen and television known for his portrayal of Kowalski in *Vanishing Point*, and for his title role in the 1970's television series *Petrocelli*.

Ruth: What's wrong with that?

Barbara: . . . in the worst sense, meaning that without a man in my life I'm not okay. I think people, men and women, need mentors. I have always needed one, at least. I can only speak for myself, I guess. I had used up my female mentors, there were no mentors who could help me with this step in my life. My mother had stayed in a miserable marriage for 30 years. My mother still believed, and believed until she died, that if she had a romance in her life that this was her full measure, and she was one of the most capable, intelligent women I have ever known. I didn't want that to be the full measure, and I didn't know any women who had made the step from being housewife to successful career person. I didn't know where to go for that help, and I really feel that Max came into my life at just the right moment, and helped me through that next step. To struggle, to do the deed, to do what had to be done, which meant working six and seven days a week, and 12 and 14 hour days. I did that. Fortunately, he was a workaholic and he lived miles and miles away, 3,000 miles away. I would see him once or twice a month. It was very comforting to feel that I was loved and I was cared about and adored, and not a day went by that I didn't hear from him, at all hours of the day and night because of the time difference.

Ruth: Where was he living?

Barbara: He lived in LA, in Los Angeles [California], his home was in Beverly Hills [California], and his practice was in Los Angeles, he got a large firm, [a] law firm. By the way, he represented Joan Carson, Joan . . . or, Linda Carson,¹⁰⁰ [in] her divorce against Johnny Carson.¹⁰¹

Ruth: Hard to keep score.

Barbara: Yes, but the one who got the big settlement. Very smart attorney. There was never any serious consideration that Max and I would be a "forever after" relationship. He was an older man, probably in his late fifties, or middle fifties. He was about 18 to 20 years older than I, had reared a family. He was still married, legally separated in the state of California which is tantamount to divorce. It's just a big rigmarole to go through and finish getting the divorce. He ultimately did divorce, as a matter of fact. I couldn't see myself moving to California, and he couldn't see himself here, and he didn't want to start all over again with a young family. It was a very unique relationship. I got to go to California fairly often. Once in a while, I would take the

¹⁰⁰ This is probably referring to Joanne Copeland, Johnny Carson's second wife.

¹⁰¹ John William Carson was an American television host, comedian, writer, and producer. He is best known as the host of The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.

children, and they would get to visit their father. Bobby and I were having a fairly friendly relationship. He would sometimes pick me up at the airport when I would come in to visit Max and drop me off. It was peculiar, I guess, but it worked fine. The other thing is that Max had really emphasized professionalism a lot, and he was very interested in my progress. It was almost more like father-daughter than it was lovers. He would introduce me to people as, "This is Barbara Friedland, who is a very successful life insurance agent." So, he put this title, you know, and I became a person other than Bobby Friedland's ex-wife, which is the way I was often introduced. Or Laura, Jon, or Barton's mother, which I was very often introduced [as]. I became this other person. I just loved being with him. There was access to the kinds of people I was used to, the kinds of circles I was used to moving in, and meeting new people, which I'm real good at and I enjoy doing. It was a good maybe six, eight, ten months for me. Then, my business was taking off, and I could see that I was going to make my goal, that I was going to get there. Max had always said from the first time we spent any time together, he said, "You know, the time will come when you won't want to see me anymore," he said, "I'm much too old for you and the time will come when we'll just be good friends." I thought that was such a silly thing to say but I could see he was a very wise man in many ways. Sure enough, after about six or eight months or so of our seeing each other, I came to this feeling that it really was a dead-end road and that I'm a goal oriented person. I just couldn't see continuing this coast to coast . . . it was tiring, hard . . . I was spending time away from my children, and I was without someone here to take places and do things with because I was emotionally tied to him. I guess somewhere in that interim, while I was seeing Max, I'm sure I went out with people occasionally. One person I went out with had never married, and he's an attractive man, and very comfortable, more than very comfortable, and he would come and pick me up in a different car every time we went out. We went out to dinner a number of times and one night he explained it all to me, and this was the explanation of what it all is: he explained to me that he was aware of me from the time I had first moved to Atlanta, and that he thought I was very attractive, and now that he'd gotten to know me he thought I was very bright and he really admired me, I had a lot of guts . . . I just have to say as an aside: I thought, what else do you do? I don't understand why so many people have said to me, "I admire you," or, "You're so brave," or, "You're so strong." If you've got to earn a living for your family, what else do you do? I mean, you can't do it by going and sitting in a corner and sucking your thumb! I was doing what I had to do.

Ruth: Some of us do it better than others.

Barbara: So, this gentleman said, "I really like you" and he said, "You're very attractive, very bright, I admire what you're doing," he said, "but nobody's going to marry you." He said, "If you're thinking that that's going to happen to you, it isn't going to happen, Barbara," he said, "because nobody needs three young kids. You have three young children, you are rearing a family, and unless somebody is really desperate for a family, they're really not going to be interested in you." He said, "I'm not trying to be mean, I'm just telling you the way I see it." I really got depressed. I didn't want to get married for someone to take care of me, but I did want to have a mate, And I went into my first serious depression, I guess, from the time that I had decided to get a divorce. I kind of went to the bottom of that depression. I wasn't afraid this time. I was afraid the first time I had gone through the depression, I really fought it, but I went with this one, because I knew it would come to a bottom and I would come back. What emerged from that feeling was, I really wasn't going anywhere with Max Greenberg, and that I had devoted a lot of energy to him and he to me, and that from that time forward I felt I was going to be giving a lot more than I was getting. I really liked Max and I wanted him to be my friend. I wanted to start concentrating on building a new life for myself in Atlanta. I had run away long enough. So, I brought that to an end, and at the same time, I made up my mind that I was not going to wait for the phone to ring. That if I wanted to go somewhere, I was going to go. I was going to go by myself, or I would pick up the phone and I would call a girlfriend, or I would pick up the phone if I knew a man that I wanted to go with, and I would call him and I would ask him to go with me. That's what I decided I would do. I didn't have much money, but I did buy season tickets to a couple of . . . maybe, like, the theater downstairs at the Alliance, and a couple of things like that, and I started going and doing what I wanted to do when I was ready to do it. At the same time, my very dear friend Dick Lehrman, with whom I was teaching a confirmation class at Temple Sinai, said to me one evening, "Barbara," it was after confirmation class one evening, and we were having a cup of coffee at the pancake house or something, and he said, "Barbara, I don't want us to be sitting here 10 years from now looking at each other and saying, I'm lonely. We need to do something about this situation," and he said, "I'm going to make some changes in my life, and I think you ought to try to do the same. You are a tough lady to approach." He says, "You're attractive, drive that darn Mercedes, you're making money in the insurance business, it's obvious to everybody who knows you that you're going to make it now," because I'd been in the

business a maybe a year and a half at this point. He said, "You're prominent in lots of things, and men don't feel confident in approaching you. You frighten them." I thought, well, that's Dick. Then a week or two goes by and Morty Tauber, who's my accountant, sits me down and has the same story with me. He says, "You know, I know a lot of guys who would like to call you, but they're afraid to call you because you're so unapproachable, you're so cool, you're so aloof." Alright, I thought about that a little while. I'm going great guns and taking care of myself, my business is picking up, and Dick calls one night . . . and I might add; the way Ron and Meyer Balser figured in this year and a half or so of my life, was that whenever I would run into a client and they would be Ron's or Meyer's client, and I would call them and tell them, "I ran into **Ruth Zuchierman** today, and I think she's a good prospect for some more life insurance, but when we talked she told me she was your client." Without fail, they always would say to me, "Honey, you go sell her. You go do it." You may not know a lot about this business, but people don't give away clients easily. If you're an established agent and you have a client, and a new agent or another agent wants to sell your client, even if you go so far as to allow them to do that, you always demand a piece of the commission. Now, I know the cases I was selling were not big cases, and I know Meyer and Ron were making very good money, and it's easy maybe for someone to judge that as being so what's the big deal? I'm telling you, it's significant. It told me something about who the Balsers are. Then Ron and I would occasionally have lunch together, business lunch, talking about a client. He would say to me, well, if I ever call in and say, "Bruce Torry wants to buy some life insurance," he would say, "Well why don't I give you their file. Why don't you just handle them from here on out." It was more than generosity, I came to understand, because Ron was really moving away from personal insurance and moving exclusively toward the area of corporate life insurance, corporate owned life insurance.¹⁰² So, it was a good situation for him as well. Anyhow, Dick Lehrmen called one night, and there had been this rash of divorces in our synagogue, in our temple, and he said, "Barbara, I'm having a group of people over, and we're going to talk about what we can do for one another as divorced and as single people," because there were a couple of widows and widowers in the group too. Dick had about a dozen people over to his little cottage, and Ron Balser was there and I was there. Now I have this speech ringing in my ears from Dick, and from Woody, about how I have

¹⁰² Corporate-owned life insurance is life insurance on employees' lives that is owned by the employer, with benefits payable either to the employer or directly to the employee's families.

to be more outgoing, and the first one to speak, and I've got to learn to do that, so people won't think I'm so standoffish. Jerrie Wyman, who later was to become Jerri Lehrman, spoke up and said, "You know, there are some of us who have our children every weekend." Oh, this was in response to some of the men saying that sometimes they're feeling very lonely. They miss their children, because they're not allowed to see their children every weekend, and Jerrie said, "Well, there are some of us on the other side. There are some of us who have our children seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, and if you would like companionship, our children would love to be around a lonely daddy. My children," she was speaking for herself, "my children would love to be around a lonely daddy so, please feel free." Then Ron said something about missing his children, which was music to my ears, hearing any of this, because my children's father didn't seem to miss them that terribly, or if he did he was certainly coping with it in an interesting way.

Ruth: How many children did Ron have?

Barbara: I thought that he had three children about the same family pattern as mine, two boys and a girl, and about the same ages. So, we had a coffee break and I was pouring myself a cup of coffee, and I was standing next to Ron, and I gathered all my courage, because I didn't want him to think I was trying to come on to him or anything, and I said, "Ron, my situation is just like Jerrie's. I have my children all the time, and I really . . . I feel really closed in sometimes on weekends, because I feel like I want to talk to another adult, so anytime that you, with your children or without your children, that you would like to get together", I said, "I think our children are about the same ages, and the same sex, so it would be great for them to get together and be together. Please feel free to call me, I'd be delighted to share weekends with you, or time on weekends with you." Ruth, he gave me a look that was like, what are you talking about? What a ridiculous thing to say! I mean, that's what the look looked like. I just, I wanted to die. I thought, he probably thinks I'm trying to attract him in some way, or trying to make a date with him, and I was so embarrassed. Ron Balsler would be the last person on earth that I would try to make a date with. I mean, obviously, he was weird. I didn't even know if he liked girls, because here we had these lunches together, and we'd seen each other, we were in the same building together for over a year and he hadn't looked at me twice. I always thought he was a little strange, and now he thinks I'm trying to make a move for him, you know, so I was really disturbed.

Ruth: At this point we're going to have to stop because we've run out of tape.

<End Tape 3, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 4, Side 1>

Ruth: [This is tape four of a 90-minute taped interview with Barbara Balser as told to Ruth Zuckerman for the Jewish Women of Achievement Oral History Project December 9, 1988.] We're going to leave off at the point where you met Ron and you thought him strange at the time.

