Ann: This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Sherry Zimmerman Frank on the 21st of April, 1993, for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). We are doing this interview at an open board meeting at NCJW headquarters on Miami Circle in Atlanta, Georgia.

It is 10:00 in the morning, and you’re nice and fresh, and I’m going to ask you, if you would, to tell us how your family came to Atlanta, Georgia.

Sherry: My father is a native, he was born here. My grandparents emigrated to this country from Europe. My mother was born in this country and was born in Brooklyn, New York and raised there until she married my father and moved to Atlanta.

Ann: Would you tell us the names of your parents?

Sherry: My grandfather was Joseph Horowitz, my grandmother was Bertha Horowitz. Grandfather was a line typesetter for The Yiddish Press in New York, and my grandmother was a homemaker. My mother’s name was Esther Horowitz Zimmerman and my father was Jack Haynes Zimmerman.

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1 Sherry Zimmerman Frank’s maternal grandparents were Joseph and Bertha Horowitz. Her paternal grandparents were Samuel Leib Zimmerman and Sarah Zimmerman.

2 Typesetting—creating text for print in books, magazines, newspapers, etc.—is now done digitally using computers. Originally, type was set by arranging physical metal pieces for each letter of each word, arranged and placed on a printing press to create pages.

3 In New York City between 1885 and 1914, there were over 150 Yiddish dailies, weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, festival journals, and yearbooks being published. Yiddish is the historical language of Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe.
Ann: Would you spell that middle name, please?
Sherry: H-A-Y-N-E-S. My mother said he made it up. [laughs] I’m not sure, but my brother’s children have that middle name, too, so . . .
Ann: What part of Europe did they emigrate from?
Sherry: I only know Russia, but I don’t know [where].
Ann: How did they choose Atlanta, Georgia? Do you remember what year the grandparents came?
Sherry: My father’s parents passed away before I was born—or my grandmother was alive when I was just a couple of years old—so I don’t know where their roots were. I think they were even native Georgians, I don’t think my father was the first generation. So they date back a long time. The Zimmerman family’s roots are in Europe. In fact, always with the name Zimmerman, when I found relatives in Israel, their name was Zimmach, so I don’t know whether that was an early family name from Russia.
Ann: The family was affiliated with which synagogue?
Sherry: In the early days, Shearith Israel was referred to as the “Zimmerman Shul.” When you look at the wall of past presidents at the Shearith Israel, many early presidents are Zimmermans. I grew up at the Shearith Israel for holidays, and all my friends were at the AA, Ahavath Achim. I went to religious school at the AA, and spent all my holidays at Shearith Israel.
Ann: That must have been lonely, Sherry, [chuckles] because most children in those years—we’re talking, what—in the 1950s?
Sherry: It’s interesting. First of all, men and women sat separate, which I think impacted my attitude towards that today. Maybe that gave me an early desire to be a

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4 Originally located in downtown Atlanta, Congregation Shearith Israel moved in the 1940s and became the first synagogue in DeKalb County Georgia. In 2002 they officially became affiliated with the Conservative movement.
5 Shul is the Yiddish word for temple or synagogue.
6 Initially an Orthodox congregation, Ahavath Achim (AA) began to shift to Conservatism, which they joined in 1952.
7 In Orthodox and some Conservative congregations, men and women are not permitted to sit together during prayer services. In some synagogues, instead of being divided by a mechitzah (a physical barrier like a curtain or screen), the women’s section is in the balcony and the men’s section is on the main floor of the sanctuary.
feminist in rebellion, [laughs]. But the neat thing, when you were kids, was that nobody upstairs paid attention and so kids could stay outside. There was a wonderful group—very small—but a wonderful group of Atlantans who were my age and members of Shearith Israel. Harriet Mazier Leibowitz and Pearl Ann Golden Horowitz and Robin Sasher Burger and I spent all of our yontifs in the hall, or at my house, during the holidays. So that was the group at Shearith Israel.

Ann: And who were your friends at school and at AA?

Sherry: Those friends from Shearith Israel were some of my friends. Peggy Alterman Shulman who heads JNF [Jewish National Fund] was a close friend, Elaine and Marilyn Greenbaum—who we used to call the “Greenbaum Twins,” and who now live in New York—were close childhood friends. I was very close to my cousin who was in my grade, Lynn Harris Goodman.

Ann: Were all of you living in that North Highland area, or where was your home?

Sherry: Yes.

Ann: Where exactly was your home?

Sherry: I lived on Zimmer Drive, but the street was named Zimmer Drive before Zimmermans moved on the street. [laughter] But it was a very Jewish street. It was the Morningside area. I remember thinking my parents made me walk for miles to school, and now when I drive from Morningside [Elementary] School to Zimmer Drive, it’s not even three blocks. I remember trucking roller skates and bicycles up to the top of the hill and thinking I was going down Mount Everest. Now I drive down that street and it’s barely a slope. [laughs]

But Peggy Shulman lived on the street. Peggy Osman’s cousin was Edward Sugarman. I used to go to Peggy’s all the time in hopes that her older cousin would be there. The Franco family lived on the street. There were two Alterman families. It was an amazing Jewish street. Barbara Sanford Orkin’s house was across the street and two

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8 An advocate for social, political, legal, and economic rights for women equal to those of men.
9 Yontif is the generic word for Jewish holidays including all but the High Holy Days of Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur.
10 The JNF is a non-profit organization founded in 1901 to purchase land for Jewish settlements. Since its founding, JNF has evolved into a global environmental organization, provided infrastructure for over 1,000 communities, and helped connect Jewish children and young adults to Israel and their heritage.
11 The earth’s highest mountain above sea level.
over from me. They had an extra lot that was a garden, and I was sure that was the “Secret Garden” from the book [The Secret Garden]^{12}. This is funny to see people grown up. The street was filled with significant Jews.

**Ann:** Which of your friends do you feel have made a significant impact, other than yourself, on the Jewish community?

**Sherry:** Well, the star of our class was Stuart Eizenstat,^{13} he went the farthest. But it’s an activist class. Peggy Shulman’s at JNF. Pearl Ann Horowitz and Robin Sasher are doing great things for disabled and handicapped people. Mark Lichtenstein was in our class, he’s continued to carry influence at the Federation [The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta]^{14}. I guess those are the key folks.

**Ann:** To what do you attribute the fact that so many of you had such a strong feeling for Jewish organizational work?

**Sherry:** We were a very close Jewish community. I remember at Grady High School—I don’t know what percentage of the school was Jewish, but—our entire BBG^{15} [B’nai B’rith Girls] group could have a meeting at lunch, even though we were friends with some of our Christian neighbors. A couple of us, like Eleanor [Daman] Blass, was a cheerleader, and ultimately was president of the student body, which was very exciting then. We were very tight as a Jewish group. I had a little group of “Six Musketeers” and we had a playhouse in the back of my yard. [laughs] All of our immediate friends were Jewish, all the guys we ran around with . . .

**Ann:** You never dated non-Jewish [boys]?

**Sherry:** Well, we weren’t supposed to, but in my senior year I had a big time crush on somebody who wasn’t Jewish. I wouldn’t ask my mother if I could go to the

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^{12} The Secret Garden is a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett first published in book form in 1911 and set in England. It is considered a classic of English children’s literature.

^{13} Stuart Eizenstat is an American diplomat and attorney. A Democrat, he served as the U.S. Ambassador to the European Union from 1993 to 1996 and as U.S. Deputy Secretary of the Treasury from 1999 to 2001. He later became a partner at the Covington & Burling law firm, and a senior strategist at the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) Worldwide.

^{14} The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta raises funds, which are dispersed throughout the Jewish community. Services also include caring for Jews in need locally and around the world, community outreach, leadership development, and educational opportunities. It is part of the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA).

^{15} B’nai B’rith Girls (BBG) is an international youth-led fraternal organization for Jewish teenage girls. B’nai B’rith Youth Organization, now BBYO, is an umbrella organization including Jewish teens in both Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) —for Jewish teenage boys—and BBG.
graduation party with him, so I went with Stuart Eizenstat and met him [the non-Jewish boy] at the party.

**Ann:** And whom did Stuart meet?

**Sherry:** I think Stuart was actually too shy to go out with anyone, so it was very convenient.

**Ann:** How did your parents meet? You said that your mother’s family were in Brooklyn. Did they eventually move to Atlanta, is that how your parents met?

**Sherry:** Yes. My father had a sister who was married and lived in New York, in Brooklyn. My mother met her, and then she fixed Mother up with Dad. But my grandparents ultimately did move, once Mother married and moved down here. She had only one brother, who also migrated to Atlanta, so her whole immediate family was here.

**Ann:** And you have siblings?

**Sherry:** I have one brother.

**Ann:** Whose name is?

**Sherry:** His name is Neil Zimmerman, and he lives in Houston [Texas]. He is married to someone named Sherry, so there’s another Sherry Zimmerman. They have two children.

**Ann:** And what does he do?

**Sherry:** He works with an oil company, and I’ll think about the name of what he is.

**Ann:** Oh, that’s all right. He’s not involved with the Jewish community, however?

**Sherry:** No, not at all. We are polar opposites.

**Ann:** The people I spoke with indicated that you were a decent student.

**Sherry:** No, my brother was smart. I was much busier with my organizational work, and school was just a minor past time. (laughs) I was much too busy running the world to study.

**Ann:** What organizations were you active in when you were in school?

**Sherry:** BBG was my thing. I always ran for everything, and lost, too. It was very discouraging; it just didn’t stop. In fact, when I was NCJW\(^\text{16}\) [National Council of

\(^{16}\text{Founded in the 1890s, The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is an organization of} \)
Jewish Women] president, I was sure they had just saved the best for last, because all through BBG I’d run for everything and wouldn’t get that, but get the next office [down]. Then I ran for student [body] president and got vice president at college. Finally, I [was president at] NCJW. Actually, I even was to be president of the New Jersey chapter and we moved. So I had this feeling that I was never going to be president of anything. But the Atlanta Chapter saved me—well, it was called chapter—now it’s section.

Ann: Tell me about your BBG chapter—because it obviously was an important incident in several of your contemporaries’ lives—and how that came about. How was that chapter formed?

Sherry: We were a very, very, tight-knit Jewish crowd. We were all at the AA synagogue. Most of us all lived in that area. There was a large group of girls my age, and BBG was very strong, and DOZ\textsuperscript{17} was a sorority in Atlanta.

Ann: Which stood for?

Sherry: Daughters of Zion. But it was just snobby, and they took very few people, and it was really a big deal to get in. Some of us viewed that as the thing for Reform Jews\textsuperscript{18} to get into—which really wasn’t true, we just associated it [with them]—because we didn’t know the Reform Jews. [We thought] they must be the snobs, they were richer and they lived down in northwest [Atlanta] and some of them were DOZ. But they also had a sorority called SDT - Sigma Delta Tau that they were part of.

But DOZ was just snobby. You either had to be very pretty, very popular, or have a parent or sister in DOZ. My crowd didn’t want any part of it. We didn’t want anybody left out. So we formed our own BBG chapter called JOJ, which was Jewels of Judea. [laughter] I don’t think it lasted after our five years in it, but we started in eighth grade. We were very, very, busy and active. And even today, so much Federation leadership and community leadership—just identified Jews—came from our chapter.

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volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into advocacy and philanthropy inspired by Jewish values. NCJW strives to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families.  
\textsuperscript{17} Daughters of Zion (DOZ) is a Jewish social club and service organization for women.  
\textsuperscript{18} Reform Judaism is a liberal strand of Judaism characterized by a lesser stress on ritual and personal observance, a regard for Jewish Law as non-binding and the individual Jew as autonomous, and an openness to external influences and progressive values. The origins of Reform Judaism come from 19th-century Germany. 
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Ann: What were some of your projects, do you remember?

Sherry: Yes. One thing that was a real deciding factor for us was, we had mothers who were advisors. Rosalyn Alterman was an advisor, and ViVi Coggin Hillman was an advisor. And Helene Facher, who was a B’nai B’rith Women leader, oversaw our work. So we had real, fabulous, activist, role models helping us. We did service projects at [The William Bremen] Jewish Home, we did service projects for the poor, a lot of Jewish awareness programming, socials. We put on a play, Peter Pan. We just did a lot that bonded us as a group, a lot of programs. I get angry today because kids do everything that costs a fortune—like going to Six Flags—instead of just playing together. We were ferocious on the basketball court. We just did things as a group.

Ann: Did you meet at the Alliance [Jewish Educational Alliance] . . .

Sherry: . . . at the Center [Atlanta Jewish Community Center] . . .

Ann: . . . Which one?

Sherry: . . . I’m much too young for the Alliance.

Ann: That’s what I figured.

Sherry: By the time I was born, it was the Center. Actually, the Center was being built when I first started, and I was sweetheart of one of the AZA groups called DSI. In fact, I have lots of fond memories of that. I remember one of my best friends had a crush on Kenny Kaufman, and he had a crush on her. He was too shy to give her his dog tag, so I did it for him. (laughs) My boyfriend then was Cary Reuben. But the DSI group couldn’t meet at the Center because it wasn’t built yet, and they had most of their meetings that year at my house.

Ann: At your house?

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19 B’nai B’rith Women (BBW) — now Jewish Women International (JWI) — was founded in San Francisco, California in 1909 and began as a social organization but expanded into cultural activities, philanthropy, and community service.

20 The William Breman Jewish Home has been serving the elderly and disabled in metro Atlanta since 1951. It provides long term skilled nursing care and short term rehabilitation services and is part of Jewish Home Life Communities, a non-profit organization.

21 The Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) operated from 1910 to 1948 in downtown Atlanta and was once the hub of Jewish life in the city. In the late 1940s, JEA evolved into the Atlanta Jewish Community Center (AJCC) and moved to Peachtree Street where it stayed until moving to Dunwoody in 2000, where it was renamed the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta.

22 Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) is an international youth-led fraternal organization for Jewish teenage boys.

23 Dog tags are worn by military personnel and display their basic medical information and often, religious preference. They are metal and worn on a long chain around the neck.
Sherry: Yes. That was fun, we had a lot of meetings in the back yard and downstairs. But every Sunday, we went from the AA synagogue to Zestos—which was one of the places on Peachtree Street—and then to the Community Center. We spent our whole day there. We went from ball game to ball game, cheering against the BBG girls we didn’t like—and always against DOZ—and then made every AZA game we could.

There were wonderful role models. I remember Elaine Gilner Freedman was in [Group] 176, a girls group of BBG. And there were older BBG groups that were great role models. We all went to convention. We spent lots of time writing songs and oratory things.

Ann: You were creative.
Sherry: We were real team-minded.
Ann: All of these Jewish identity activities, obviously had a major impact on your life. As you grew up and went off to college, how did you choose the college that you went to? It wasn’t a very Jewish choice, was it . . .
Sherry: It was such a misfit. My mother really had no sense in guiding me, when I look back now. Stephens College was viewed as a finishing school. I’m so down to earth that it just wasn’t a match. There were no Jews, no Jewish sorority. When my father died . . . when my dad began working, he worked as an insurance agent for Oberdorfer Insurance Company [in Atlanta, GA]. Then he formed his own agency. When Dad passed away, Mother dissolved his agency and went back as an agent with Donald Oberdorfer. At that time, Gene Oberdorfer was working there. We would go to office parties and Gene Oberdorfer was a graduate of [University of] North Carolina and Sarah Lynn was a graduate of Stephens [College]. So Sarah Lynn told me I had to go to Stephens, and Gene told my brother he had to go to the University of North Carolina, and that was just our destiny. At that time you didn’t have brochures from a million colleges. You didn’t go travel to look at them. Sarah Lynn said it was good; I went.

Ann: I wondered how you had gotten there, because I know that there were a

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24 Stephens College is a private women’s college in Columbia, Missouri.
25 A school for young women that focuses on teaching social graces and upper-class-cultural rites as a preparation for entry into society.
very limited number of people from Atlanta . . .

**Sherry:** I had a Jewish roommate who was Arlene Gottlieb, now Arlene Gottlieb Jaffey, from Savannah [Georgia]. But our Jewish activities were minimal.

**Ann:** Did you associate with any of the students at the University of Missouri, right there in Columbia [Missouri] . . .

**Sherry:** Oh, yes.

**Ann:** . . . because there are a lot of Jewish students there.

**Sherry:** Well, I had met Leonard [Frank] during my senior year—the last quarter of our senior year of high school—and had fallen in love. I went to school crazy about him, was sorry I was going far away, and couldn’t wait to come home once I got there. So I did date the guys from the University of Missouri, but not that much. That’s where we all went for our social life, and there was a Jewish fraternity there, so that was a connection for us.

**Ann:** You mentioned that your father died. How old were you when your father died?

**Sherry:** I was eleven.

**Ann:** Very young. That obviously must have had a major impact on your life in general. Would you open up that area a little bit?

**Sherry:** Yes, two thoughts. One is that I remember as a child when—on the High Holidays—you said *yizkor*, all the children left, then anybody with both parents still living left. Today, the tradition is to stand—particularly in light of the Holocaust—that everybody needs to say a prayer for someone. I was dreading that first *yizkor*, when I had to stay and add my family’s response.

At that time, Rabbi [Sydney] Mossman was at [Congregation] Shearith Israel. I think he probably had more influence on me than anyone. I’ll never forget, he gave a phenomenal sermon. When he talked about going up and down rows of a hospital during World War II—and seeing a jovial guy at the end of that hall in a bed,

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26 *Yizkor* (Hebrew: remembrance) refers to memorial prayer services held four times a year during *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Passover*, and *Shavuot*. During the services, those who have lost a parent or a close loved one recite the *yizkor* prayer.

27 World War II was a global war lasting from 1939 to 1945. The vast majority of the world’s countries eventually formed two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. By the end of the war, more than half of the Jewish population of Europe had been killed by the Nazis (political party of the mass
always greeting him. He never knew what the guy’s physical problems were because he was always in a bed and always very jovial. One day he saw him walking, and saw he only had one leg, and he fell. Rabbi Mossman went to help him up, and he pushed the rabbi aside and said, “It’s not the leg I don’t have, but the leg I have, that will keep me going.” And he wouldn’t take help. I just remember feeling, “It’s not my loss, but what I have, that will always keep me going.” And I think that’s been my cornerstone, plus, I really think a lot of my inspiration has always come from rabbis. I was forever making speeches, and after that yizkor, every time I needed to give a BBG speech I’d go to Rabbi Mossman for help. Even today, I look for Rabbi [Arnold M.] Goodman. I always look for rabbis for mentors.

The other thing is that my mother was strong and stoic, and if she was suffering, she never showed us. She just kept on going. We never saw her cry, and she went to work at a time women didn’t work. She was a survivor, and I needed her survival skills these last twelve years. So I guess those are the two things.

Ann: Yes. Tell me more about your mother, because everyone I spoke with told me what a phenomenal woman she was and how strong she was.

Sherry: Mother was strong. She had a little bit of an acid mouth, so people who find me much too short will know where it came from. (laughs) I inherited it rightfully. You never worried what my mother was thinking because she said it, to a fault. And I would say I have that problem, too. But she was very strong and very determined and really raised my brother and I believing we could do anything and have anything. She sacrificed, and looking back now—I went to Blue Star28 to camp, I went to Stephens [College]—I don’t think I ever thought I had money, but she certainly gave us all the opportunities that my friends had with two parents.

Ann: Who were her good friends, or your parents’ good friends, when your father was still living?

Sherry: There were lots of rooms in my parents’ house painted by Harry Dwoskin,29 and Dad’s best man at his wedding was Harry Dwoskin. Actually, Diane Dwoskin

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28 Blue Star Camps is a Jewish summer camp located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.
29 Harry Dwoskin worked with his father, Morris Dwoskin, at Dwoskin & Sons. The company specialized in interior design for synagogues, churches, clubs, theaters, and high-end homes.
[Harry’s daughter]—when her dad passed away and her mother had passed away—in cleaning out family pictures, found some old pictures of my father and her father on fishing trips. She didn’t know who it was until someone told her, and she sent them to me. They were very friendly with Muriel and Harry Marrett whose children are Don Marrett and SueSue Sussman. But, mostly the network was the family, the Zimmerman clan. Jerry Horowitz’s mother, Helen Haan’s parents. I remember Jerry Horowitz ran for everything at college, and he was older than I was, too. I had a crush on him like I did Ed Sugarman. And every time Jerry and the Tulane [University] guys came home, I went to visit Aunt Doxey in brand new clothes. It was ridiculous. I loved going to Passover30 there because Jay Brock and a whole bunch of Jerry’s friends would be there, and that was very prestigious. But mother’s network of friends were either her neighbors or her relatives. Also, the other people who were very important in Mother’s life were Rose and Harry Mazier. I remember Mother had to go back to school short term to get her insurance license, and my brother and I spent several weeks at Harry and Rose Mazier’s house. I just always loved them.

Ann: And you came back from Stephens?
Sherry: I came back from Stephens after a year, to get married—at nineteen and almost twenty—and I was going to continue. Leonard had graduated from Georgia Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] and was living in a small town in Alabama. It was very lonely for me, and we decided that we would get married and I would continue school. I got pregnant in six weeks, so I had a baby before my first anniversary. I remember sitting in the hospital with Helen Haan—who had her baby two months premature—and we were due the same day. I kept saying, “God, I wish it was me.” I didn’t realize my mother was stroking out and counting, (laughs) I was just so innocent. So I got pregnant, got sick and nauseous and the works, and never did go back to school. Then, in between the kids, I went a quarter here and there. But my school plans changed as I started having children.