Barbara: Well, just to finish out that evening, that episode: I was feeling somewhat uncomfortable about his interpretation of my, I thought very warm and friendly, gesture, and a few minutes later he walked over to me and he said, "Have you had dinner yet?" this is about 9:00 or 10:00, 9:30 I guess, in the evening. Of course I had had dinner, I had had dinner with my children at a normal dinner hour. I said, "Yes," I thought it was a test question or something, you know, "Yes, I've had dinner." He said, "Oh, I thought maybe when this meeting was over you'd like to go and have something to eat with me." I said, "No, but I'll go for a cup of coffee," and we went to a little place that's no longer in business here. The name of it was Scarboro's, in Buckhead. It was a little teeny neighborhood restaurant, and Ron talked at length about his children. We talked a little bit about business, and it was an introduction to a side of him that I had not seen before. I can't say it was a terrific time together, it was just different than any time he had had together in the past. He was leaving for Israel on an insurance leaders mission. The idea was that chief executive officers, with some of the leading life insurance carriers in the United States had been invited by a group of Jewish leaders, who were interested in seeing these insurance companies purchase bonds for the state of Israel. He was going to do that the next day, or a few days later, so that was kind of that. I guess about two weeks went by, and I came in late one evening, suffering from a really bad cold. Frankly, I think I had come in that night from attending the initial meeting for people from Temple Sinai who had an interest in going on a trip to Israel with our Rabbi, Rabbi Dick Lehrman. A blessed memory. I couldn't believe that I had gone to that meeting. I didn't know how I was going to afford to go to Israel, but I really wanted to go. When I came in there was a message for me that Ron Balser had called, and it was only about 10:00, so I called Ron and he was asleep. I was very embarrassed. Again, I felt I had done the wrong thing, I had over reacted. He said very sleepily, "Oh, no it's fine, I just got in from Israel and I'm a little groggy. Would you like to go out Thursday night?" I was really quite taken aback and I said, "Thursday night is Thanksgiving," and again I think my response . . . I was so

immersed in my family, and I think my response was probably fairly similar to when he asked me if I had had dinner or not, it was like, don't you know any better? Don't you know that Thursday is Thanksgiving, and of course I would be with my children? And he said, "Oh ok, yes I know it's Thanksgiving, how about Friday?" Well I had this awful cold, and I really didn't know, but I said, "Okay." I can't say that I was looking forward to that Friday evening with great anticipation, but the funniest thing, Ruth, is that as the week wore on, I started to get very excited about going out with Ron on Friday night, and I really can't tell you why. I liked him, I thought he was a nice man, and I thought he was an excellent business man, and you know I thought highly of him, but I didn't see how we ever had anything to really talk about, and I didn't think of him as being an attractive man. He was just a person. Friday night came, and he came to pick me up, and we went to a little place in Roswell called The Lodge. We had a very nice dinner, but what was more important, is we had a really incredible exchange, and I found myself in an atmosphere where I felt I could say anything and it was okay. That he was truly interested in me, he was truly interested in what I had to say, truly interested in my innermost thoughts, finding me fascinating, which I thought was wonderful! Without being condescending in any way, or without trying to, well, I'll use the old fashion expression: without trying to snow me with lots of meaningless nonsense. It was an exceptionally romantic evening. By the time we were ready to leave the restaurant, I had gone so far as to confide in Ron how disappointed I was with my accomplishments in life, because I truly felt—particularly then, youth is a wonderful thing—I truly felt that I had greatness within me, I felt that I had it within me to contribute to humanity all the things that a Golda Meir¹⁰³ or an Eleanor Roosevelt¹⁰⁴ had done, and that I hadn't done it, and I wasn't going to do it, and I was very disappointed in myself. I felt I wasn't living up to my potential. And when I said those things about myself, and when I compared myself to these living legends, he didn't laugh. He was very sensitive, and he listened, and he just absorbed it and didn't say anything banal back, you know, like "Oh, you'd be better," you know. He just absorbed it, and he understood what I was feeling. At least he seemed to understand, and I had never been able to talk to a man in such an open and honest way, and share so much of my inner hopes, and

¹⁰³ Golda Meir (1898-1978) was an Israeli teacher, politician and the fourth Prime Minister of Israel.

¹⁰⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) was the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President of the United States from 1933 to 1945. She supported the New Deal policies of her husband and became an advocate for civil rights. After her husband's death in 1945, Eleanor continued to be an international author, speaker and politician and activist.

dreams, and thoughts in such a trusting environment. I didn't feel afraid to tell him those very personal feelings that I had. As we turned to go out of the restaurant, we were walking down the stairs, and Ron turned and kissed me.

Ruth: Oh, how nice, how romantic.

Barbara: And I think I literally saw stars, and he told me that evening that I could do exactly as I wished, but that he had two commitments. One I think had to do with a blind date coming up the next weekend that he had committed to. I think, in fact, it was **Beverlee Soloff Sheer's** cousin, or niece, that he had promised to escort to a wedding or she was in a wedding and after he was taking her out, and that he had also made plans to go away over the upcoming Christmas holidays. This was Thanksgiving. But that other than that, he had no intentions of seeing anyone else, and I could do whatever I wanted but that's what he was going to do. He was making a commitment. Of course, I didn't believe a word of it.

Ruth: Just what every woman dreams of in a man.

Barbara: It was just too good to be true. Here was this sweet, dear, kind man who was suddenly very attractive to me, because in our conversation that evening he just revealed this whole warm, funny, dear, communicative side of his personality that I never knew was there.

Ruth: Barbara at this point we're going to pause and I'll rewind the tape to some degree to see if it's working properly.

Barbara: Good.

<interview pauses, interview resumes>

Barbara: Soon after that, Ron called and invited me to come to his home for dinner, and I really did not know what to expect. He owned a small cottage on Osborne Road,¹⁰⁵ which was certainly not an upscale neighborhood in those days. The cottage was so beautifully and charmingly furnished and decorated. Each little object—and there were so many—each little object was so carefully placed. He had so many beautiful things, fine things. Not glitzy, high tech, instant bachelor pad decorator items, but carefully selected, individual, personal, beautiful paper weights, pieces of art glass, letter openers, oils, lithographs, sculpture. Everything was interesting, everything had such character, and I guess that cottage kind of came to symbolize how I saw Ron, and how I think lots of people see Ron. There was this plain little cottage, in a plain little neighborhood, that nobody would look twice at. But on the inside, there was such

¹⁰⁵ Osborne Road is in the Brookhaven area of the northern part of Atlanta.

incredible beauty, and depth, and that's what knowing Ron has been like. He is an ordinary looking man, and generally fairly reticent, and I don't think that more than a handful of people know that he is absolutely zany, off the wall, has a hysterical sense of humor, loves to play pranks, adores surprising people, is one of the best story tellers I have ever known, is exceedingly bright, and flexible in terms of taking a situation and an event and seeing a link between them and leveraging that into something. He served me the most beautiful meal. I learned something else about Ron. I didn't learn it that evening but I put that evening together. He never told me that the meal had been prepared elsewhere, and that he brought it in and served it. He served the meal as if he had prepared it. Some of which he had, and some of which he had not. Ron happens to be an excellent cook, by the way. But Ron likes very much to create an ambiance, and he would just as soon not distill the intent of the event ambiance by cluttering up your mind with details about how that happened. He would not tell you less than the truth, he wouldn't tell you a lie. He would not say, "I made all of this dinner", but he would not go out of his way to tell you that it came from elsewhere. If one were to say, "Oh, is this delicious," he wouldn't say as many of us would, in a self-effacing way, "oh, I just brought it in from so-and-so's," he would just say, "Thank you." He let that mystique kind of linger on. The next time I recall seeing him really closed the loop for me, in that I fell so madly in love with him, and that has not deviated for one second. It's only been made stronger by all the intervening years. I mentioned that Ron had just come back from Israel. He asked me if I would come over on a Saturday, I guess it was the next Saturday, and help him sort through his slides that he had taken in Israel. I didn't know Ron was a photographer. Not only is he a photographer in that he takes nice pictures, but he's a photographer who sees things that are there and nobody else sees, and that told me something else about Ron, about his sensitivity, about his patience, about the things that give him a payoff in life. You know, as I tell you this, it's really hard for me to talk about that without tearing up. You know I'm an emotional person, and he is just so exceptional, and knowing him has been so very important to everything that has happened to me in the last 10 years.

Ruth: Sounds like a beautiful human being.

Barbara: He is a beautiful human being. Looking at what he saw in Israel, and what he wanted to take away with him was very different than what I had ever seen anybody else take away from Israel.

Ruth: What did he want to take away?

Barbara: The faces of individual people. Not the buildings, not the *kibbutzim*,¹⁰⁶ but the faces of children, and the faces of the *Sabras*,¹⁰⁷ and the faces of the soldiers, and the faces of the *Hasidim*. He captured the most wonderful photograph of a Hassidic¹⁰⁸ walking away from the wall on *Shabbat*¹⁰⁹ with his beautiful fur *shtreimel*¹¹⁰ on. You know, it's a *Shabbat shtreimel*, [and] this huge prayer shawl, and he's whistling, and it's those kinds of pictures that brought the joy and the strength and the sadness of what is Israel to Ron. Well, I looked at these hundreds of pictures, and I just thought this man is the best secret, the best kept secret, I have ever known in my life! Because I knew lots of people who knew Ron, and I knew Ron, but nobody knew Ron. I knew him the way that no one else did, and I didn't want anybody else to know that. It was my best kept secret ever, and he loved me, and I loved him. For months, we literally went out of our way not to be seen in public together. Not to let anybody know that we were seeing each other.

Ruth: Oh, how romantic.

Barbara: Because it was too good to be true and we just wanted to keep it our secret, and we did pretty well with that for a couple of months. In February, I went to Israel for two weeks. I left on a real high in my relationship with Ron, and while I was away, I found out after I came back, he tried to reach me at almost every stop along the way. He did send me flowers at one point, but he wrote to me at every stop, and I never got any of the mail. By the time I was away for two weeks, I really had lost confidence in myself, I guess, and in our relationship to sustain itself, because I felt I had these three children and such a huge financial burden trying to support them, and knowing that Ron had three children about the same age to whom he was totally committed and felt that he wanted to be 100% responsible for financially.

¹⁰⁶ 'Kibbutz' (plural: *kibbutzim*) means 'gathering' or 'clustering' in Hebrew. It is a collective community in Israel traditionally based on agriculture. They began as utopian communities that combined socialism and Zionism.

¹⁰⁷ A *Sabra* is an informal-turned-formal term that refers to any Jew born on Israeli territory. The term first appeared in the 1930s to refer to a Jew who had been born in the land of Israel.

¹⁰⁸ Hasidic Judaism (also sometimes called *Chasidim* (From the Hebrew word "Chasid" meaning "pious")) is a Jewish mystical movement that was founded in eighteenth century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. It promotes spirituality through the popularization and internalization of Jewish mysticism as the fundamental aspect of the faith.

¹⁰⁹ *Shabbat* (Hebrew) or *Shabbos* (Yiddish) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. *Shabbat* observance entails refraining from work activities, often with great rigor, and engaging in restful activities to honor the day. *Shabbat* begins at sundown on Friday night and is ushered in by lighting candles and reciting a blessing. It is closed the following evening with the recitation of the *havdalah* blessing.

¹¹⁰ A *shtreimel* is a fur hat worn by many married Haredi Jewish men, particularly (although not exclusively) members of Hasidic Judaism, on *Shabbat*, Jewish holidays, and other festive occasions.

Ruth: Did he have custody of the children?