Ann: Tell me about your children. You have wonderful children.
Sherry: Yes, my kids are great. They’re all math geniuses.

30 [Hebrew: Pesach] The anniversary of Israel’s liberation from Egyptian bondage. The holiday lasts for eight days and on the first two nights the seder, a ritual feast, is celebrated.
Ann: They take after their mother?

Sherry: No, my husband had very strong math skills—and I have strong ones—but they don’t have the writing skills I have. My oldest is 30, lives in San Francisco [California] and is an actuary and a real community activist.

Ann: Her name is?

Sherry: Her name is Jacqueline Frank, and she’s just gotten on the National Young Leadership Cabinet for UJA. My second daughter is 28, she’s Laura Frank, and she’s an investment banker, and she’s married. Her husband is John Bernard, she’s Laura Frank Bernard. My third one is 24 and an engineer, and he’s Jacob Allen Frank. And my youngest one is 16, and he’s Andrew Frank.

I remember doing some of my first NCJW projects with Andrew, in what my mother used to call a “drain board.” [It was] like one of those infant seats, but it was really crummy. It could fall over and create any kind of disaster. But we had this cultural enrichment program at Black schools in Atlanta, and I would bring Jacob there—having no concern about safety or disease or anything—and put him on the table. He would sit in that infant seat and sleep and I would go teach a cultural enrichment class. We just brought the kids everywhere, and now he’s 24. It’s a long time ago that I was doing those NCJW projects. (laughs)

<End Sherry Z Frank T1-S1-01>

<Begin Sherry Z Frank T1-S1-02>

Ann: Tell us about some of your volunteer activities, since they laid the groundwork for your professional life.

Sherry: I used to say I received my undergraduate degree in NCJW and my graduate degree in AJC. When I lived in New Jersey, I was married to an engineer and he traveled, and we had two children. We had Jackie here, and we moved to New Jersey and Laura was born in New Jersey. I immediately wanted to get involved in the community, and the thing in Plainfield, New Jersey, was NCJW. That’s what all my

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31 The United Jewish Appeal (UA), a Jewish philanthropic umbrella organization, began in 1939 and in 1999 became part of the United Jewish Communities (UJC)—a merger of UJA, Council of Jewish Federations, and United Israel Appeal. In 2009, UJC changed its name to The Jewish Federations of North America. The National Young Leadership Cabinet is the Jewish Federations’ elite leadership training program for people ages 30-45.

32 The American Jewish Committee (AJC) is one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations in the country and was founded in 1906 to safeguard the welfare and security of Jews worldwide.
friends were involved in, and I threw myself into the service projects and to work for Israel and the like. I went to the national convention that was held in Atlanta in 1965 or 1967. I was here in Atlanta as a delegate from New Jersey. I came with the kids and left them with my parents. I was the only one traveling on the plane to a convention with children, and my partner there was Marilyn Flansbaum who is now a national vice-president of NCJW. I was to follow her as president. I came back here, and Marilyn Shubin was about to be president. We had just moved, Leonard went into the family business, and I came back here and starting climbing . . .

Ann: And that was what year, late sixties?

Sherry: Yes, I would say it was 1968. It was after the 1967 War, because I remember the fund raising for that war in New Jersey. You remember things by wars. I remember the fund raising for the 1973 War here in Atlanta.

I did the telephone committee for the first ball that we had. We did a ball, and then when we stopped doing the NCJW ball, we had a “No Ball” event for a year and then we did Bargainatta. I was the advisor to something called Councilettes, and the Councilettes are still around. Lyle Hertz’s sister-in-law, Julie Golson, was a Councilette; the three Wyler girls were all Councilettes. So I did that, and then I moved into membership, and then I moved into fund raising, and then I moved into presidency.

Ann: And you were president what year here in Atlanta?


Ann: What special projects were you involved with in those years?

Sherry: The three or four hallmarks of my particular work was the Tay-Sachs screening and created the lab at Emory [University]. We did a study on juvenile justice.

33 The State of Israel is a country in Western Asia. The history and religion of the Jewish people originated there, and Jews around the world maintain physical, cultural, and religious ties to the region.

34 The Six-Day War, also known as the June War, 1967 Arab–Israeli War, or Third Arab–Israeli War, was fought between June 5 – 10, 1967 by Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

35 The Yom Kippur War, Ramadan War, or October War, also known as the 1973 Arab–Israeli War, was a war fought from October 6 - 25, 1973, by a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria against Israel.

36 The Junior Division of the National Council of Jewish Women.

37 Tay–Sachs disease is a genetic disorder that results in the destruction of nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. One in 30 Ashkenazi Jews are carriers of Tay-Sachs, and one in 300 people in the general population are carriers. Since the 1970s, the incidence of babies being born with Tay-Sachs has fallen by more than 90 percent among Jews because of genetic screening in the Jewish community.
Barbara Asher’s administration before mine had done the study on child care, but we opened the Grady Hospital Child Care Center just as she was going out of office and I was coming in. I was at a retreat for Councilettes with Barbara Lipshutz’s daughter, Wendy, when they got the news that Barbara had died. So it was very interesting watching the Barbara Lipshutz Institute evolve in NCJW and the friends around her, like Marilyn Shudman, who really grieved that loss. I guess the loss of Barbara Lipshutz and Ros Cohen were the two most dramatic losses I’ve experienced with NCJW.

Mostly there was a team. Susie Elson followed Barbara Asher. It was a very interesting style. Susie Elson lived elaborately and served magnificently. When the Executive Committee used to meet, we would meet from early morning until late afternoon—you know, [like we had] nothing else to do. Susie would serve these gorgeous lunches and she would put crackers out in these silver biscuit tins I had never seen before. Then Barbara Asher became president and with Barbara, as long as she had a cigarette and a legal pad she went for hours without food. I remember vice-presidents bringing peanut butter sandwiches (laughter) to her house so we could survive lunches at Barbara’s. Then I got my turn to be president, and I love to cook. I would cook for days waiting for the big Exec [Executive] meeting at my house. We had great lunches, and I remember the only one who could ever keep up with that, and surpass it, was when Gracie Hentrow was president, and her mom would come in from Montgomery [Alabama] and she would cook for us. (laughter) That was great.

Ann: And today?

Sherry: Today, the Exec meetings are held here in just a couple of hours. We’re in the modern age of technology and quick decisions, but [back then] we just resolved the world’s problems for hours and hours.

Ann: There were a few other projects, I think, that you might want to mention.

Sherry: I have to mention that my love for Soviet Jewry38 really started in National Council of Jewish Women and has followed me on a destiny that has really changed

38 The Soviet Jewry movement was an international human rights campaign that advocated for the right of Jews in the Soviet Union to emigrate. The protest movement, which spread throughout the U.S. and other Jewish communities during the 1960s and 1970s, was in large measure a response to the Holocaust.
my life. I remember in the early days of 1970, the Soviet Jewry movement began with a failed attempt to airlift seven people who tried to leave Russia in 1970. The women’s organizations used to do a “Women’s Plea for Soviet Jewry” on Human Rights Day.\(^{39}\) We rotated, and it was NCJW’s turn. We were probably the second organization to do it in 1973. I decided we’d do something daring and we’d do a soup kitchen in the city park. I remember a board meeting when some old past presidents threatened to leave NCJW and quit their membership, and the question of whether life members could drop out, because of my bringing our Jewishness into the streets of Atlanta. I still have a hard time with some of those folks. (laughs) But I was really determined that we would go out in the streets and bring this issue to the fore, and the NCJW did a fabulous job.

**Ann:** What was the reaction, other than the internal reaction before the fact?

**Sherry:** The reaction was fabulous. We were looking to get publicity in an unusual way, so we decided we would serve potato soup and black bread. We got the food editors of the paper [*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*] to do a two-page spread on what a diet was like in the hard labor work camps, as part of the abuse that the Soviet Jews took. So there was enormous publicity and there was enormous coverage of the event. We did it at the park. I don’t think Woodruff Park was open then. We did it at the park that’s in front of the old Municipal Auditorium . . .

**Ann:** . . . Hurt Park . . .

**Sherry:** . . . and I remember Max Cleland\(^{40}\) came in his wheelchair then. It wasn’t that long after [his] recuperation from the Vietnam War.\(^{41}\) He was so moved by the Soviet Jewry movement—1973 was very early—he decided to pass a resolution in the Georgia House. He was a House of Representatives member of the State Assembly then. He came out, and as it was windy and freezing in December, and he read it with two of us holding the papers down. Georgia was the first State House to pass a

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\(^{39}\) Human Rights Day is celebrated worldwide on December 10 each year. The date was chosen to honor the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948.

\(^{40}\) Maxwell Cleland is a Democrat who served as Georgia’s Secretary of State, and represented Georgia in the U.S. Senate from 1997 - 2003. He is a disabled Army veteran of the Vietnam War and a recipient of the Silver Star and the Bronze Star for valorous actions in combat.

\(^{41}\) The Vietnam War was a conflict that occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1955 to 1975. America’s involvement in the war was highly controversial.
resolution for Soviet Jewry, and he did it. Even then, we had such close ties. I remember fundraisers for him at Richard Cohen’s first wife—Lois Cohen’s—house. Those of us who are active in public policy had unbelievable contacts, as we do today, with politicians.

Ann: Tell me about the political contacts. Were they made through your work at Council [NCJW], or were they just done on your own and became part of the whole scene?

Sherry: They were done inside and outside. Council . . . we always called it Council and not NCJW then . . . what happened, and still exists, is that the most politically savvy activist people were in NCJW. So my best friend at the time in the NCJW context was Fran Eizenstat—who, obviously, was married to Stu Eizenstat—who, at that time, for instance, was doing the policy positions for Andy Young42 in his race for Congress, or the position papers for Wyche Fowler43 in his race for City Council. So we clearly didn’t do the political fundraising under NCJW’s banner. But because of my contacts there, I had a fundraiser for Andy Young, I had a fundraiser for Wyche Fowler at my house, I did voter registration and brought people to the polls on election day.

Ann: You told me something about that, it was kind of interesting.

Sherry: Everybody had house help—housekeepers—at that time. I had a woman who worked for me who had worked for my mom and partly raised me, and she would work for me and help me with my children. The day of the election when Andy Young ran for Congress, I had asked her to spend the night because I had signed up to work Perry Homes.44 I was going to be there when the polls opened, but I had to be in the neighborhood first to get people to the polls. When I told my housekeeper I was going to Perry Homes, she had a coronary and made me leave my wedding band and diamonds at home. [She] absolutely wouldn’t let me tell my mother where I was going.

42 Andrew Young is a politician, diplomat, and activist. He was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968 movement by African Americans to end legalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and racial segregation in the U.S.), executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and a close confidant to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives, was a United Nations Ambassador, and Mayor of Atlanta from 1982 – 1990.

43 Wyche Fowler is a Democrat who represented Georgia as both a Senator and member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He served in Congress from 1977 to 1993.

44 Perry Homes was a public housing project in metro Atlanta completed in 1954 and predominantly populated by African American families. The project was demolished and replaced in 1999 by the West Highlands development.
I went from the morning—from the minute the polls opened—until late at night. We had these big signs on our car advertising Andy Young, and I knocked on doors and brought strangers in my car. When the buses unloaded at the end of the day, people even reeking of alcohol, got in our cars. We drove them all over town trying to find their poll. Then at night, a few of us went down to see the election results come in, and I had to watch Perry Homes come in. We were really part of the great band wagon. Andy Young’s campaign really gave new meaning to grass roots organizations. A documentary should have been done on it.

I remember a wonderful moment, too. Andy Young had risen to U.N. Ambassador, and we were at an NCJW convention. There was a big delegation from Atlanta—Karen Piecuch was probably there—and Andy Young spoke. He had everybody in awe, and I raised [my hand] for a personal privilege. I said to Andy at the time, “If I knew how far your star would take you, instead of driving a car to bring people to vote for you for Congress, I would have driven a bus.” It just brought the whole house down at the convention.

Ann: You’ve mentioned to me also that you were involved with John Lewis, who is our current congressman here in Atlanta. You’ve been very much involved with the Black community here in the city. Tell us something about your feelings and how important that has been.

Sherry: Yes. I think that was probably nurtured through NCJW as well, because so much of what we were doing in community service was in the Black community, in the poor community, with schools. I developed very close ties that I really cared about, and particularly my association with Andy Young. Then it evolved. When I came to work for the American Jewish Committee, my boss told me to find a place and really make a mark; find one area that I felt I could really contribute in, and begin to develop some credibility in it. At the time, we debated about whether it would be energy—which was an emerging issue in 1980—or whether it would be ethnic outreach. Atlanta just wasn’t

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45 John Lewis is a civil rights leader and politician who chaired the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and lead the march on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama in 1965. He currently serves in the U.S. House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district.
quite ethnically diverse yet. Though we tried with an Hispanic\textsuperscript{46} community, it was too soon. The other option was to be involved in the Black community, and that’s really where I zeroed in, on the renewal of the Voting Rights Act.\textsuperscript{47} We created a meeting around the renewal of the Voting Rights Act that we knew Jews had lobbied on and worked to create years ago. We could work for its renewal and extension, so we created a Black/Jewish coalition out of that.

**Ann:** Who has been particularly actively involved in that project?

**Sherry:** The first co-chair was John Lewis, and that was really the beginning of a total love affair with the Lewis family. John chaired the coalition for four years, when he ran for Congress. And many, many, activists that I work with closely in the Jewish community, I met through the coalition and then outgrowths of it.

But a minute on John Lewis. I fell in love with John and his wife, Lillian [Lewis]. We discovered—they had adopted a child, and at that time I only had one child at home—that our boys were born the same day. So they invited my son to their son’s birthday party, and that continued for several years. And when John ran for office, I said to him, “I can’t do anything partisan politics, but as a single parent I’m home every weekend and I’d be glad to take little John [Lewis] any time you want.” John took me up on the that offer, and from Friday night to Sunday for four months, —through the entire race—John Miles spent weekends with me. Anywhere my son went, or spent the night, or was invited to a birthday, the two kids went together. They just spent that summer in *John Lewis for Congress* tee-shirts. (laughter) Every time they went to the grocery or filled up gas or went to meet family at the airport, they were a two-team show.

Julian Bond,\textsuperscript{48} who speaks so beautifully, challenged John to lots of debates. So Sunday night after those television debates . . . even the difficult one where John didn’t show up because one of the people running for office wasn’t a significant

\textsuperscript{46} Hispanic refers to people from Spanish-speaking Latin America, including the Caribbean, or from Spain itself.

\textsuperscript{47} The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a landmark piece of U.S. federal legislation that prohibits racial discrimination in voting. It was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, on August 6, 1965. Congress later amended the Act five times to expand its protections.

\textsuperscript{48} Julian Bond was a social activist and leader in the Civil Rights Movement, politician, professor and writer. He helped to establish the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
enough candidate so they didn’t put her on the panel. She started a picket, and he wouldn’t cross the picket line, and she didn’t come. Her last name is Kanner. John decided that he just couldn’t cross the picket line and that he had worked so much for equality that he would not participate in a panel that all the candidates weren’t in. So Julian had that whole hour to himself, and we all died—who were supporting him—and said he could be a little less self-righteous and get elected. (laughter)

Anyway, John promised my son that if he got elected, he was going to bring him to Washington, [DC]. When John did get elected, the Freedom Trains\textsuperscript{49} were so important to the Black Movement, [he decided] he was going to go to Washington on a train with his constituents. So we went by train to Washington. And when John Lewis was sworn in, my son and his son were in the well—side by side with him—and I was sitting in the bleachers in the balcony with Lillian, looking down. That was very exciting. So we have stayed, really, their family. They come to my house for \textit{yontifs}, and weddings, and \textit{bar mitzvahs},\textsuperscript{50} and our relationship is very close.

But then, through my work, I was involved in Leadership Atlanta\textsuperscript{51} and other things where I’ve met other significant folks. It was very interesting, when I moved back to Atlanta I was on the National Board of NCJW. I applied soon after that for Leadership Atlanta. There was absolutely no doubt that I got in Leadership Atlanta on my NCJW bio, because I was even impressed with my bio. (laughs) I was on the National Board of NCJW, I was appointed twice by Secretaries of State to the U.S. Commission on UNESCO,\textsuperscript{52} which has now closed. NCJW always had an NGO—non-government organization—position on UNESCO. UNESCO was a U.N. agency very critical of Israel, so in all my briefings to fight the battles for Israel within this U.N. agency, I got a lot of my early education on Israel. My first trip to Israel was for the dedication of the NCJW Institute [NCJW Research Institute for Innovation in Education at Hebrew University]\textsuperscript{53} in Israel, and it was supposed to open in 1973, but

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\textsuperscript{49} The 1975-1976 steam-powered American Freedom Train was a nationwide celebration of the country’s Bicentennial. Over a 21-month period, over 7M Americans visited the train during its tour of all 48 contiguous states.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Bar mitzvah} is a Jewish coming-of-age ritual for boys, aged 13. \textit{Bat mitzvah} is the corresponding ritual for girls.

\textsuperscript{51} Leadership Atlanta is one of the oldest sustained community leadership programs in the nation.

\textsuperscript{52} United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

\textsuperscript{53} The Institute carries out research and creates innovative educational programs serving
the 1973 War came. After the war, we went back in 1974 to dedicate the Institute, and
Mount Scopus was opened to us, so it was very exciting. So even my first trip to Israel was with NCJW.

**Ann:** We are going to run out of tape shortly, and we are also going to run out of time since you have a meeting. I think what I will do—if I may, Sherry—is reserve the right to meet with you again, and we will continue our conversation. Because there obviously is a lot more to talk about in your life. But I thank you for what we have been able to accomplish today, and I know it is going to be worthwhile. Thank you.

<Interruption in tape>

**Sherry:** . . . The first ten pages of my baby book are Edward, because my mother must have been trying to have a baby when Edward was born. Every year she would tell me when it was Edward’s birthday. I mean, like who cares? (laughter) But my parents had a real affinity for Ed.

<Interruption in tape>

**Ann:** That little bit of tape concerned Edward Sugarman. It was recorded just after the meeting.

<End Sherry Z Frank T1-S1-02>

<Begin Sherry Z Frank T1-S2-01>

**Ann:** This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Sherry Zimmerman Frank on the 16th of June, 1993, in Atlanta, Georgia. It is almost 8:00 o’clock in the evening, and we are doing this at an open meeting of the Oral History training group. The group for which it is being done is the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Okay, Sherry, how about starting at the beginning. Tell us how your family came to Atlanta, Georgia.

**Sherry:** My father’s family was here—he was a long-time Southerner in Atlanta—and my grandparents, his parents, were born in Atlanta. My mother came by way of Brooklyn, New York, and she came here to marry Dad.

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socio-economically at-risk segments of the Israeli population.

54 Mount Scopus is one of the seven hills on which Jerusalem is built and is home to Hebrew University.
Ann: How did they meet?

Sherry: My father had a sister who lived in New York, met my mother, and made the shadchan, and Dad traveled to New York to visit. Then they got married in New York and came south, and then my mother’s parents and brother also ultimately came to Atlanta.

Ann: What were all their full names, if you would, please, and approximate years of birth and such?

Sherry: My father’s parents were Sarah Zimmerman, and right now I’ve forgotten his father’s name. My mother’s parents were Bertha and Joseph Horowitz, and my grandmother was a homemaker. But my mother tells me that my grandfather—her father—set the line type for the Yiddish Press, The Forward, in New York.

Ann: Your father’s family, the Zimmerman family, they’ve been in Atlanta for more than one generation before your father?

Sherry: Right. I’m a fifth-generation member of the AA synagogue. But my father’s family were all deeply rooted at Shearith Israel, as well as my family belonging to both shuls. There was a very large Zimmerman family. In fact, Shearith Israel was called—in its early years—the “Zimmerman Shul.” Its lineup of past presidents shows lots of Zimmermans.

Ann: Any of them your relatives, your immediate relatives?

Sherry: They’re all my relatives. My father had a group of sisters and brothers. He was Jack Zimmerman. He had an insurance agency, and he died when he was very young. He was in his forties. But his brother was probably the one of his siblings known the best. He was Joe Zimmerman, and he had a men’s store, Zimmerman’s. Everybody in Atlanta dressed at Zimmerman’s. In fact, there were two Joe Zimmermans, and most folks in Atlanta dressed at one of the other. The women’s store was called Joseph’s—and was owned by] the other Joe Zimmerman, and he was a cousin.

Ann: Where was it located?

Sherry: It was located, right now, where the Central City Park is, in an old hotel downtown. I remember going downtown on weekends and stopping in to see my

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55 Hebrew word for matchmaker.
Uncle Joe around lunch time so he’d bring me to Leb’s [restaurant]. And I remember, as a young girl, I used to wrap presents and sell ties there on Christmas. I remember all the Black folks that came in there, and how kindly he was treated. It didn’t dawn on me until years later how important those folks were. I’ve noticed at the King Center, in the memorabilia in glass [cases] that they have of Dr. Martin Luther King [Jr.], there is a suit that he wore when he gave a famous speech, and Zimmerman’s label is in the shirt. (laughs) And when Uncle Joe passed away, “Daddy King” gave the eulogy at Shearith Israel, which is really remarkable.