Barbara: He did not have custody of the children, but he saw the children at least one night a week during the week. They would spend the night with him on a school night, and I think it was then every other weekend. But if the children were available, he often took the children whenever he could get them, because he enjoyed seeing them. They were all in private school and they were all young. I think the oldest was 14, and the financial burden was going to be tremendous, and Ron had gone into terrific debt like so many people had in Atlanta in the early 1970's when they invested so heavily in real estate, and all the deals went belly up. Ron and his partner, Hank McCamish decided that they would not go bankrupt. That they would not walk away from any of these deals and they had debt service that was going to carry Ron well into the 1980's and he had pledged all of his renewals at the bank, and he was really stretched financially. That's why he was living in this little cottage. He had been kind of depressed since his divorce, and his business was just so-so because he wasn't working hard on it, and he really didn't feel like working hard on it. I just felt with all these burdens and obstacles that probably my being away for two weeks he probably rethought it and wasn't so committed to me. Happily, I was wrong, and I'm so pleased that I went to Israel, and had those two weeks with good friends, most of the people. There were 14 of us on our trip from Temple Sinai. My dear friends Arlene and Bruce Turry, friends **Barbara and Richard Clouse**, of course I knew everyone else on the trip as well, and my dear, dear friend Dick Lehrman, who is no longer with us. I had lots of remarkable experiences on that trip. I think for me, aside from the emotional joy and what you feel, which is so personal when you go to the wall, that overwhelming feeling of a tie with thousands and thousands of years. That feeling of responsibility and excitement, that you are going to be the link to the next generation. The other thing that happened for us, that was just incredible on that trip was, at that time, Israel had not given the Sinai¹¹¹ back yet to Egypt, and our bus went into the Sinai, where there are no roads, and we traveled through *wadis*,¹¹² and we stopped and used natural facilities with the group of Bedouin,¹¹³ and then we traveled on to a

¹¹¹ Egypt's Sinai Peninsula is a sparsely populated desert region between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. On its southern tip, Sharm el-Sheikh resort is a base for diving and snorkeling around the reefs of Ras Mohammed National Park. Inland, 6th-century St. Catherine's Monastery is near biblical Mount Sinai, where the 2,285m summit is renowned for its sunrise views.

¹¹² Wadi is the Arabic and Hebrew term traditionally referring to a valley. In some instances, it may refer to a dry riverbed that contains water only during times of heavy rain.

¹¹³ The Bedouin are a grouping of nomadic Arab peoples who have historically inhabited the desert regions in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and the Levant.

place called the Monastery of Santa Catarina¹¹⁴ which is at the foot of Jebel Musa which is the famed Mount Sinai.¹¹⁵ Probably isn't really, but that's where the Coptic sect¹¹⁶ believes that Moses was delivered the ten commandments. It is the oldest monastery in the world. In the third century after the birth of Jesus, I believe a young woman by the name of Catarina thought that she saw a burning bush, and thought that she heard the voice of Moses, and so this monastery was erected there and it has been peopled by Ethiopians all these centuries, and it houses one of the wonders of the world. I'm sure you've seen photographs, Ripley's Believe It or Not,¹¹⁷ or something. Every monk that has died in monastery has been buried within the walls, and because there's a very small cemetery, after a period of time the bones are disinterred and the skulls are put in one room, and the rest of the skeleton is put in another. Those who are believers believe that the day will come when Jesus will return, and the bones will be joined and put together, and that's where, you know, "Them bones, them bones, them dry bones,"¹¹⁸ that's where that comes from. At any rate, we spent one night there, arising at 3:00 in the morning, and with the aid of a young Arab, we climbed to the top of Jebel Musa, which is called the dome of the world, the roof of the world, And I'm in pretty good shape physically, I was then, and I was the first of our party to get to the top. It was about a three-and-a-half-hour climb. It was remarkable. I was astonished and saddened that a number of our friends couldn't make the climb. They started, but turned back, and this was 11 years ago so, we were all pretty young, and I was kind of surprised. Anyway, on the way down, my dear friend Dick Larman started complaining of a back ache, and I gave him a very hard time, because I told him he needed to get more exercise, and he complained bitterly of this back ache all the way home. Of course, when he got home he found out that he had this terrible growth in his spine for which he was operated. We were all so excited when we heard that the surgery was successful, and they got it all, and then Jerrie called me. He

¹¹⁴ Saint Catherine's Monastery, officially "Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai", lies on the Sinai Peninsula, at the mouth of a gorge at the foot of Mount Sinai, near the town of Saint Catherine, Egypt.

¹¹⁵ Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb or Jebel Musa, is a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt that is a possible location of the biblical Mount Sinai, which is considered a holy site by the Abrahamic religions.

¹¹⁶ The Copts are an ethnoreligious group indigenous to North Africa who primarily inhabit the area of modern Egypt, where they are the largest Christian denomination in the country.

¹¹⁷ Ripley's Believe It or Not! is an American franchise, founded by Robert Ripley, which deals in bizarre events and items so strange and unusual that readers might question the claims.

¹¹⁸ "Dem Bones" (also called "Dry Bones" and "Dem Dry Bones") is a spiritual song. The melody was composed by author and songwriter James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938). Some sources also credit his brother, J Rosomond Johnson. First recorded by The Famous Myers Jubilee Singers in 1928. The lyrics are inspired by *Ezekiel 37:1-14* where the prophet Ezekiel visits the "Valley of Dry Bones" and prophesies that they will one day be resurrected at God's command, picturing the national resurrection of Israel.

ultimately married the Jerrie that I spoke of earlier, she was **Jerrie Ryman**, the mother of the children who never got a break. Jerrie called me while Dick was convalescing, and told me that he wanted to talk to me, and he told me that they had not gotten all of the cancer, and that it was not curable. That was the beginning of the end of a terrific guy.

Ruth: How old was he at the time?

Barbara: I guess Dick was about 40 when he died and of course, you knew him and you know that he was reduced to being a cripple who was in a wheel chair. He lost all of his beautiful hair which was one of the hardest things for him. He had this gorgeous mane of salt and pepper hair and beard. He was so proud of that. Guess he was not physically an attractive man, and it was his real crowning glory. Dick was a real leader. He helped us become . . . he helped us move from being Jews who were reformed Jews, many of us, I guess, for convenience, or because we just wanted to be less involved, or because we wanted to be more American or more, whatever our reasons. Mostly negative reasons, I think. He helped us move to become much more observant. He became a real mystic. He helped so many of us who had never been involved and committed with anything Jewish before. I'm not speaking for myself personally, but so many of us in the congregation, really become involved. I guess he was kind of the John Kennedy¹¹⁹ of the Rabinic movement in Atlanta, Georgia in the **Sixties and Seventies**. He captured the spirit and the interest of our young people, they became involved in temple. So many adults, parents, became involved *bar mitzvah* because of Dick, *bat mitzvah*. They'd never had that experience. So many people I know learned to read Hebrew because they wanted to participate with him, because he made it seem so special to participate in being Jewish. He led us down another path when he and **Gail**, his first wife, divorced. It created almost an epidemic in our congregation. I think there were a lot of young couples who were unhappy with one another, or restless, or looking for something more, who were at Sinai because they thought maybe Dick would help them find something more, and then I guess when the unthinkable happens to the Rabbi, it's okay if the same is going to happen to you. So, there was this enormous rash of divorces after Dick and Gail divorced, and we all suffered together, and boy he suffered on the *bimah*¹²⁰ every Friday night, every Saturday morning and he really bled in front of the congregation. It was hard, we all

¹¹⁹ John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), commonly known as 'JFK,' was the 35th President of the United States, serving from 1961 until November 22, 1963 when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. He was a Democrat.

¹²⁰ Hebrew for 'platform.' The *bimah* is a raised structure in the synagogue from which the *Torah* is read and from which prayers are led.

suffered together. It was kind of a depressing place to be for a couple of months. Then we went through the experience of a remarriage and a reconstituted family, and he led us all in those directions. Ultimately, he showed us that we all die, too. It was real tough to take. Sinai became a very sad place. It's not been the same for me since he died.

Ruth: You still attend Sinai?

Barbara: I still go to Sinai. I think we have a lovely Rabbi there today.

Ruth: What is his name?

Barbara: His name is **Phillip Kranz**. A very sweet, caring, bright, very warm communicative person. Can't say all those things about Dick Lehrman. Dick Lehrman was not necessarily warm, and he certainly knew how not to communicate when he didn't want to. But there was something so dynamic about Dick, for me. I'm an intellectual snob, and he certainly was one of the brightest guys I've ever known. I don't think I ever attended a meeting or a service that Dick conducted, or took a leadership role in, that I didn't come away challenged. He would say what Judaism had to say about whatever the topic of the day was, and whether you agreed with him or you didn't agree with him, you left thinking about what it means to be Jewish, and whether or not that tenant that he had explored that day was one you would have interpreted in the same way, or if you would have interpreted it differently, and how you would you would enact that in your life. And that to me is what a Rabbi needs to do, to challenge you to think more about being Jewish. Anyhow, the months passed, Ron and I spent a lot of time together. We were able to share a lot in terms of business, and my children seemed to like him very much. I didn't get to spend very much time with his children. He seemed anxious to be with his children alone as much as possible. [He] seemed to want to shield them from getting real involved with someone who may or may not be his life's partner, and then having them disappointed in the event that our relationship didn't ultimately end in marriage. I had an interesting experience with his father one day. I felt that when I went to get on the elevator, this is after Ron and I had been dating about six months or so, and people knew we were dating, I went to get on the elevator to go up to my office one day and I felt that Meyer came to the door of the elevator, looked in, saw me, and chose not to get on the elevator. Meyer and I were on the same floor, we both were Mass Mutual Life Insurance agents. When I got up to my office I called Ron. I'm very sensitive to things like that, and I was very upset, and I said, "you know, the funniest thing just happened: I think your father saw me and chose to avoid me." Meyer had always been so sweet and warm

and friendly. That was about 4:30, 5:00 in the afternoon, and the next morning when I came into the office around 8:00 there was a message for me to call Meyer. I called him and he said, "Meet me in parlor A," which was the slang term for our kitchen on the floor and he said, "I want to talk to you about something." I assumed we had a client to discuss and went back there for a cup of coffee with him, and he was smiling from ear to ear and he told me some interesting gossip or something and then turned to me with this broad smile on his face and he said, "Now honey, when I got home last night, Roslynd said to me, 'why did you not get on the elevator with Barbara today?'" Well, if ever I wished the floor would just open up, that it would swallow me. I couldn't say, "Why did she say that? Where did she get that from?" I understood immediately where she got it from. I told Ron, Ron told his mother, his mother confronted Meyer with it immediately. I learned a very important lesson that day. So, Meyer said, "Now honey, that's ridiculous, because I would never avoid you, but if I were to avoid you, let me tell you why I would avoid you," this is a Southern gentleman. "You know," and this is almost verbatim, he said, "You know, if you had asked me before you married Bobby Friedland, I would have told you you were making a mistake." He said, "But you didn't ask me. I wouldn't expect you to have asked me, but I could have told you you were making a mistake." He said, "As a result I admire you a lot, I admire the way you're keeping your little family together, the way you're taking care of yourself," he said, "but you've got three big problems. Now, Ron asked me what I thought about him marrying Temmie, and Roslyn and I thought it was a wonderful idea. We encouraged him to do that," he said, "But it didn't work out and he's got three big problems." He said, "My son doesn't need three more problems, he's got three big problems of his own." He said, "So honey, I would never avoid you, I'd always say hello to you, but if I were to do that, that's why I would do it." I felt very relieved. I said, "Meyer, do you think Ron and I are going to get married?" He said, "Well, I've been thinking maybe that's what's going to happen." I said, "Oh, don't be silly," I said, "with six children we would have to be out of our minds to think about getting married." I guess that was April or May. By the end of the summer, I was starting to chafe at the relationship. I had spent an awful lot of time with Ron during the year, I had taken a certain amount of time away from my business, and my production showed it. I was taking a certain amount of time away from my children, and I didn't feel good about that because there was nobody else to fill in with them when I wasn't with them. While I was as much, if not more, in love with Ron than ever, I began to realize that probably marriage was just going to be out of

the question because of our mutual financial state at the time, and because we had all these kids, and how do you work that out? It was just too complicated for me to figure out. We would have to buy a new house, I guess, because my condominium would be too small for us, and just all kinds of problems. It just seemed like a lot of problems that we couldn't figure out. I'm very practical and I'm goal oriented, and while I loved Ron and I enjoyed being with him, I felt that ours was not a relationship that you could really modify and you could pull back from, that you were either in the relationship or you weren't, and I was not willing to continue to give that kind of effort and that kind of time to a relationship that was not going to be a focus for the rest of my life. Ron and I often talked about marriage, and we kind of assumed it was something that would happen down the road. Ron wanted to focus on sometime in the Eighties, when he had paid off all of his extraneous debt, and I just took a philosophical view that if we were both still around in the 80's that maybe that was something we would look at. I frankly felt that I probably would remain single because I was very intent on building a business, and really did not want to be dependent on anyone financially or spiritually. I wanted to get on with the business, and devoting all of my energy to that. Ron and I discussed the marriage possibility one evening, and I really felt that he was very hesitant about wanting to make the marriage move, and while I felt it was fraught with lots of challenges, I always have had, and still do have, this super woman view of myself that I can make things happen. Give me the goal and I'll get there somehow. I will figure it out. I'm practical enough to want to know what budgets are and to know what the constraints are but within certain parameters, I just get a gut feel about what my capabilities are, and I felt I could handle whatever was required in making a go of marriage with Ron. Everything, that is, except feeling that he might come into the marriage less than super enthusiastic. That was not something . . . the emotional part of that I could not handle. I think that the one thing that I treasured most about my relationship with Ron, up to that point, was I think it was the first time in my life that I felt I was in a relationship with a man whom I thoroughly adored, who really cherished me, undoubtedly, at least as much, if not more, than the way I felt about him. It was the first time I ever felt so very much love. So, it was with some difficulty one evening that I explained to Ron that I didn't think I'd be seeing him anymore. I suggested that he leave, and he didn't budge. And I said, "Ron, why don't you just go!" you know, I was very emotional, it was upsetting, and he said, "Well, I just didn't quite understand you really meant it." you know, I'd had this conversation with him several times, that I wanted to feel like we were working towards

something, and I did want to feel like we were going to make a commitment to one another to get married. This was August, and I thought, well, you know maybe we can get married over the Christmas school holiday, or maybe the next spring, so that it would be at a time when all the kids could be there, and so on. Ron said, "Ok well, I'll call Dick in the morning," and I said, "Dick who?" you know. "Dick Lehrman." "What for?" He said, "To arrange for the wedding." I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "I think we ought to get married right away," and we did, I think within a week.

Ruth: Oh my.

Barbara: Less than two weeks, I'm sure. The other thing that Ron did, that I thought was just so dear, and so sensitive, is that I had obtained a Jewish divorce, a *gett*, after a lot of begging, and at my own expense, from my former spouse. We were married in a conservative synagogue, and I wanted that marriage to really be over and behind me, and I wanted it to be officially, religiously dissolved. I guess this was on a Sunday that Ron and I decided that we would get married, and the next day he called Rabbi Epstein at the Ahavath Achim Synagogue and arranged to obtain a *gett* for the disillusion of his marriage. It was not required for Dick Lehrman to marry us, but Ron felt that if I thought it was important that he ought to respect that act by doing the same. Again, that tells you something about the man. He never asked me how I felt about it in advance. He did it, because he felt that that was something that was important to me, therefore, he would do the same. I don't think religiously it meant anything to him. He did that out of respect for me and my desires. So, Ron and I were married on August 25, and that 8/25 has been something, that numerology has been something that has played a significant role in our lives. Our telephone number is 237-0825, and lots of things that take numeric codes have that code. My son, Jon David, was *bar mitzvah*-ed a year after we were married and we arranged for it to be on August 25th, which was our first wedding anniversary, and so it helped make a great celebration for both Jon David and for us. Shortly after Ron and I married . . . we had a very private ceremony, with a handful of close friends who were witnesses, and Dick Lehrman had everyone sign the *ketubah*,¹²¹ which was really very nice. **Barbara and Marty Pollack** were with us and **Judith and Elliott Cohen**, Arlene and Bruce Turry our partner, Ron's partner **Hank McKanish**, my mother and my father, Ron's parents, sister and brother and our children.

¹²¹ A *ketubah* is a special type of Jewish prenuptial agreement. It is considered an integral part of a traditional Jewish marriage, and outlines the rights and responsibilities of the groom, in relation to the bride. In modern practice, the *ketubah* has no agreed monetary value, and is never enforced, except in Israel.

Ruth: I'm going to turn the tape at this point.

<End Tape 4, Side 1>

<Begin Tape 4, Side 2>

Barbara: Our honeymoon was an interesting affair. We spent the weekend, we were married on a Friday afternoon, and we spent the weekend in my little condominium with all six children. It was kind of a horror show. They were not anxious to get along, and they didn't. But I think that that commitment to be with our family and make a celebration of it, that has really been the expression of our 10 years together. I must say, I didn't even think about it but so many people commented on it. We recently celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary, and Ron's 50th birthday, which occurred within a few weeks of one another, and we threw a party for lifetime friends and very close family. Dinner was a seated affair, and we worked very hard to seat together people who had something in common. Our table was composed of Ron and myself, and our six children, because I think that's the achievement and the accomplishment that we are most proud of. It apparently made an impression, I might say not only on our children, they were surprised that they weren't seated at a table by themselves. Our children of course are now 25, and 24 and 22 and 21 and 19 and 16, and they were 10 years younger when we got married, so we've come a long way. Three of the boys have graduated from college, one of them is a senior in college. Ginger is a freshman at Holland, and Laura is a junior at the Lovett school.¹²²

Ruth: How do they all get along together?

Barbara: They get along beautifully.

Ruth: How long did it take them to adjust to the fact?

Barbara: Years. Lots of arguing, among themselves, and between Ron and myself. Ron is really not a disciplinarian. It's very difficult for him to do anything or say anything that will have the slightest negative impact on his children. But he does get easily . . . well not easily, but he does get frustrated and angry with the children from time to time, but his expectations of them are minimal and I find people generally preform at whatever level you expect of them. If you expect nothing from them that's pretty much what you'll get. I, on the other hand, am terribly demanding, and I'm not real good at compromise when it comes to values.

Ruth: How would you feel if any of the children were to marry non-Jews?

¹²² A private school in Atlanta founded in 1926 by Eva Edwards Lovett in which progressive education is stressed and where children learn by doing.

Barbara: Well, I hate to say it, but I will be surprised if any of the children marry Jews, and I feel terrible about it. I'm disturbed.

Ruth: Why do you say that?

Barbara: Because none of the boys date Jewish girls. I should take it back, I think Laura, the youngest, will try very hard to marry a Jew, because she knows how important it is to me. It's interesting: I am sure on some level, Ron's children want to please their parents, but it's not high motivator in their lives. It's so astonishing to me because my whole *raison-d'etre*¹²³ was always to make my parents proud, and to do whatever I could to make them happy and make them feel that I had accomplished . . . I had this feeling that my parents had sacrificed a lot for me, and done a lot for me, and I wanted so for them to know what it meant to me that they had given me so many opportunities. I can promise you that Ron and I really sacrificed a lot for our children, and Ruth, it was just a few years ago, we used to have a budget of \$30 for the entire weekend to entertain and feed these six kids, that's all we could afford. So, our big meal out was maybe a place like a Denny's, or a McDonalds, because that's about as far as \$30 would go five or six or seven years ago. Well I guess more years. Eight years ago. So, I'm kind of amazed that the kids are not so aware and so sensitive to . . . because they are nice kids, and they are sensitive kids, why this is just an area that doesn't seem to be important to them. In fact, I really feel that Ron's children particularly, and this is something he and I have discussed openly, I don't know what the genesis is because they didn't grow up in my house, so, it's hard for me to say. But I really feel like Ginger and Jonathan and Dan go out of their way to avoid being Jewish people, and it's painful, very painful, for all of us.

Ruth: Why do you think that is?

Barbara: I just don't know, I really don't know.

Ruth: Let me ask you, do you ever feel overwhelmed by all these roles that you're assuming, or taking?

Barbara: I think I have in the past, I don't feel so today. I think that the fact that I had all these kids at home, I had this great big house . . . Ron and I bought a home after we'd been married about a year. We bought a home that's, I guess, still referred to sometimes as the Kahn Home. We bought a home that belonged to **Max Ed Kahn** and **Ruby Kahn** and the house has an interesting history in that they had three children, two boys and a girl, Jerry, Roger, and Jan. Jerry

¹²³ Raison d'etre is a French phrase meaning "reason to be."

was the eldest, and married the all-American Sandra-Dee-type¹²⁴ sweetheart, **Gail Orenstein**, and they had three children, two boys and a girl, and they died tragically in the **Gator Bowl** fire¹²⁵ 20 . . . lets see, Christmas time, this month, it will be 27 years ago. They were killed, and **I T Kahn's** son, **Jay**, and his wife **Leslie Tourno**, remember **Dr. Tourno** was married to **Hildegard**, that was his daughter. They were killed also in that fire, and so those three babies came to live in the Kahn home. When we looked at that home, David, who was the youngest of the three grandchildren, he was 16, and Mrs. Kahn, who is still alive, Mr. Kahn had died, Ruby was getting up in years and it was just the two of them in this house, and Roger, her youngest son, wanted her to get out of the house. Roger and Ron were very close friends. We were looking for a house that was large enough to accommodate our family, because we didn't know who was going to live with us and who wasn't going to live with us, and we ended up buying this house only because the Kahn's wanted to sell it to us.

Ruth: Is that now the Kahn Home that houses senior citizens?

Barbara: No, no, no, I think that's the Lewis Kahn Home.

Ruth: Oh yes.

Barbara: So, we lived at 3650 Paces Ferry Road, which was a house that was originally started under construction by **Bud Mantler**, when he was married to **Nancy Mantler**, and in the middle of the construction Bud and Nancy got a divorce . . .

Ruth: I'm not surprised.

Barbara: . . . and she became **Nancy Thal**, she married **Aaron Thal** thereafter. I understand the way the story goes that Bud called Ed Kahn one morning and said "I want to show you this house I'm building," and he took Ed over and showed him the house and Ed bought it from Bud. The Kahn's finished the home and lived there for 20 something years. The house was built in the 40's. After we had looked at literally more than a hundred homes, because what we needed was beyond our means, we went out to dinner one night with Roger and the woman he was seeing at that time, who is today his wife, **Lannie**, and we had some small talk, and I was just about to jump out of my skin and finally I said, "Roger, I really like your mother's house," and he said,

¹²⁴ Sandra Dee (1942-2005) was an American actress. Dee began her career as a child model, working in commercials before transitioning to film in her teenage years.

¹²⁵ The Hotel Roosevelt fire, on December 29, 1963, was the worst fire that Jacksonville, Florida, had seen since the Great Fire of 1901, and it contributed to the worst one-day death toll in the city's history, resulting in 22 deaths. It is also known as the Gator Bowl fire as the football event attracted hundreds of guests to the hotel at the end of each year.

"Well, how can we help you move in there?" And they did help us, they took a second mortgage back on the house and made the deal palatable for us that would only have been done by a friend for a friend, and they really made it possible for this Friedland-Balsler family to live in a beautiful setting and have a goal of changing this house, and doing things with it, and we just love our home. We've gone through two major renovations and when Ruby Kahn comes to the house she's so proud of everything she sees, and she'll say to people, "Look how beautiful this place looks! It didn't look like this when I lived here!" She's so proud of it, it's really darling. So, in those early days when we were renovating the house and I was trying to keep all the schedules straight, of all the children, and which night we had which child for visitation, and which boy was playing on which basketball team on which night, and there wasn't enough money to go around, and I couldn't afford as much help as I would have liked to have had and I was very blessed there also. When I separated from Bob Friedland, I had a lady who had come to work for me, her name was Barbara Ann Burton, and she had come to work for me on a temporary basis. She had never worked in a private home before, so this was temporary, and Barbara stayed with me for 13 years. She is one of the dearest friends, and was the most wonderful help mate to me, and lavished my children with wonderful love and wonderful care. She is now caring for another family that needs her. I mentioned to you that my partner **Greg Simmons** had been killed several months ago and he left five young children, so, Barbara is now taking care of the Simmons family. She is a really lovely woman. So, those years of coping with learning to be a step-mother to Ron's three children, two of whom really were not anxious to have a step-mother, and being a relatively structured person who believed in discipline, trying to deal with a young family that integrated with my family, young children who integrated with my children, who were not disciplined, and whose parent that I lived with was not interested in disciplining them, and learning to deal with a whole new set of in-laws, sister-in-laws and brother-in-laws.