Ann: Daddy King gave the eulogy for your Uncle Joe?

Sherry: Yes. So, he fitted a lot of folks in there in their time.

Ann: Why would he have been asked to do a eulogy?

Sherry: I think my Uncle Joe was very close to the King family. He probably helped dress them, probably floated a lot of loans for them, and he was very close to the Black community.

Ann: The loans probably were the answer there. (laughs) That’s very interesting. I had not ever heard that particular tidbit of information.

Sherry: I have very little of my father’s memorabilia—I was eleven when he died—but someone once sent me something that I have framed at my office, and I just love. My father was in the insurance business, and his mother was elderly, and I guess she kept kosher. She had reached the point that she couldn’t live by herself; her husband had died. I was probably two or three when she died, so I don’t remember them. But in this little article I have from the Southern Israelite—because that’s what it was called—Daddy had committed in a letter to the editor, to give a dollar a week to the

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56 Established in 1968 in Atlanta by the wife of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mrs. Coretta Scott King, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (“The King Center”) has been a global destination, resource center, and community institution for over a quarter century. The King Center is a 501(c)3 and National Historic Site.

57 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 until his assassination in 1968.

58 Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. (“Daddy King”) was an African American Baptist pastor, missionary, and an early figure in the Civil Rights Movement. He was the father and namesake of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

59 Kosher is the set of Jewish dietary laws that dictate how food is to be prepared or served, and which kinds of foods or animals can be eaten.

60 The Southern Israelite is a monthly newspaper which represents the voice of the Jewish community in Atlanta, the nation, and the world.
formation of a home for the elderly where they [could] live in dignity until they died. He said that while we were trying to form a Jewish home for the elderly, he would put his secretary at the disposal of the community for any organizational help. I always thought about, had he lived, what he might have done for the elderly. After he died, my mother—just the last couple of years ago was sick and passed away—but she lived her last five months at the [William Breman] Jewish Home.\(^{61}\) And I thought how interesting, he tried to build it for his mother, and his wife was there.

**Ann:** Were other members of your family real active in the community, not just at Shearith Israel, but generally in the community?

**Sherry:** Yes, they were. My family’s roots were very involved in Hadassah,\(^ {62}\) very involved in Shearith Israel, very involved in AA. Some of my favorite cousins today—Helen Hunt—is like a sister. I end every day on the phone with Helen Hunt, who was a Zimmerman. Her father and mother were Mildred and Louie Zimmerman. And I remember another cousin. Helen’s first cousin was Jerry Horowitz, who today is Federation [The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta] president. Jerry was a few years older than I was, and every time Jerry came home from Tulane [University], I got dressed up in new clothes and went to visit Aunt Doxey. And I can remember many, many, **seders** at Jerry’s house, or at Helen’s house, in the years after my dad died.

**Ann:** Obviously, the death of your father was a pivotal point in your life and the life of your family. Could you maybe talk a little about how that affected you personally, and also the family structure?

**Sherry:** I have a brother. My mother had an eight-year-old son and an eleven-year-old daughter, me. Dad came home, we had *Shabbos*\(^ {63}\) dinner, and he didn’t feel well, he laid down. We were watching TV, and he died of a heart attack. I’m sure today there would be all kinds of things that might have saved him. But I think I was dramatically impacted by that in ways that I’m just beginning to see. My father

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\(^{61}\) The William Breman Jewish Home has been serving the elderly and disabled in metro Atlanta since 1951. It provides long term skilled nursing care and short term rehabilitation services and is part of Jewish Home Life Communities, a non-profit organization.

\(^{62}\) Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, is a volunteer service organization which currently has over 300,000 members and supporters worldwide.

\(^{63}\) *Shabbos* (Yiddish) or *Shabbat* (Hebrew) is the Jewish day of rest and is observed on Saturdays. It 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.
was in the insurance business, and my mother dissolved his insurance agency, went and took her insurance exam, and became a broker—an insurance agent—carrying on mostly the family business. So I think she taught me a lot about persevering as a role model, being able to survive. And when I divorced, and then my former husband died and left young children, I think the lessons of my mother—that you can make it and you can go out and work and do it—were important to me.

Ann: Had she ever worked before or was she a stay-at-home mom?
Sherry: Mother went to NYU [New York University], and she worked for a while, but in retail. She didn’t graduate, worked in retail, and then got married and had children and didn’t work until Dad died.

Ann: I don’t think you mentioned her name.
Sherry: She was Esther Horowitz Zimmerman. She was a very strong woman, and she was single and working at a time that women weren’t doing it.

Ann: Did you have to shoulder a lot of the household responsibilities?
Sherry: No, I was very spoiled. I lived the good life of most Southerners. My grandfather and grandmother moved to town shortly after Mom and Dad married, and had my brother and me. My grandfather passed away and my grandmother moved in with us. And after Dad died, I always had my grandmother in the house. She died about three or four years later. So there was that transition time. Grandma was there, and also we had a housekeeper during the day time. Everybody had help in Atlanta at that time. Mother worked, but was home at three [3:00 o’clock]. My brother and I did just an overwhelming amount of elocution and piano and ballet—if you can believe it—and all the other sports. So I don’t think I realized Mother wasn’t a stay-at-home mother. I mean, she was there when I needed her.

Ann: You indicated that you felt that the example she set had a good deal to do with the way you have carried on your own life after your own trials. What other influences do you think have given you the kind of the wherewithal to get on with it?
Sherry: It’s interesting that Mother gave me elocution—in addition to all the other kinds of things—because I think in my later life I realized how much that gave me a sense of comfort, speaking in front of people, because it’s always been something that I’ve enjoyed doing. The other thing is that I found tremendous comfort in the
synagogue, and I guess that’s always been where I’ve turned and where I’ve found strength. I’ve always found it in the Jewish community, and particularly growing up. My family belonged to the Shearith Israel, but all my friends went to the AA synagogue. So I went for yontif to Shearith Israel and for confirmation to the AA, so I had both. But Rabbi Mossman was a real inspiration to me. I always was running for something, so I ran for every office in the school and BBYM. I lost everything and always came in second; I was vice-president of the world. (laughter) But I always turned to Rabbi Mossman for inspiration, too.

**Ann:** Who [else], among the adults in the community, do you think were the real movers and shakers? Or were you aware of things like that when you were a kid?

**Sherry:** I think there were models in my family. Jerry Horowitz’s parents were very involved. My Uncle Joe Zimmerman was very involved. As I moved into adult life, Marilyn Shudman was one of my most important mentors in the National Council of Jewish Women where I spent a lot of my adult life. I think probably Rabbi [Harry H.] Epstein influenced me in ways I didn’t know about until I grew up, because I always found that my most inspiring voices came from the pulpit. In my later years, there have been other people that are my mentors. Clearly, Rabbi [Arnold M.] Goodman is probably my favorite mentor today.

**Ann:** You were involved in his selection, I understand.

**Sherry:** I was on the committee that selected him. It was a lot of fun. He’s terrific.

**Ann:** Who else was involved in that?

**Sherry:** That was an interesting committee. Marshall Solomon was involved in it, Herb Karp, Doris Goldstein, Sol Singer. Each time we brought another rabbi down, a few of us had dinner with him at a different house, just to break the ice and have a smaller group. I was invited to the dinner when Rabbi Goodman came, before he met with our whole committee. And that evening, Sol Singer hosted the dinner, so that was what I remember about that selection. But Rabbi Mossman—I remember—in the old days when I was a child, they used to have *yahrzeit* at the holidays. Anyone who didn’t have a parent or a sibling or spouse to say Kaddish for was asked to leave the

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64 “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, the prayer for the merit of the departed soul of one’s father, mother or other loved one.
and there was this huge exodus of people out. I think that’s really before we confronted the Holocaust, because since then, everybody has taken on more the role that everybody has someone they ought to say Kaddish for, whether they know them or they don’t. But, I dreaded it. I was eleven years old. I was afraid of everybody crying and being hysterical, and I knew I had to stay in shul for Kaddish. And I’ll never forget, as long as I live, Rabbi Mossman’s sermon. Because I know that it was something that stuck with me my whole life. He told the story of visiting in a hospital with people who had been wounded in one of the wars. One of his favorite people was always very jovial in a bed, and hospitable, and he never knew what was wrong with him or why he was always in the hospital bed looking so healthy and wonderful. One day he saw him on the halls and noticed he didn’t have a leg. And he dropped something, or he fell, and the rabbi rushed to go help him. This man pushed him away and said, “It’s not the leg I’ve lost, but the leg I have left, that will pull me up and keep me going.” And he didn’t want help. That has always been my creed. It’s not what I don’t have but what I have that just keeps me going.

**Ann:** Very inspiring. I wanted to get back into some of the old-time leaders in the community, if we can. The Rabbi Mossmans of the world.

**Sherry:** Yes. Two other leaders . . . I think it’s a sad commentary today, because when we grew up in BBG, we didn’t have young advisors. We had parents who were advisors, and BBG was fabulous. The advisors of our group were Ros [Rosalyn] Alterman, and she was fabulous. The other woman who was just unbelievable was Vivi Cogen who is now Vivi Hillman. Our inspiration at that time was Helene Facher. Helene’s got another name now—I can’t remember the last name—but Helene did everything in B’nai B’rith Women. And those were role models who were fabulous to all of us who were just beginning our climb into organizational life.

**Ann:** They were women, what, in their thirties perhaps?

**Sherry:** Well, we were eleven—no, we were thirteen to seventeen—and they must have been twenty to twenty-five years older than we were, in their thirties. But they were doing wonderful things in the community, and they were smart and organized

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65 The Holocaust was the World War II genocide of the European Jews. Between 1941 and 1945, across German-occupied Europe, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered some six million Jews, around two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish population.
just really “with it” women.

**Ann:** And none of them worked?

**Sherry:** No. Today when I see Helen Facher and I tell her she was such a role model to me, she points to our group and how accomplished we were, and she says, “You know, I look with pride at all that you’re doing.” A lot of us are doing very neat things in the community that were part of my BBG group.

**Ann:** We talked on the other side of the tape about this, but I think this group would be interested in hearing how it came about that you formed a BBG group.