Ruth: How many are there?

Barbara: Well, Ron has a sister and a brother. His sister Ellen, is married to an ophthalmologist, **Barry Hyman**, and they live in Houston [Texas] and they have two daughters, Laura and Karen. Laura is a senior in high school and Karen must be a sophomore. Jack is Ron's brother and his wife, Pat, had three children, two boys and a girl. David is the eldest and he's just

decided to become associated with the firm of Long and Aldridge.¹²⁶ Very, very bright, accomplished young man, he has been clerking in **Judge Moyeis** court. He has had any number of firms fighting over him and this was his decision. Their daughter **Heidi** is now married and pregnant with what will be the first Balser great-grandchild.

Ruth: Here in Atlanta?

Barbara: She lives now in Baltimore [Maryland], she is married to a young man from Long Island [New York], who's name is **Jeffrey Fisohgrund**, who is a doctor. They met, it was her first date I think when she went to Penn, she fell in love. They dated all the way through college, and married, and they have a son Michael, who is a sophomore or a junior at Penn.¹²⁷ All the Balsers, all Jack's children, had gone to Penn as did Jack, as did Ron. University of Pennsylvania. So, learning to cope with all these people who wanted little pieces of me, you know. [Who,] I felt, wanted little pieces of me, or needed little pieces of me, was difficult. And trying to grow a significant business, and to be successful, and to be a wife, and to be mother, and to be step-mother, and to run the household, and to be daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law, and aunt . . . and of course my mother was living, and my father was living in those early days, and of course I've lost them both. My mother only more recently. I have a younger brother as well.

Ruth: Do you see him often?

Barbara: I don't . . . of course, I saw him a lot during mother's illness. Mother was very sick for three years, and he was in Richmond and well, I think the last year of mother's life I made 20 some trips to Richmond so, of course, I saw him every time. I speak to him less frequently now that mother has died. He's seven years younger than I and we don't have much in common. I take care of him. I'm the new mommy. I manage my mother's estate, I manage my father's estate, I handle his finances because my parents wanted it that way. He is a hard-working person, he's a hair stylist, but he is irresponsible, and doesn't really make a very substantial living. So, my parents both left the bulk of their assets, which were not enormous, to him, and I manage that for him, and dole it out to him because that's the only way he can handle that financial end of his

¹²⁶ McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP (MLA) was a United States-based international law and public policy firm with more than 575 attorneys and public policy advisors in 15 offices and 13 markets. The firm provided legal, business, and public policy solutions in the areas of complex litigation, corporate law, environment, energy, family wealth, finance, insurance, global infrastructure, government contracts, health care, intellectual property, technology, and real estate. The firm merged with Dentons, a large multi-national law firm, in June 2015.

¹²⁷ The Pennsylvania State University, often known as Penn State, is a state-related, land-grant, doctoral university with campuses and facilities throughout Pennsylvania. Founded in 1855, the university has a stated threefold mission of teaching, research, and public service.

life.

Ruth: I think we all have one of those in the family.

Barbara: Yes, we do.

Ruth: If you had your druthers, what would you like for your children to be? What are your aspirations for them?

Barbara: Well, I want them to feel challenged and fulfilled in whatever they do. I really don't much care what kind of work they do. Except I want it to be honest work. I'd like to think that what they do has some value to the community. I don't necessarily mean that they have to be a social worker, or something related to the social sciences, or health care. However, I would like to think that what they do contributes to the overall productivity, creates jobs, does something meaningful in the community and so far they're doing ok.

Ruth: Do they volunteer, are they involved?

Barbara: I don't think that they volunteer much. I think that they will, but what I was more getting at, Ruth, is that as a career path I would like to think that they'll be doing things that they'll be proud of, and that will be more than just making a buck, more than being a merger and accusation specialist.

Ruth: What are they specializing in college, the ones who are in college?

Barbara: Well, three of the boys, two of my sons and one of Ron's sons, have already graduated from college, and they all studied various areas of business. One studied advertising, marketing rather, one majored in management, and another majored in finance. They are on three different career paths. My oldest son is very much involved in the computer area, and he has had several extremely good jobs. He is now in an area where I will say he has a temporary job. His last episode, which involved being on Apple computers vertical, national vertical marketing team, ended disastrously for him. He had relocated from New York to San Francisco to work in Cupertino [California] at Apple computer headquarters, and he left there after maybe four or five months and decided he would move to Los Angeles to be near his younger brother Jon David. This is Barton I am speaking of, and things did not quite fall into place the way I think he thought they would. They rarely do unless you work hard at them.

Ruth: What is Jon David doing?

Barbara: Jon David is a mortgage representative. He's the guy that you go to see when you need a loan for your house and I just got off the phone with him right before this meeting. And

he graduated from University of Southern California¹²⁸ last May and he's doing very well. He's a very directed, terrific kid. He will probably stay on the West Coast. It makes me very sad. He went out there to be near his father, and because his father really wanted him to go to University of Southern California, or school in the Los Angeles area, let me put it that way. Jon attended University of Southern California, and for Jon it has been the most wonderful experience because he is a quiet young man, and a little on the reserve side and he had a very limited social life here. Although, I must say, the Balser family just adores him, and I think try to make him feel very much a part of the family and so on. I think he always kind of felt a little bit of an outsider and he flowered, blossomed at University of Southern California and became president of his fraternity which was Teke [Tau Kappa Epsilon],¹²⁹ president Reagan's fraternity. And he held so many chairs there successfully. He made so many good friends. It was just a real good growth experience for him, and he made good grades, so he's got a whole network now in southern California and he's very happy there. He likes the weather, he likes the people, he gets to see his father often. I think he loves us, I think he misses us, but it's hard to have everything.

Ruth: Is he married?

Barbara: He's not, And I don't think he's serious with anyone yet. But the one or two gals that he has had a relationship with have not been Jewish. He knows that this is important to me, he more than any of the kids.

Ruth: Let me ask you, how would you feel if your daughters were to, instead of opting for a career just being a housewife and mother?

Barbara: Both girls kind of threatened that when they were younger, but they didn't want to be like me at all, or like their own mother who has a career. Like Ginger. I feel like Ginger is my own but her mother is **Timmie Barkin Loeb**s, and both Ginger and Laura have said on many occasions, "I don't want to be anything like you when I grow up. I want to be just like grandmother, and just like Aunt Ellen." Grandmother being Ron's mother, and Aunt Ellen being Ron's sister. Which isn't all bad, these are both very bright women, very well read women. I don't think of them as dilettantes, they're not card players. They don't necessarily do anything in terms

¹²⁸ The University of Southern California is a private research university in Los Angeles, California. Founded in 1880, it is the oldest private research university in California.

¹²⁹ Tau Kappa Epsilon, commonly known as TKE or Teke, is an international all-male secret and social college fraternity founded on January 10, 1899, at Illinois Wesleyan University. The organization has chapters throughout the United States and Canada.

of creativity, but they are beautiful homemakers, and are completely devoted to their families and very supportive of their spouses. Grandmother has been so, Roslyn Balser has been so involved with her grandchildren.

Ruth: She's a wonderful person.

Barbara: She is just remarkable. And she made a point all the years that Ron was divorced and before we married, and even after we married, as a matter of fact, really until the children were driving, she absolutely insisted on picking the children up at least one day a week after school and keeping them with her for the afternoon, and having dinner with them. She wanted that alone time with them to talk to them and find out what was really going on in their lives. She is sincerely interested in young people. If you ever go to a bar mitzvah you'll find that, sooner or later, she'll go over to the bar mitzvah table and she'll get all the young boys up to dance with her. She loves young people, she loves to surround herself with young people. She kids me [and] her friends, by saying, when any of her friends turn 60, she tells them they're too old for her. Now I think our girls, by the way, are maturing and they're starting to think more career wise, and Ginger is interested in going into elementary education, and as I said she's a freshman in college. She loves children, she's always loved children, and that I have to say is a typical Balser-stone, Roslyn is a stone a trait . . . I have never seen a family that's so completely adores children. I mean, they just love children, any children. They love to be with children, and love to take care of children. So, Ginger really comes by that naturally. My daughter, who's only a junior in high school, has suddenly developed very specific ideas about what she wants to do. The latest, and it will be very interesting to see if this is what develops, she is very specific, she wants to go to **Tulane**. She wants to go to the business school at Tulane in New Orleans. She wants to study business, and she wants to go for a five-year degree and get a masters in international business.

Ruth: That's wonderful.

Barbara: She studied Spanish in high school. She's going to take an exploratory course next year in French, and she wants to study French in college, so that she can really do something on the international business scene. Now I think that if I were to design a course of study for her that is precisely what I would tell her to do, but I feel that she has arrived at this place independently. I guess the kids do absorb an awful lot by osmosis.

Ruth: Yes, they do. What advice would you give a generation of women just entering into the work market today?

Barbara: I think that for women at any age, the very important thing for us to do is to learn to understand and then to actualize the necessity of developing our own selves. Of not falling into the trap of being a reflection of our parents, of our loved ones, but to try to actualize your own talents, and fulfill your own personal goals. Because when you are a fulfilled individual, you're able to give so much more to everyone else. I think so many of us are taught to be good little girls, to do what others expect of us, that often we arrive at different plateaus in our life and we really don't know what we want. We know what we're supposed to want, or we see what others want, and we figure well maybe that's what I want.

Ruth: Have you met any resistance in finding yourself?

Barbara: I have a very hard time, sometimes, knowing what it is I really want to do, because I want to please other people more than anything else. Getting in touch with what I want for myself is a continual search. I find myself frequently—and I think I'm strong—I find myself frequently saying, “Oh, well, I'd be willing to do this, or I'd be willing to do that,” when given a situation, but I find it really hard to know what I really want to do. First of all, I enjoy doing a lot of different things.

Ruth: Tell me about it.

Barbara: I like sports: I like to watch sports and I like to participate in sports. I like music: I like to sing and I like to listen to music, and I like all different kinds of music.

Ruth: I know that you're a friend of Marvin Hamlisch. How did that come about?

Barbara: That, again, was something that Ron made happen. We have a friend who lives in Los Angeles, who's in the life insurance business. His name is **Richard Kagin**, and Richard is a real character. He probably should have been, and really is, a stand-up comedian, except he also happens to sell life insurance, and he sells a lot of it. He's very successful. One of his most famous clients, aside from Marvin Hamlisch, for instance, is Bill Cosby.¹³⁰ Richard had a bit of a problem a number of years ago, working out some contract details, I think it was, with a carrier, and he called Ron for some help, and Ron gave him some advice. Maybe some contractual language of some ideas of how he might resolve the situation favorably for himself, and it did work out favorably. Richard was very grateful, and he said to Ron, "Let me know if I can ever do anything for you, I'm very grateful." Ron said, "I'll tell you right now," he said, "If you and your friend Marvin Hamlisch ever do another show, please call us," and that's what happened. When

¹³⁰ William Henry Cosby Jr. is an American stand-up comedian, actor, musician, author, and convicted sex offender.