**Sherry:** Right. When I grew up, there was BBG [B’nai B’rith Girls] and AZA [Aleph Zadik Aleph] for girls and boys in Atlanta. But the real “in” thing to be in was DOZ [Daughters of Zion]. And DOZ—from my perspective—was a very Temple, very rich, very snobby, kind of private sorority. You had to be accepted into DOZ. Actually, it wasn’t the Temple, the Temple was STP, and DOZ were the other girls in town, but not the Temple. But you had to be asked to be in it, and it had a certain snob appeal to it. My age group was very large and very close, and we decided we were not going to deal with some of us getting in and some of us not. We decided we were not going to go in for this snob appeal, we were going to go in for a real equal rights kind of view. So about thirty of us formed a BBG chapter, and in our age group, there were only [about] three people—Barbara Talpa was one—who went into DOZ. They were really siblings of long-time DOZ members. And when our chapter started, I think there was a big following for years to come of large groups going into BBG. I’m not sure DOZ was ever quite as strong afterwards, and STP. I don’t really quite know what happened to that at the Temple.

**Ann:** I think it’s interesting that even in those years, you were espousing equality. (laughs) And I understand from Peggy that you were among the leaders of the pack.

**Sherry:** Well, Peggy Shulman was Peggy Alterman, and we were very close. I mean, we planned the world from our street on Zimmer Drive. She lived down the street. Ed Sugarman was her cousin, and when she would get home from being at

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66 The Temple is a Reform congregation located in midtown Atlanta and is the city’s oldest and most diverse synagogue. The civil rights advocacy of the senior rabbi during the 1950s and 1960s led to the infamous bombing of the Temple in 1958.
Mama Ida Sugarman’s on shabbos—if ever Ed was coming over afterwards—I made a quick dash down there to visit as well. I remember Peggy and I sitting on her door steps when her mother brought baby Bruce [Sugarman] home from the hospital. Bruce today is grown up and owns the Brickery Restaurant in Sandy Springs, but I remember him coming home from the hospital.

**Ann:** You’re not supposed to miss those things.

**Sherry:** Our group had wonderful people, our BBG group. I ran for office against Pearl Ann Golden Horowitz, against Robin Sasher Burger, against Peggy Shulman, against Eleanor Danamon Blass, the Greenbaum twins. There were a lot of activists in our group.

**Ann:** And what are all those activists doing today?

**Sherry:** Well, Peggy Shulman is the JNF [Jewish National Fund] Director. Harriet Masier Leibowitz is an accomplished photographer. Pearl Ann Horowitz Golden is an advocate for those with disabilities and very active in lots of boards in the community. Eleanor Blass was the first Jewish president that I know of at Grady High School—we all got behind her campaign. That was very exciting. She and Michael Blass were childhood sweethearts in high school. I remember I was sweetheart of an AZA group called DSI, and my boyfriend was Cary Reuben. I remember Kenny Kaufman lived around the corner from me, [and he] was Cary Reuben’s good friend. And Kenny was so shy that he wouldn’t give his girlfriend his dog tag, so I gave it to her for him. And in our group was Mark Lichenstein, he’s involved in the community, and Sam Mislow. Stu Eizenstat was the star of our class. He went on to fame in the President [Jimmy] Carter administration. Pearl Ann Horowitz and Harriet Leibowitz and Robin Burger and I all were at Shearith Israel, and we lived behind the shul. So, we would just take the break and come to my house for a few hours and then come back late in the afternoon. We spent many a yontif, half at Shearith Israel and half at my house.

**Ann:** What all did you do when you dated? What were the activities that were

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67 Stuart Eizenstat served as the U.S. Ambassador to the European Union from 1993 to 1996 and as the U.S. Deputy Secretary of the Treasury from 1999 to 2001. He was also President Jimmy Carter’s chief domestic policy adviser.

68 Jimmy Carter, a Georgian, was the 39th president of the United States from 1977 to 1981. A member of the Democratic Party, he had previously served as a Georgia State Senator from 1963 to 1967 and as the 76th Governor of Georgia from 1971 to 1975.
Sherry: You went to a hamburger restaurant in Atlanta called Seven Steers, which I haven’t thought about since then, which was in Buckhead and downtown right near The Fox [Theater]. You went to the movies, but then you went to the drive-in movies a lot.

Ann: Where were those?

Sherry: There was a very big one we used to go to at Piedmont [Road] where the Lindbergh Station is today. I hadn’t thought about that in a long time. When you cut Sunday School, you went to the Krystal and The Varsity. When you went to the Varsity and you drove in, Black folks would jump on the hood of your car, and they would try to get a bigger tip based on how much they entertained you. So they would sing and dance, they’d wear crazy hats and stuff, and you would really look for them. If you collected things, you collected their numbers, because when they jumped on the hood of your car, they’d put a number on your window sill, and that’s how you knew who your waiter was when he went in to get your food. Had a whole lingo, too. You could go there and order a bag of rags and a PC walking, and folks would know that was french fries and a chocolate milk with ice.

Ann: They still do a lot of that kind of thing. None of the jumping on the hoods that I’ve noticed, but the lingo is still there. And did you have dances?

Sherry: Everything really revolved around BBYO, and when I went to Grady High School, our whole BBG group could meet at lunch in the cafeteria, there were so many Jews there. It was unbelievable. It seemed like the whole world was Jewish when we were there, and there was routine to our lives. Every Saturday after Sunday School or after shul at the AA, we would walk to Rich’s [department store].

Ann: You went to services every Saturday?

Sherry: We went a lot. We had to, around the time we were confirmed, so we went to shul a lot on Saturday, more for social than for religious purposes, I’m sure. Then we would walk into downtown Atlanta, because it was walkable. And we would go eat at a Chinese restaurant called Ding Ho which was up a big flight of steps. And then we’d go

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69 B’nai B’rith Youth Organization, now BBYO, is an umbrella organization including Jewish teens in both AZA and BBG.
between Rich’s and Davison’s [department store]. Then every Sunday we went to Sunday School and went straight from Sunday School to the Center, and we had meetings, and then we all played basketball. That was when DOZ and the BBYO groups were really at each other. It didn’t matter who was playing DOZ, if they were in BBG and different chapters, you cheered for them. And then we always stayed later to cheer for the boys’ teams that were playing, so that was the social thing. And there were always dances and parties with BBG and AZA.

Ann: Who were your favorite dates?

Ann: But you liked some of those older guys, too, that you never really got to date.
Sherry: I’m going blank. I can’t remember them, (laughs) but when I was a senior in high school, I met my husband. And when we were young in high school—eighth, ninth and tenth grade—we all dated the high school guys. We dated the guys our age for a long time and the guys one year older than us who were in Frank Garson [AZA Group], which was another AZA group. But then . . .

Ann: What was your BBG group called?
Sherry: JOJ, Jewels of Judea, and the DSI group were Devoted Sons of Israel. We had really classy names. That’s in the days before they named them for all the Frank Fearmans and Frank Garsons and all those great Atlantans who had chapters named for them. But, we played basketball, and I remember Leon Tuck was my advisor, our coach for a while. We loved our basketball coaches.

But then, once you were in eleventh and twelfth grade, you went to the colleges to date, because at that time there were no women at Georgia Tech. So all the guys who came here dated the Jewish girls. Judy Cogen was a good friend of mine, and was sweetheart of AEPi70 at Georgia Tech. She was dating Marty Cogen then, and I

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70 AEPi (Alpha Epsilon Pi) is an international Jewish fraternity, founded in 1913. Over 102K men have
was dating an AE Pi, so we doubled a lot. So once you hit eleventh and twelfth grade, you began dating the college kids, and that was big time.

**Ann:** Also at Emory [University]?

**Sherry:** Not as much, a little bit, but Emory had women on the campus. So even though they dated high school girls in Atlanta, it wasn’t as much. But at that time, the AE Pi and TEP\(^1\) house at Emory were all Jewish, and the AE Pi house at [Georgia] Tech was really where the action was.

**Ann:** Who were some of the guys at Tech?

**Sherry:** Well, Jerry and Sandy Cohen were [there]. One of my best friends was Elaine Greenbaum. Elaine and Marilyn Greenbaum were the “Greenbaum Twins” here in Atlanta; now they live in New York. Elaine dated Jerry Cohen. Judy Cogen dated Marty Cogen. I dated Leonard [Frank]. Oh, and Lenny Greenstein was there at the time, he stayed here.

**Ann:** How about Warren Epstein?

**Sherry:** I think Warren was a good deal older than I was, I didn’t know him. But some other names escape me. Lee Weinstein and Gary Leff were there. They’re still in Atlanta. But most of the crowd that Leonard and Marty Cogen ran around with are gone, out of Atlanta.

**Ann:** They just left town.

**Sherry:** Yes.

**Ann:** Couldn’t stand it, couldn’t take the heat. (laughs)

**Sherry:** Right.

**Ann:** All right, let’s move on. I’m really curious, and would like for you to talk a little more about, how you got into your profession, how you used your volunteer activities as a stepping stone into a career.

**Sherry:** I always was involved in organizational life. I ran for stuff when I was at college—I went to Stephens College—and then Leonard and I got married, and we lived for a while in New Jersey. When I was in New Jersey, I was introduced to

\(^1\)TEP (Tau Epsilon Phi) is an American fraternity formed in 1910 by a group of ten Jewish men who were excluded from membership in other fraternities due to their faith. They dedicated themselves to building an organization free from discrimination.
National Council of Jewish Women, and I fell in love with it. When I came back to Atlanta, I immediately looked up NCJW. Marilyn Shudman was president of the section, and she plugged me into my first job. That was just a twenty-year love affair with National Council of Jewish Women. Through the National Council of Jewish Women and my work with Soviet Jewry, I became very involved in Federation and chaired the Federation Soviet Jewry Committee. I moved out of NCJW as president, on to some national things with NCJW, but [did] a lot of leadership training and campaign stuff with Federation work with Soviet Jewry.

Then Leonard and I moved to Tennessee, and I went through a divorce in Tennessee and knew I needed to go to work to support four children. I had two job opportunities that were a direct result of my volunteer work. The first one offered to me was Director of Volunteers at a Jewish home and hospital. The second one that was offered to me was Director of Volunteers with Russian Resettlement. I had worked with Jodie Franco and Fran Eizenstat when the Soviet Jews first began coming to Atlanta in the seventies [1970s]. So when I moved to Memphis [Tennessee] in 1978, I really knew a lot about Soviet Jewry. I had helped write a national manual that the National Council of Jewish Women had gotten a grant from the Council of Jewish Federations\(^2\) to write about the volunteer role in the resettlement of Soviet Jews. So it was a real toss up for me, and I just decided that the future of this country was in the elderly and I needed to learn about that if I was going to be working long term. So I went to work for the Jewish Home [Memphis Jewish Home and Rehab] as their Director of Volunteers. Then, two years later, I finished the divorce, sold my house, and moved back to Atlanta. I came looking for a job and really was determined to work in the Jewish community, and if not that, in the political arena.