Marvin was starting to put together a show called *Smile*,¹³¹ which originally had lyrics by **Carolyn Lee**, he called us. Or, Richard called us, and asked us if we would be interested in coming up and hearing a reading. We went to New York, we heard the reading of the play, we were invited to Marvin's apartment for a supper afterwards, and Marvin walked over to us and asked us how we enjoyed the play, what did we think of the investment, and Ron said, "Well, I think it's a lousy investment but I think it's a terrific play." Marvin really did not like hearing that answer, and in that kind of a cocky way he has, you know, he said, "You got any better ideas?" And Ron said, "Well you know, it's just, if you buy a unit in this play you have something that's worth \$80,000 at 8:00 one night, and at 11:00 it can be worth zero, and there ought to be a way to structure an option, and if the play looks like it's going to be successful, then you ought to be able to exercise that option." Marvin looked at us like, why did anyone ask you to come here? Why do I have to put up with these idiots? Where is Kagin, I'm going to kill him! One thing led to another, and Marvin started working on another project because midway through, we raised some money for this particular effort, for the *Smile* effort, because it really did look like a cute play, it was kind of a young American [Unintelligible, 11.55: possibly "mist"] story. We got some friends who were interested, and we raised a significant sum of money. The project came to a halt because Carolyn Lee died, and the lyrics, which she owned, were tied up, because the partnership had not yet formed for the play. It was in formation. As I understand it, the lyrics got tied up in the estate and it held the project up for some time. In the meantime, Marvin got involved in this other project writing the music with **Christopher Adler**,¹³² Marvin writing the music, Christopher Adler doing the lyrics, for a play based on the life of **Jean Seberg**¹³³ called *Jean*. Really ghastly plot because there really was very little redeeming, that I could understand, about Jean Seberg, but the music was monumental. One thing led to another, Ron suggested that they might want to open the play in London [England], since everything [that] seems to come to the states from London is a smash, because it gets all this hype and press in London, and then

¹³¹ *Smile* is a musical with music by Marvin Hamlisch and book and lyrics by Howard Ashman. It was originally produced on Broadway in 1986. The musical is based loosely on the 1975 comedy film of the same title, from a screenplay by Jerry Belson.

¹³² Christopher Edward Adler (1954–1984) was an American lyricist and theatre director. His best-known works as a lyricist were the musical *Jean Seberg* and the show *Shirley MacLaine on Broadway*.

¹³³ Jean Dorothy Seberg (1938-1979) was an American actress who lived half her life in France. She appeared in 34 films in Hollywood and in Europe, including *Saint Joan*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Breathless*, and *Airport*. She was also one of the best-known targets of the FBI COINTELPRO project. Her targeting was retaliation for her support of the Black Panther Party in the 1960's.

British people support their theater so well.

Ruth: It beats East Lynne.¹³⁴

Barbara: Right, and one night from out of nowhere, we got this three-way conference call. Marvin's calling us from London, Richard's on the phone from Los Angeles, "Hello partner," and Ron had given them the skeleton of this idea to get in touch with **Sir Peter Hall**,¹³⁵ who had just had this wonderfully successful production of *Amadeus*.¹³⁶ To get Sir Peter Hall to direct a review, a run through, of this play at the **National Theater**¹³⁷ in London, and that we would raise money on a contingency basis, or option basis, here in this country, and if the play was a smash hit in London then people could exercise the rest of their option. They decided it was a great idea, and so we became associate producers of that effort. We had a great time, first time the **FCC** ever saw a structure like that. That's what Ron and I are good at is financial structure. The play opened to very mixed reviews. We never bought the play in New York, but we had a wonderful time, and subsequently we were involved as producers of *Smile*, which had a disastrous outcome, but we had a good time with it. That's how we became friends with Marvin Hamlisch, and we're still friends with Marvin Hamlisch. We don't see him as much, because we're not working on any projects now. I think we've probably had it with Broadway, I don't know that we'll do anything again. We had a few other episodes along the way.

Ruth: What are your other interests? I know you are very much involved in the Arts.

Barbara: We are. We are collectors of all kinds of work. We have eclectic taste, and we even collect Ruth Zuckermans. I have my second beautiful Ruth Zuckerman.

Ruth: Thank you, it's nice to know [my painting is] in such a wonderful home.

Barbara: Thank you. We have tried to bring a little focus to our collection. We own a lot of work by **John Baeder**,¹³⁸ who was born here in Atlanta, and is a photo realist, paints diners. He

¹³⁴ Theatrical group founded in 1980 & focused on the heritage of American plays performing in a church in New Jersey.

¹³⁵ Sir Peter Reginald Frederick Hall CBE (1930-2017) was an English theatre, opera and film director whose obituary in *The Times* declared him "the most important figure in British theatre for half a century."

¹³⁶ *Amadeus* is a play by Peter Shaffer, which gives a highly fictionalized account of the lives of the composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri. First performed in 1979, *Amadeus* was inspired by a short 1830 play by Alexander Pushkin called *Mozart and Salieri* (which was also used as the libretto for an opera of the same name by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov in 1897).

¹³⁷ On the South Bank of the Thames, in London, the National Theatre presents up to 25 new shows a year. There are three theatres, a learning centre, theatre tours, restaurants, a riverside bar and a bookshop on their campus. The productions also play in the West End and on tour.

¹³⁸ John Baeder is an American painter closely associated with the Photorealist movement. He is best known for his detailed paintings of American roadside diners and eateries.

is a close friend of Ron's from childhood, and recently did a wonderful work for which we commissioned, called the Airline Diner. We like sculpture. We collect a lot of interesting art. We also have been very supportive of another local artist, whose name is **Toby Martin** and Toby is assistant professor at Spelman and I think he's going to do some monumental metal work, big . . .

Ruth: A welder?

Barbara: Welder, engineer by background, and he's done, oh, we must have about five of his things now. He's a wonderful, loving person and it has been fun to help him grow, he's on his way now.

Ruth: How old is he now?

Barbara: I think in his 30's. He was working for General Dynamics,¹³⁹ I think, as an engineer, quit and went back to school. He has a wife and two children, and it's not been easy but I think he's on his way. We are involved in the [High] Museum, we're involved in different societies within the museum that are trying to acquire works for the museum. We are active in both the Twentieth Century Society¹⁴⁰ and the Fine Collectors Society, and I am on the board of the Atlanta College of Art and we are avid supporters of the theater and the ballet, and occasionally the symphony. There's just not enough hours in the day to take in all the things

Ruth: It's really amazing how much you do. What are your aspirations for the future? Your job, your position, your family?

Barbara: Well, the business is really an adjunct of our marriage, because we interact here so much, and so much of what we want to accomplish together has to do with . . .

Ruth: When did you and Ron merge the business?

Barbara: We formed a joint venture, I guess, about five years ago. We had done a lot of joint work together on various closely held corporate clients where I would do a certain amount of the work and Ron would do a certain amount of the work. We didn't necessarily present the case together but we would share the burden in preparing the case. Then we formed this joint venture called MCG [Management Compensation Group] Financial Corporation with Hank McKanish and Ron owning half the company and me owning the other half and that went very well. That plan sold 401K capability to public companies, and I found out that I really enjoyed

¹³⁹ General Dynamics Corporation is an American aerospace and defense multinational corporation formed by mergers and divestitures.

¹⁴⁰ The Twentieth Century Society is an organization focused on Twentieth century artists who do decorative work in society.

going into the public market place. It was different than the closely held corporate, family-run kind of businesses I had worked in the past but frankly, it could be extremely lucrative and very rewarding. People are people, you still have to build relationships. So, about three years ago we . . . well more than that, but we made the decision three years ago that I would buy into this company along with two other gentlemen, [including] **Greg Simmons**, who Ron had done a lot of joint work with. Up to that point they had written ConTel,¹⁴¹ which is probably one of the most significant public companies, public cases, ever written in terms of size of the case. They also at that point had probably accomplished doing AT&T, Coca Cola, and BellSouth. We formed a new company, which had for all intents and purposes, as far as the world knew, had the same names, but the partners were myself, Greg Simmons, **Bud Smith**, Hank McKanish, who had been Ron's partner for close to 20 years I guess, and Ron. Of course, it was difficult for five people to run a company. It is not as if one of us was a great administrator, and another one was a great bookkeeper, and another one was a great sales person, and another one was great with a computer. We all had the same skills, we all loved to be out in the field, and we all liked to be with clients. After about the first four or five months, Bud Smith dropped out of the group. The maintenance, the monthly overhead was a very big number, and people in the insurance industry who had always been housed, or been a career agent with an insurance company, are not used to having to foot any bills. This was a significant difference from an operation, from that which I had had previously, and what Bud had had, and what Greg had had, too, but I think Greg and I were both much more realistic about our understanding that that's what it was going to take. It was particularly difficult for me because I had not participated in the income stream from those very large cases I mentioned before, because I was not involved in those cases happening. While I had a very good business, my income stream didn't come anywhere near equaling what Ron's or Hank's or Greg's was. The other side of that is that I did not have a financial burden as great as any of the men, because while I contributed to my household and I had certain fixed expenses with my children, I didn't have to take care of a spouse, too. So, while it was certainly a financial drain to me, I knew that if I fell completely on my face and failed, that the worst thing that would happen is that Ron would have to take care of me, and believe me that was a pretty bad thing, but it wasn't as if I felt my family would be out on the street. To me it was a relatively small price to

¹⁴¹ ConTel Corporation was the third largest independent phone company in the United States prior to the 1996 telecom deregulation. It was acquired by GTE in 1991.

pay to have the opportunity to be in business with the best people in our business. I knew that as a professional, that the people who knew more about corporate owned life insurance and funding executive benefit related liabilities for publicly held companies, the best people in that business were Ron Balsler, Greg Simmons, and Hank McKanish and I wanted to be in business with them.

Ruth: Well, you've succeeded admirably.

Barbara: Yes, it's been very good, and I may have mentioned at an earlier time, we bought Hank McKanish out in March of this year, because his business interest has really moved from the selling of life insurance product to corporations to the selling of administrative services to life insurance carriers to administer the corporate owned life insurance. I know that sounds a little Greek but it's a difficult thing to do, and life insurance carriers are not generally innovated in terms of developing new product and developing new systems and so, what Hank has done, is to kind of be a private label developer of product and builder of systems to manage the product and that's really what he wants to do, so we are transactionally in it. We like to make the deal between the carrier and the corporate buyer. So, we bought Hank out in March. We had already met **Rich Magner** and had started negotiations to bring Rich in as a partner . . .

Ruth: Talking about starting I think it's time we start another tape.

Barbara: Okay.

<End Tape 4, Side 2>

<Begin Tape 5, Side 1>

Ruth: This is tape five of a 90-minute tape, and the final tape, of an interview with Barbara Balsler as told to Ruth Zuckerman for the Jewish Women of Achievement Oral History Project December 9, 1988.

Barbara: Ok, let me see, where were we? Talking about the business. We had started negotiations with Rich Magner. My mother died in February of this year, and she died mid-week, and Ron had an appointment to go to Hartford [Connecticut] to meet Rich Magner Rich was president of the corporate owned life insurance division of Cigna,¹⁴² which was Connecticut General and merged with INA [Insurance Company of North America],¹⁴³ and we wanted that

¹⁴² Cigna is an American worldwide health services and insurance organization based in suburban Bloomfield, Connecticut and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴³ Insurance Company of North America (INA) is the oldest stock insurance company in the United States, founded in Philadelphia in 1792. It was one of the largest American insurance companies of the 19th and 20th centuries before merging with Connecticut General Life to form CIGNA in 1982, and was acquired by global insurer ACE Limited (currently Chubb Limited) in 1999.

product and we were having some difficulty getting the product, and so, Ron had arranged to go up and meet with Rich for the sole purpose of securing this supply. Ron felt that maybe he ought not to go since mother had just passed away and the week of sitting *shivah*¹⁴⁴ was not over. Frankly, I was anxious to kind of get on with dealing with my grief by myself, and getting mother's home in order, and that kind of thing, and I urged him to go on. We had been up there for so many weekends, and then mother, I guess, died on Wednesday, and this was Sunday night, and I urged him to go on. He went on up on Monday, and he called me Monday night and he said, "You have got to get up here and meet this guy, he is so terrific." He said, "I was not with him 10 minutes before I said to him, 'What are you doing in the home office of a life insurance carrier? Why aren't you out in the field with us?'" And so, sure enough, the very next week, I traveled to Hartford and I had dinner with Rich and was very impressed with him. Then we brought him down to Atlanta, and Greg, too, was very impressed with him, and we began negotiations, discussions, about how he might consider becoming part of our firm. We wanted to bring him in on a partner level. So, we finalized all of our papers with in March with Hank. Of course, that negotiation had been going on since the September before, the breakup of the business is not an easy thing to do. In June, Ron and I went to New York for a weekend with our dear friends, **Judy and Jerry Dubroff**, and we got home on a Sunday, June 12, and we had just walked into the house and Greg's younger brother Forrest drove down the driveway at break neck speed. I was in our bedroom, in my dressing room and I looked out the window. I was ready to open the window and fuss at Forrest for driving so quickly. I couldn't hear what Forest was saying because the windows were closed but I could just see this look on his face, and the body language was so grief stricken. Ron was getting our luggage out of the trunk and he literally just collapsed into the trunk, and I didn't, I knew something, obviously, just horrible was wrong. I ran downstairs, and Greg had been killed only an hour or two or three before in a fall from a water fall on his property. Beautiful water fall that he loved to climb up. Four of his five children were with him, and he hit his head, probably a third of the way down, I don't think he knew anything after that, but he never regained consciousness, and he was dead when he was found. Rich

¹⁴⁴ *Shiva*, literally "seven," is the week-long mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister and spouse. The ritual is referred to as "sitting *shiva*." Immediately after burial, first-degree relatives assume the status of "mourner." This state lasts for seven days, during which the family members traditionally gather in one home and receive visitors. At the funeral, mourners traditionally rend an outer garment, a ritual known as '*kerish*.' This garment is worn throughout *shiva*.