Interestingly, one of the people I spoke to was Sidney Marcus\(^3\) who was about to run for mayor. All of his folks really wanted me on that staff, but they weren’t ready to put the staff together, and I needed a job. I had come to Atlanta, bought a

\(^2\) The Council of Jewish Federations is an association of Jewish community organizations in the U.S. addressing issues of budgeting, campaigning, public welfare, public relations, and business management services.

\(^3\) Sidney Marcus was a legislator in the Georgia General Assembly for fifteen years in the 1970’s and 1980’s, a leading spokesman on urban and progressive issues, and a leader in the Atlanta Jewish Community.
house, and moved here with four kids—one in college by then. The American Jewish Committee position opened up, and I got this job, and I’ve been at it now twelve and a half years. I really feel like I’m getting paid for the things I’ve done for twenty years as a volunteer, and still in the same kind of tying social issues, public policy issues, and concern for world Jewry [together].

**Ann:** Was there a strong social activism streak in your mother?

**Sherry:** No, I think the social activism comes from my father. My mother was very private, very quiet, not communal at all. But when I look back at it, I think she probably did all she could do to work and raise a family, and I don’t think single women could do what they could do today. So she was not organizationally minded at all. I’m not sure Jewish women did that in New York growing up, too. I think some of it is very much . . . communal activity is southern.

**Ann:** I don’t know that it’s necessarily southern, but you may be right. Although, look at the leadership in Council, for instance. Frequently, the top leadership comes out of that New York area.

**Sherry:** I was in a great crowd, though. Marilyn Shudman was followed by Susie Elson who was followed by Barbara Asher, and then I followed Barbara Asher. So it was just a wonderful succession of interesting and different role models.

**Ann:** You told a cute story about how your meetings changed . . . .

**Sherry:** Oh, yes. These were the days when everybody was home with help and with children. I remember when I finally came on to the Executive Committee of the National Council of Jewish Women. Marilyn Shudman had finished her presidency—and shortly after, went to work for the Federation—and Susie Elson was president. We would have Executive Committee meetings that would last, I guess, from 9:30 [A.M.] or so in the morning until about 2:00 or 3:00 [P.M.]. At Susie Elson’s, they were always absolutely elaborate lunches. She used the most exquisite silver I ever saw in my life. It was the first time I saw a biscuit tin—I always thought you put crackers in a basket or a little loose side thing—but she had these silver antique beauties. Then we went from Susie Elson and all the delicious food, to Barbara Asher who felt if she had a cigarette and a pad of paper, she could go from early morning until late night. I remember people used to bring fruit and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
thinking they would die before Barbara Asher’s meetings ended. And I’m the original Jewish mother and cook. When I got to be president, (laughs) the focus of our meetings were, “What had Sherry cooked up?” I remember Gracie Hentrow was one of the presidents after me, and I think she was intimidated by how much we ate at these meetings, or the style in which we served. Her mother used to come in from Montgomery [Alabama] when we’d have Exec meetings, and she cooked for us. (laughter) It was really a lot of fun.

Now I see the women meet for two and a half hours at the Council office and barely have coffee, so I guess those were the good old days when we could ponder the world for hours. They were exciting, challenging times.

**Ann:** Your own drive, then, for social activism and for bettering this world, you think . . .

**Sherry:** It was partly my synagogue and it was partly my youth group. I believe it probably was my father who just didn’t live long enough to set the example that I followed. But I’ve just always been drawn to the community, and to me, that’s living out my Judaism and working for social justice. I think maybe [I’m] even lucky to be part of the times.

I remember one of the things that I did. . . When I was President of Council—and I think I was a fairly good delegator—I decided there are certain things you should be able to do as president, and pick. It was early in the 1970s, and the Soviet Jewry Movement had just started, really in 1970. The women’s organizations were rotating the Women’s Plea for Soviet Jewry on December 10th which was Human Rights Day. I was president from 1973 to 1975, and in 1973, it was National Council of Jewish Women’s turn to do the Women’s Plea for Soviet Jewry, and I decided as president, I was going to be chair. I also decided we were going to take the cause of Soviet Jewry into the streets of Atlanta. I remember a past president suggesting to me [that] she might rethink her membership in NCJW and be the first life member to

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**Notes:**

74 A coalition of women’s organizations working to build awareness about the plight of imprisoned Jewish activists in the U.S.S.R. and to encourage authorities to allow Soviet Jews to immigrate.

75 Human Rights Day is celebrated annually across the world on December 10. The date honors the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption and proclamation, on 12/10/1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first global enunciation of human rights and one of the first major achievements of the new United Nations.
cancel a life membership because I was being so Jewish in public. But we set up a soup kitchen at a downtown city park to stage what it was like being in Siberia in a prison camp in the Soviet Union. I think to work for Soviet Jewry and to see the doors open and resettle Soviet Jews, and to see them land by the thousands in Israel, if you weren’t a social activist, the times made you one.

I was supposed to go to Israel for the first time in 1973 when NCJW’s research center was to be dedicated at Mount Scopus. But the Yom Kippur War broke out, and we didn’t go until 1974. Well, to go to Mount Scopus and see that road open again and Jerusalem re-unified—and not be compelled to work for your life for Israel—I think the times drew me in as much as my own kind of commitment to these issues.

Ann: You’re probably quite right. I think there are a lot of people who have been in much the same boat. How did the Civil Rights Movement—for instance—of the 1960s, impact you or influence your thinking?

Sherry: I probably had a comfort level working with Blacks. I think lots of us grew up loving the people who worked in our house. [I also] grew to have a real comfort level with Blacks, not realizing it through the years, because I worked sometimes in my Uncle Joe’s store. But it was really through National Council of Jewish Women that I began doing projects at inner city schools—cultural enrichment programs—that I got drawn into it. My best friend in my National Council of Jewish Women days became Fran Eizenstat, and you just couldn’t be Fran’s friend without being politically active. So everybody Stuart Eizenstat knew got involved in Andy Young’s campaign. I remember the day of the election for Congress when Andrew Young ran. This is the 1960s. All of us were assigned districts, and we were to go work all day bringing people to the polls. And when I told my housekeeper I was going, she had a fit and made me promise her that I wouldn’t tell my mother where I was going. I was going to Perry Homes. She spent the night at the house and made me take off my wedding band and diamond ring when I went into the district. I was there when the polls opened at 7:00 [AM] and stayed until they closed at 7:00 [PM]. I literally knocked on stranger’s

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76 Between the 1948 Arab–Israeli War and the Six-Day War in 1967, Mount Scopus was a UN-protected Israeli exclave within Jordanian-administered territory. Today, Mount Scopus lies within the municipal boundaries of the city of Jerusalem.
doors, brought folks—some reeking of alcohol—in my car to vote, waited at bus stops to take people to the polls. And there are wonderful documentaries about that being the beginning of grass roots politics,\textsuperscript{77} the folks that came out to get out the vote when Andy ran for Congress. I remember Leonard and I being one of maybe a dozen folks down at Andy Young’s precinct on election night watching our precinct. I figured I was going to get commission on how many folks in Perry Homes voted that day. (laughter) But it was an amazing victory and I think from then on I just couldn’t stand staying out of politics.

Then Wyche Fowler was in [Atlanta] City Council, and I was involved in Soviet Jewry with Federation. Wyche went and interceded on behalf of a Soviet Jew who, a week after Wyche got back from Russia, got out. I remember having parties at my house for Wyche when he first ran for Congress and City Council, then went on to be Senator. You just couldn’t be involved with the friends that I was involved with, [like] Ros Cohen, who was a past president of NCJW and passed away as a young woman. All of us got caught up in politics—if not out of our own inclination, through being friends of Fran and Stuart—and that’s continued to this day.

\textbf{Ann:} I know you have a close relationship with John Lewis and his whole family.

\textbf{Sherry:} Right, by the time I came to work for the American Jewish Committee, I knew it was inappropriate any longer to say where my politics were, particularly when I was working as much as I am in the Black community today. But I told John [Lewis] when he ran against Julian Bond, that I was certainly in his camp, wanted to do what I could, but out of the spotlight. Also, I didn’t have money to give. But I discovered in learning about John Lewis, that his son and my son had the same birthday. And John Miles Lewis, and my son Andy Frank, have shared many birthday parties together.

\textbf{Ann:} Is Andy Frank named for Andy Young?

\textbf{Sherry:} No. (laughs) I never even thought about that until I just slipped. But I told John when he ran for Congress that I was a single parent, home on weekends, and if there was anything I could do for them in that vein, quietly to let me know. What I

\textsuperscript{77} A grassroots movement is one which uses the people in a given district, region, or community as the basis for a political or economic movement. They use collective action from the local level to affect change at the local, regional, national, or international level.
didn’t realize was [that] John was from Alabama and his wife, Lillian [Lewis], was from California, and they had no one here. Little John came on Friday nights and stayed until Sunday evenings for three months, through the entire summer. John would end his busy weekends and his debates on television, putting his feet up at my house, unwinding, and having something to eat and picking up little John. His son and my son spent the entire summer wearing “John Lewis for Congress” shirts. So wherever they went, to fill up gas, to get groceries, they were politicking. And he promised my son if he made it to Congress, he was going to take him with him. And when John was sworn in to Congress, his son and my son were at his side on the floor, and Lillian Lewis and I were looking down on them from the balcony. So there’s a real affinity we have with the Lewis family.

Ann: Very special.

<End Sherry Z Frank T1-S2-02>

<Begin Sherry Z Frank T2-S1>

Ann: This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Sherry Zimmerman Frank on the 16th of June, 1993, in Atlanta, Georgia. This is the first side of the second tape. This is for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Ann: We were talking about the American Jewish Committee’s Black/Jewish or Jewish/Black coalition, whichever way we phrase it. There are other areas, however, that I think you’ve had a significant impact on in the American Jewish Committee’s work of the last several years. What about Access, for instance?

Sherry: I guess there are three or four things I’m most proud of. One is [that] in another world and another day—if women were in places that they were not in [in] my day, or they are today—I am sure I would have studied to be a rabbi. So one of the things I like to do best is be rabbi to the American Jewish Committee. It was very fertile ground. It was a constituency that needed a little bit of Jewish nourishment, (laughs) and I really liked to fill that vacuum. Also, I was the first person who was a non-Temple member to be president of the National Council of Jewish Women.

So I think I have an affinity with moving Reform Jews into a more
traditional posture, and I’ve done that—I think—with the American Jewish Committee. I was always very devoted to Federation, and I enjoy being a team player. I enjoyed making NCJW more centrist and more connected to Federation—and vice versa—Federation more appreciative of things outside of their four walls. So I’ve really enjoyed when people say to me, “AJC is so mainstream or so known or so different than when you came in,” I really like to think that it’s come both ways. The more traditional Jewish community has come to appreciate the important role AJC plays and AJC is more a player in mainstream Jewish community. So that’s one thing.