Magner was to have announced his resignation from Cigna on Monday, June 13, and he didn't do that. He did come in for the funeral. I must say that I've never been to a funeral like Greg's before or since. I think there must have been 1,500 or 1,800 people present in the church. He was a very committed Christian. He was a very serious boss. He kept a journal, he . . . I'm laughing, because he really had a typically rabbinic approach to his religion. It was a struggle for him, and he struggled with it every day. He read constantly about principles and ethics and he was a very complex man. He was the kind of guy that would love to play center on a football team and just knock the living hell out of the other team. He was a real tough competitor, but he also was a person who loved to do good deeds, and there were these two sides of his nature, but I think he really struggled with the desire to always win no matter what the cost, and the desire to lead an exemplary, good, Christian life. He really was a living example of someone who was tormented by all that. At any rate, he left behind him his wife Christy, Christina, and five young, beautiful, beautiful towheaded¹⁴⁵ children, a boy and four girls. So, for about a week or so there, Ron and I were more or less, I guess, in a state of shock, and what's more, we found ourselves in this very unique position from having been five partners, a little more than two years prior to that, [and] it was suddenly just Ron and me. And we thought for a day or two, hell, we'll do whatever we want now! We don't have to please this one, or that one. Having gone through all the negotiations we had gone through to first bring everybody together, and then one guy left, and then buying Hank out, and now trying to figure how to bring Rich in, I have to tell you, if I never sat through another session with our lawyers, whom I adore, but I'm tired of it already, you know, it would be great. So, for a day or two we thought, isn't this terrific? We'll just do it this way, you know, the deal has changed. Greg's not here, Rich probably won't even want to come now, and we just won't encourage it. We met with a couple of friends and advisors and every single one of them said if you want to grow your business you need other people. I think while Ron and I would have really had a lot of fun and enjoyed running this business together, and had found it very fulfilling, and if the time ever comes again, we will find it fulfilling. I think we felt that in order to build this company the way we think it has the potential of being built, which is, frankly, I think we have global potential. There is no one who does the kind of work we do here. A very specialized niche market and we are the best at what we do, which is helping corporations fund

¹⁴⁵ The “tow” in “towhead,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to “the fiber of flax, hemp, or jute prepared for spinning.” Since flax is light in color, blond people (especially children) are sometimes referred to as “towheads” or “towheaded.”

post retirement liabilities. Measuring that and servicing and ministering the products that they purchase. We really hardly have any competition, and we have built a stellar group of people here.

Ruth: How many have you here?

Barbara: We have about 30 people, and that's the size of the firm before Hank left in March with the six or eight people he took with him. We have built right back up to 30. Not that having the number here is significant, but we hope not to grow the firm larger than 50 to 60. Which is not to say we might not acquire other firms and maybe employ hundreds or thousands of people one day. But where we are, I would envision this as being corporate headquarters, and that corporate headquarters would never be more than about 50 or 60 people, because that's manageable, and you can really know people. The thing that is happening here . . . and I just should go back half a beat and say a week or two later we sat with Rich Magner for the second or third time after Greg's death, and confirmed that we really wanted him to come, although the chemistry was different and the deal would be a little different, and he confirmed that he really wanted to come even though his fondest hope had been to work closest with Greg, and that he knew that the chemistry would be different. It's a real tribute to Rich and the person that he is, that I think he is perfectly comfortable working with a husband and wife, and that he handles that relationship beautifully.

Ruth: Well I think the fact that husband and wife are handling the situation so beautifully . . . in most cases it doesn't work that way.

Barbara: That's true.

Ruth: It takes a great deal of intellect on both sides to make it work.

Barbara: I think the working together has enhanced our love and our respect for each other.

Ruth: That's wonderful to hear.

Barbara: I think it's one of those things that either really works or really doesn't, and for us, it really works. There were times prior to Greg's death, during these last couple of years, where I felt I was stretched beyond my capacity. [I was] not happy, and growing into a new role I felt that Ron expected a great deal from me, and I felt that the other two men who were my partners expected and wanted nothing from me. That, to me, is worse than having someone expect too much from you. Both Hank and Greg were and are terrific chauvinists, and I would never have been here, frankly . . . I would never have been given the opportunity, were I not Ron's wife and I

recognize that. But there is a bias in the marketplace about husbands and wives in business together. You know, if a father and son are in business together, if the son shows any promise at all, any talent, while people say "Well, you know, he is the son," people don't assume that the son is an idiot, or that he brings nothing to the table. If brothers are in business together, or sisters are in business together, people don't think that it's an incestuous, if you will, relationship. They think of it as natural. Even if father and daughter, or mother and son, are in business together, but husband and wife is usually viewed in that one of them has to be a zero, you know?

Consequently, there have been those in the industry who did not know me prior, who had their doubts, but that has all, I have to say that's all history. I was made a national director of Management Compensation Group . . .

Ruth: Congratulations.

Barbara: Thank you . . . after Hank retired or left our company his directorship was open, and Ron and I thought it would be politically appropriate to nominate Greg, because Ron was the other director. Each office has two directors to the national board, and so we nominated Greg. The gentlemen who are the directors, who have known me for a decade and had known me professionally from before my becoming part of MCG said, "Why should it be Greg? It should be Barbara. She brings much more to the table." Greg was not present at that meeting. We never told him that I was made a director. It happened in May, and we were trying to think of how to break the news to him in a way that would not hurt his feelings, and we just never shared that information with him before his death. So, where we are going now is that Ron, and Rich, and I are going through that painful process, and Rich is being very helpful in this process because he is from a large public company . . . Although, the division that he ran is about the same size that MCG is. He's 10 years younger than we are but he's very wise, and has a very nonthreatening style, but he is one of the best negotiators, very incisive, and so on. He's just a great addition, and what he is in the process of doing for us, and with us, is helping us move this company from an entrepreneurial company to a managed company. We are trying to further our goals of structuring the company and building secondary management as if we were structuring the company to sell, because in essence we will be selling the company, ultimately, either back to ourselves, or to someone else. That's the way we want to build the company. We want to build it so it will run without us.

Ruth: What would you do after that would happen?

Barbara: Well, what I intend to be doing, now, is being in the field less in terms of opening and closing cases, and working on other ideas I have for the growth of the company overall. In other words, Ron and I have been key marketers, we have made significant cases happen. We, Greg and Ron and I, have made the significant cases happen. So, we have expanded our marketing staff, and they're doing very well. They're going to continue to do well, and we're going to continue to expand that marketing staff, and to encourage joint ventures with other firms with whom we have a symbiotic relationship, and, perhaps, to acquire other firms that have specific accounts that we would like to be able to acquire, and to grow that way. I see my role, and Ron's role, and Rich's role, as being eureka's and implementers of corporate goals that don't have to do with closing a particular sale, but rather have to do with what will be our next step: Shall we do joint ventures with the Johnson Company? Shall we buy ABC Company? Part of Rich's dowry, if you will, is that he brought us a joint marketing situation where we have entered into a joint venture with Cigna, who will underwrite the Life Insurance and Fidelity,¹⁴⁶ who will manage the investment portion, and Management Compensation Group, which will handle the marketing on an exclusive two-year basis for a brand-new insurance product that's called a private placement. It's for the funding of these huge multi-million, and multi-billion-dollar, post retirement liabilities that companies are now going to have to start booking, which will negatively impact their earnings per share in the next few years. That is the kind of thing we want to work on, and then the implementation of that, and then turn it over to another marketing group. I'm really excited about that potential. The three of us, Ron and Rich and I seem to have such a harmonious, productive exchange. We get along just famously, and beautifully. A year ago I can't say I felt that way about the business. A year ago, all I thought about was getting out, and how I could best do that. I think if I didn't feel that so much of the strength of my relationship with Ron, and so much of the joy of my relationship with Ron, was based on the exchanges that go on with us here, and the sharing of excitement, and disappointments, sometimes . . . of all these shared experiences of the people we work with, and the situations on which we work . . . if I didn't know that that is such an important part of our relationship I would have left, because I was not happy here. Had it continued that way I would have left, and the only thing I was concerned about was our marriage. That there would be this

¹⁴⁶ Fidelity Investments Inc., commonly referred to as Fidelity, is a multinational financial services corporation based in Boston, Massachusetts. It is the fourth largest asset manager with \$2.4 trillion in assets under management as of December 2017.

space between us that has never been there. That I wouldn't know what was really going on in his life, and he wouldn't really know what was going on in my life, and we are so many things for each other. We are partner, confessor, lover, best friend . . .

Ruth: It's remarkable.

Barbara: We were in New York the end of last week, Thursday we were at AT&T all afternoon designing and doing a new project for them. Came into Manhattan Friday morning, an appointment was canceled, or postponed, and so we had this free time, and we ran over to Christie's¹⁴⁷ to see how the art auction was, and had a wonderful morning there, and enjoyed just watching. We didn't buy anything, but going through all that, and running into some folks from the museum, **Goodman [Unintelligible, 20.05: likely a name]** and **Carolyn and Wes** were there trying to buy for the museum. Then we drove out to New Jersey, and we attended a party that evening that's given every year by AT&T's Actuarial Subsidiary, Actuarial Scientists Associates, and how fortunate for us that as key clients of theirs, and they're clients of ours, that were able to come as husband and wife and dance and have a good time!

Ruth: That's great, a festival across the world.

Barbara: Then Saturday, we flew Laura up . . . we were interested in getting a dog, and we'd heard about a particular kennel that has German Shepherds that are trained a certain way that we were very interested in. So, the three of us drove across New Jersey, and it was a gorgeous day, and to New York right by the Tappan Zee Bridge¹⁴⁸ and had this lovely day together in the car, and looked at the dog and went through all this excitement together, and Ron knows so much about animals.

Ruth: Did you get the dog?

Barbara: We selected the dog. He is being trained. We selected his name, Emperor Drake. We're going to call him Drake. He comes out of Bihari Kennels and he is in E litter. You see, you have to have respect for the kennel, you should start the dog's name with an E, but Laura wanted to call him Drake. So, we're calling him Emperor Drake. And, you know, this is the kind of whirlwind life we lead. It's something out of a novel you know?

Ruth: It's delightful.

¹⁴⁷ Founded in 1766, Christie's offers premier art auctions and private sales in galleries around the world.

¹⁴⁸ The Governor Malcolm Wilson–Tappan Zee Bridge, commonly known as the Tappan Zee Bridge, was a cantilever bridge in the U.S. state of New York. It was built from 1952 to 1955 to cross the Hudson River at one of its widest points, 25 miles (40 km) north of Midtown Manhattan, from Grand View-on-Hudson to Tarrytown.

Barbara: We flew back home that night, and it really is wonderful. And we enjoy so much of it together, we really just have a good time.

Ruth: That's wonderful. Multifortunata.

Barbara: We know that, we really do know that. Ron will often say, "It's so convenient to be in business with somebody that you love so much! It's terrific!" We have a great time, we have a good time at home. You've been to our home, so you know we have a good size home that is crammed in every corner . . .

Ruth: Oh, it's beautiful.

Barbara: . . . with all kinds of tchotchkes . . .¹⁴⁹

Ruth: I think it fits your personalities.

Barbara: We just added on, and it's full now, and now Ron's saying, "I want to buy some more. I want to collect some more," and of course the years have been wonderful to us. Our business has been very successful.

Ruth: Well, you know how to deal with success. So many people do not.

Barbara: We're trying. The fact that we both had means before, and lost it all, and really had to struggle to get it back . . . I guess we really didn't have to struggle that long or that hard, but while you're going through it, it seems like forever. I think that it has made having money really important, and using it well more important. We support causes because it gives us great pleasure. I don't think of us as great philanthropists. We really are not. We support a lot of different things in the community but I don't think we have supported anything yet to the extent that we will ultimately be capable of, and really want to do. I think we have more or less done the expected thing, or done the right thing, but I don't think we've really done the significant thing yet.

Ruth: What's the significant thing?

Barbara: Well, I'm not sure what it's going to be. Maybe it will be a series of things. I don't think we've been ready to make those kinds of financial commitments yet. We still have three children whose education we must finish. Until recently I was concerned with my mother's future care, although I never had to take care of her. Her illness was extraordinarily expensive, and we never knew how long she would last, and how long her funds would last.

Ruth: Did she have cancer?

¹⁴⁹ A tchotchke is a small object that is decorative rather than strictly functional; a trinket.

Barbara: Yes, she had cancer, and my mother was a very strong lady and had no intentions of dying from cancer. Fought like a lioness, with great courage and great dignity for three years. She fooled all the doctors. Nobody thought she would live as long as she did. So, I think that Ron and I were really just kind of merging . . . for instance, we've gotten the company now to the point where we know that there is enough capital coming in every year so that if we have a bad year in terms of new sales, that we won't go under. We've got the company to that point. We have gotten to the point where we feel that most anything material that we really want for ourselves we can acquire, and we are materialistic. I don't think for the benefit of others, but for ourselves. In other words I'm not really interested in buying something because it's the thing to do, or because others have it, or will see that I have it. In fact, I like to keep . . .

Ruth: Play it close to the vest.

Barbara: I have only told my mother-in-law, and one or two very close friends who are animal lovers, about the dog because it's kind of unusual to bother to go to New York to get a special breed dog, or something, or maybe slightly eccentric, and I just don't like to publicize those kinds of things. I'm private about that kind of thing. Not secretive, but I would just rather not talk a lot about it. But we do like to acquire things, Ron more so than I. I like to go to museums. Ron is easily bored in a museum.

Ruth: He's a collector.

Barbara: He is a collector.

Ruth: Pack rat.

Barbara: He loves to have it. He loves to have it in his house.

Ruth: Why not? it goes with the territory, it's part of the perks.

Barbara: We have established an art trust, and we have started gifting our art to this trust. Right now, our children are the beneficiaries of this trust, but I think we have the right to redirect or maybe . . . I don't understand all of the legal ramifications. I know that maybe all the art won't go there, and we're intent now in trying to build a collection that would be desirable for a museum. We even laughingly talk about having a museum of our own, and if Ron keeps buying the way he's buying, we will have to build something. We certainly have the room on our property and we have talked about that.

Ruth: Are the children art minded as well, are they interested?

Barbara: They're sensitive to it, and they are interested. Dan Balsler is probably the most

knowledgeable. You know Temmie is an art consultant, his mother's an art consultant, so he gets . . .

Ruth: She's into corporate art, is she not?

Barbara: Yes. He gets a lot of exposure on both sides. We have given, both last *Hanukkah* and the *Hanukkah* before we gave lithographs to the children. We gave [John] Baeder lithographs last year, and **Linoner** lithographs the year before. We did not give art this year. I'd really rather wait until the kids get into their own place and not keep cluttering them up with stuff. Dan is in the process of buying his first condominium now, and I think my son Jon David will probably buy a home this year. So, when that happens, I think we will start giving them pieces that we have on hand now, as we try to improve the quality of our collection. Give them pieces, and they seem to enjoy them. Jonathan, Ron's middle son, also likes art and is aware of various artists, and feeling and so on. I would be surprised if the children don't have some interest, I don't know how interested they will be.

Ruth: Well, that input shows up sooner or later.

Barbara: Yes, it does, yes, it does.

Ruth: Well I think we pretty much covered Barbara Balser to this point.

Barbara: We sure did.

Ruth: To be continued, though.

Barbara: I want to share something else that is emerging in my life, and this may be an unimportant footnote. It may be something significant. I have been involved with Spellman College for a number of years, raising funds through a group called Friends of Spellman. Because she's a dynamic lady and I love dynamic ladies, I have gone out of my way, and the relationship has just been a natural, I've gone out of my way to meet and to know **Johnetta Cole**, who is the new president of Spellman. Johnetta and I are just on the same wavelength, and we have become good friends. I was real pleased that she shared with me the Bill Cosby gift before it was ever announced, and that kind of thing. [She] saw to it that I was at a terrific table for the inaugural ball, and all that. I've had the experience of being in Leadership Atlanta which is about building bridges among the leadership of our community, black and white. I mentioned to you earlier that we have been instrumental in supporting an emerging local artist, whose name is Toby Martin, and Toby's a professor at Spellman, and is black. One of my dear friends and a good client over the years has been **Isaac Willis**, who was a leading black doctor in our

community. We have also gotten very friendly . . . well, let me just take a step back. Ron was an early collector and supporter of Benny Andrews,¹⁵⁰ whom we also consider a friend, and who often will call us, and we've been up to his place near Athens and spent time with him. We had the good fortune to come across Faith Ringgold¹⁵¹ a couple of years ago, and we acquired two of her wonderful story quilts. They have been touring the country and ended up here in Atlanta this past summer at a very important show of five black women artists at the Atlanta College of Art. We have, just, through a series of fortuitous circumstances, become very close to Michael Lomax.¹⁵² Of course, if you're going to be close to somebody who might be mayor of this city, that's going to be a black person. Just as we've developed a very close relationship with John Lewis.¹⁵³ And just on the side here: I helped Ron going back 10 years ago, 11 years ago, I helped Ron put together these gorgeous photo albums from his trip to Israel, and Ron sent one, even though he was really broke in those days, he sent one to each person who had been on the mission, and he wrote a beautiful poem which is published in the *Southern Israelite*.¹⁵⁴ It was called "Tears on the Soil" and I'll be sure you get a copy of it, it's beautiful. Very moving.

Ruth: I would like that.

Barbara: A couple of years ago, during the election process, we threw a coffee, or a brunch, at the house for John Lewis. We had never met John and his lovely wife, and at the conclusion of the brunch, Ron was so taken with John, and his warmth, and the way he spoke about Israel, that he remembered he had one extra photo album from his trip to Israel and he ran, gave this to John, and when John got home and he and his wife looked at it, they saw the same things, I think, that I

¹⁵⁰ Benny Andrews was an African-American painter, printmaker, and creator of collages.

¹⁵¹ Faith Ringgold, painter, writer, speaker, mixed media sculptor and performance artist lives and works in Englewood, New Jersey.

¹⁵² Dr. Michael Lucius Lomax is, since 2004, the president and chief executive officer of the United Negro College Fund of the United States. Lomax is the son of Lucius W. Lomax, Jr., a Los Angeles attorney, and Hallie Almena Davis Lomax, a journalist.

¹⁵³ John Robert Lewis (born 1940) is an American politician and civil rights leader. He is the U.S. Representative for Georgia's 5th congressional district, serving since 1987, and is the dean of the Georgia congressional delegation.

¹⁵⁴ The *Southern Israelite* was a publication that covered news of southern Jewry and issues that involved Jewish populations throughout the nation and world. Rabbi H. Cerf Straus originally established the *Southern Israelite* as a temple bulletin in Augusta in 1925. It became so popular he expanded it into a monthly newspaper. Straus eventually sold the paper to Herman Dessauer and Sara B. Simmons, who moved it to Atlanta, where it began circulating state-wide and eventually throughout the South. In October of 1934, the *Southern Israelite* began publishing a four-page weekly edition, supplemented by its established monthly magazine edition. Ownership of the paper was turned over to a corporation headed by editor Adolph Rosenberg in 1951. In 1964 Vida Goldgar joined the staff and was an important contributor to the *Southern Israelite* for the next 40 years. In 1979, she purchased the paper. The monthly edition of the paper was discontinued in 1973 in favor of its increasingly growing weekly edition. In 1987, its name changed from *Southern Israelite* to the *Atlanta Jewish Times*. Today the paper is owned by Michael Morris and continues as a weekly publication with a distribution of 15,000 copies per week.

saw, and it has created this bond because Ron revealed this other side of him. Anyhow, we have become friendly with Michael Lomax, and Michael recently asked me if I would serve on his finance committee for election to mayor, which I'm going to do. Michael called me to discuss with me perhaps that we would lend one of the Faith Ringgolds to the Atlanta Museum. Excuse me, the Atlanta Public Library, where he, of course, he has some input, being a Fulton county [Georgia] commissioner. He said to me, "You know, you are building a significant collection of black art, and it's important, and it's important to our community," and I had never thought about that, and we are. Ron and I feel so good about that. We feel a kinship with the emotion that we see expressed in art by so many black artists, not unlike the kinship we often feel with Jewish artists. Or other artists, but there is something special that we both seem to be drawn to.

Ruth: I think it has a lot of soul.

Barbara: Yes, I think so.

Ruth: A great deal of soul.

Barbara: So, I don't know where this art and political friendship, relationships are going in the history of our city, or in the history of our lives.

Ruth: I think the art scene here is very political.

Barbara: But it will be interesting to see where this kind of convoluted series of relationships will lead in the future.

Ruth: That's great.

Barbara: And that's **Barbara Ann Brown Bernstein Friedland Balsler** to date.

Ruth: Very impressive and I thank you very, very much. This has really been quite a distinction to interview you.

Barbara: Really, it's been a wonderful experience for me, I feel we have become, we were friends before from a distance but I feel we have become good friends because I have felt that you have understood and empathized and felt, really felt, a lot of what I have told you.

Ruth: Well, I went through a lot that you went through growing up, I can empathize with it.

Barbara: It's been a pleasure.

Ruth: My pleasure.

Barbara: Good.

Ruth: Would you like a copy of these tapes?

Barbara: Yes, I would.

Ruth: I'll see to it that you have them. There's one thing I must ask you to do is sign this release. This is strictly for the library, it doesn't go any farther.

Barbara: Okay, I think I signed one already, but we'll sign another. Are you going to put the dates, you're going to put all the dates in.

Ruth: There's nothing you wish to hold back on these tapes?

Barbara: Well, probably if I were to listen to them, I probably would want to shoot myself for saying some of these things, I don't know really who's going to listen to them.

Ruth: This is strictly for research.

Barbara: I think that it would probably be in everyone's best interest for me not to hold back anything.

Ruth: I can't really see anything here that needs to be held back, that you should be ashamed of.

Barbara: No, there's nothing I'm ashamed of.

Ruth: It's been exemplary.

Barbara: Thank you very much. It's been fun to share it with you.

Ruth: Thank you darling. It's a pleasure to know you.

Barbara: That goes two ways.

<End Tape 5, Side 1>

INTERVIEW ENDS