Another thing is, I really am committed to the next generation, maybe because some of my kids are in that next generation. My daughter has just got on the Young Leader - on the UJA National Board and is president of Young Leadership Council of Federation in San Francisco. So I’m very proud of that kind of next generation of commitment. I really am committed to young people, and I think the American Jewish Committee—because of its intellectual programming and other kinds of things—has a great deal to offer these young folks who are educated and community minded as well as Jewishly committed, or who ought to be more Jewishly committed. I can be a rabbi to them because they haven’t quite joined a synagogue yet.

But Access has grown. I recently told my boss, when I came on staff at the American Jewish Committee in 1980, the chapter had about 450 members. Today we’re 1,450. Access is our young adult division, and is now 550 [members], so it’s larger than the chapter I came to direct twelve and a half years ago. I’m very proud of that. I’m proud of the leadership that is emerging from it. Also, as much as I think I’m a team player, I still am guilty of a lot of turf issues—we all are—and I see how “un-turf-minded” they are. They’re teaching me, and that’s very exciting, so I really feel good about that.

It’s interesting, the things that lead to other things. Through my work with the Black community, [one time] Maynard Jackson78 called to ask us to pull together a press conference. Our efforts to bring in the diverse group that we’re working with—which includes religious folks and ethnic folks—we, in all innocence, called the

78 Maynard Jackson was a politician and attorney from Georgia and a member of the Democratic Party. In 1973, at the age of 35, he was elected as the first Black mayor of Atlanta or of any major city in the South. He served three terms, making him the second longest-serving mayor of the city.
Latin American Association,\textsuperscript{79} the Korean Community Relations Council,\textsuperscript{80} and others. The Koreans came to that press conference feeling [that] finally they could get someone to listen to them about the problems they were having in the Black community. We’d become the bridge between the Black community and the Korean community. The Korean community said to us, “The Jewish community works in the Black community—physically, has jobs in the Black community—with small grocery stores in the Black community. How do you function?”

We pulled together a wonderful committee of Jews to meet with the Korean community, and it was a very funny meeting. One of the people that we invited, who is one of my favorite mentors and I think one of the Jewish community’s giants, is Gerald Cohen.\textsuperscript{81} We invited some traditional young folks, like Elaine Alexander, who has always worked in inter-group relation stuff or her kid—Kent Alexander—who wants to work as an outreach person. But we also invited some of the old-timers like Gerald Cohen who would know what it was like to be in business in the Black community.

When we went to have this meeting with the Koreans, they invited us to a restaurant in Korea Town—which I didn’t even know existed—on Buford Highway. We were dying to call \textit{[The Atlanta] Jewish Times}\textsuperscript{82} about the meeting. But we didn’t want the Koreans to feel like they were on stage or like animals in a zoo, “Come take pictures.” So we held back our desire to call the press, we left our cameras at the office, and when we got to this meeting, we discovered that there were cameras just flicking away at us. We discovered for the small Korean community that’s half the size of the Jewish community—maybe thirty thousand—they’ve got five papers. We have one or two. We were just intrigued with it. There was such awe among the Koreans when Gerald Cohen would speak. They have this tremendous respect for the elderly, as we do as a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} Founded in 1972, the Latin American Association (LAA) has grown to become the region’s leading agency representing Georgia’s Latino issues. The LAA offers direct services that help Latino individuals assimilate and become contributing members of Georgia’s community.
\item \textsuperscript{80} The Korean Community Relations Council represented the needs of Atlanta area Korean individuals and businesses, helping them assimilate and become contributing members of their community.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Gerald Cohen (1919 – 2009) was known for his vision, his ability to bring people together, and his philanthropic generosity in the Atlanta Jewish community. He has served as president of AA Synagogue, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, and was a founding member of The Harry H. Epstein School. He served on the boards of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta, and many others.
\item \textsuperscript{82} \textit{The Atlanta Jewish Times} is a Southern Israelite publication, owned and published by Michael A. Morris.
\end{itemize}
Jewish value, too. They were so intrigued when Gerald said to them, “I know how to talk to my grandson at the Shabbos\textsuperscript{83} table. I know how to talk to my friends, to my colleagues at Federation, but I also know how to communicate with the guys who load the trucks and sort metal in our warehouse.” He gave them a lot of insights about being part of the community, a lot of communities, that you live and work in.

We learned that the Koreans had a lot to learn from us and were very anxious to learn. [At] our next meeting with them, we realized what savvy\textsuperscript{84} the Jewish community has politically. So we thought we would help them because they thought any time you needed to express yourself, you do it in the press—which very often is counterproductive and particularly inflammatory for the Black community. We told them about working quietly and working through political process. So we invited Elliott Levitas—who is a former Congressman—but who couldn’t come. But Liane Levitan, Ron Slotin, and Doug Tebor were in elected positions: Kent County [Georgia] chairman (Liane Levitan), and a [Georgia] state legislator (Ron Slotin), and a representative of the [Georgia] State House [of Representatives] (Doug Tebor). [We invited them] to speak about how you use the political system, and we’ve done some very interesting things in helping the Koreans move into communal affairs. So that’s another exciting area, too. I hope Federation will help me fund a trip of Black Atlantans, but next I want to take Koreans and Hispanics and Japanese. I think there are some real friends out there for the Jewish community in these growing ethnic communities who have tremendous awe for us.

\textbf{Ann: } Very interesting, I certainly had not considered that. I had thought in terms of the Koreans taking the place of the old-time Jewish families who lived and worked in the ghettos of the earlier years, but . . .

\textbf{Sherry: } The other thing is the American Jewish Committee, and it’s a program coming from the Agency, but I really love it. A priority of the Agency is something we called, “Why Be Jewish?” I think all of us, as we look at the studies about Jewish assimilation, realize that we have to reach out and affirm more, why it is a very positive thing to live a Jewish lifestyle. And I’m finding tremendous interest among my

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Shabbos} or \textit{Shabbat} is the Sabbath, Judaism’s day of rest and seventh day of the week.

\textsuperscript{84} Having or showing perception, comprehension, or shrewdness especially in practical matters.
constituents in the American Jewish Committee for that. This past year we had a wonderful study group for our Board. I think our founders of the American Jewish Committee would be turning in their graves to think that of all Boards in the city of Atlanta, the American Jewish Committee was the first one to institute a six-part Board study series on the Torah\[^{85}\] for our leadership. But I see us getting into studying and being more knowledgeable, Jewishly as an organization, and I’m going to have fun nurturing that in the years to come.

**Ann:** What else do you want to talk about? You’re such a good interview, I don’t even have to say anything. (laughs) I’m going to let you make your own questions, now. Is there something else?

**Sherry:** I guess, if there’s any area that I am radical on, it’s feminism in the Jewish community. I never was a bra-burning feminist.\[^{86}\] I don’t relate at all to the radical feminist issues, I like playing woman’s role. I like equality. But I am rabid in the Jewish community, and I don’t know where it came from. Sometimes I wonder if it came from sitting in the back, or on the side, of the mechitzah\[^{87}\] at Shearith Israel and feeling second class and hating it. I never can daven\[^{88}\] where women sit separately. I don’t like that kind of thing. For years, I wanted to wear a tallit,\[^{89}\] and women didn’t do that at the AA [Ahavath Achim]. When I was bat mitzvahed—I didn’t have a bat mitzvah as a child because my voice is really pitiful, and I had all the Hebrew but I was embarrassed to sing. I used to sit every Shabbos at shul with Jeannie Cutner who sings as badly as I do, and Jeannie was having this whole new renewal into Judaism. Gerald Cohen says Jeannie overcame her background more than anyone he knows, meaning she grew up at the Temple and is now at the AA. (laughs) Jeannie and I decided we’d study for our bat mitzvah together. My kids really had a kick telling their boss they had

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\[^{85}\] Hebrew for ‘teaching’. Torah is a general term that covers all Jewish law including the vast mass of teachings recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinical works.

\[^{86}\] A reference to the most radical thinkers of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s. The idea of bra-burning represented a critique of the existing beauty culture which valued women for their appearance instead of their intellect or other skills and talents. There are, in fact, no historical records of actual bra-burning events or activities.

\[^{87}\] A physical barrier like a curtain or screen, found in some synagogues, which divide the women and men.

\[^{88}\] Daven is the act of reciting Jewish liturgical prayers.

\[^{89}\] A prayer shawl fringed at each of the four corners in accordance with biblical law. The wearing of tallit at worship is obligatory only for married men, but it is customarily worn also by males of bar mitzvah age and older.
to get off work to come in town for their mother’s bat mitzvah at forty-five. But, some of my friends wanted to buy me a tallit then, and I wouldn’t do it. I said to my kids, “The only reason I do a bat mitzvah with Jeannie is because she couldn’t sing either.” And on the way home from the bat mitzvah, my kids said, “Hey, Mom, next to you, Jeannie Cutner can sing.” (laughter) They only told me that after the bat mitzvah. But it kept gnawing at me that I wanted to wear a tallit, and I just didn’t. At Etz Chaim, now, the women wear tallits and you can’t have an aliyah at Etz Chaim without putting on a kippah and a tallit if you’re a man or a woman, which I just think is so beautiful.

I went to Israel right before the Gulf War, and there was no one in Israel, and the shops were open just for us for our tour bus because nobody was going and nobody was buying. I decided with my meager money, I was going to make an investment in Israel’s economy. (laughs) And if I was going to make an investment in Israel’s economy, it had to be a tallit. So I went and I bought this absolutely exquisite tallit. I figured, also, if I was going to wear a tallit, it had to be a feminist tallit. It’s pink silk, and it’s all woven colors, and it’s wonderful. Then I decided, if I was going to wear the tallit, it had to be a very special time. I bought it in December. My mother had passed away that year, and I was going to say kaddish for my mother for the first time in February. So I saved it to wear the first time I said kaddish for her, so I could remember her every time I put it on.

I remember that next year, whoever was president of synagogue called me to ask me to do the Torah portion for Rosh Hashanah, which a woman had never done and which I was very excited about. Then my singing voice really threw me and I had to study for three months with a cantor which I thought was going to give him a

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90 Congregation Etz Chaim is a progressive, egalitarian, Conservative synagogue in metro Atlanta, north of the city.
91 Aliyah in Hebrew means ‘ascent’ or ‘going up.’ An aliyah is the calling of a member of a Jewish congregation to the bimah (a raised structure in the synagogue from which the Torah is read and from which prayers are led) for a segment of reading from the Torah.
92 Jewish men cover their heads during prayer with a small skull-cap called a yarmulke or kippah.
93 The Gulf War (1990 – 1991), including Operation Desert Storm / Operation Desert Shield, was a war waged by coalition forces from 35 nations led by the United States against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait.
94 The Jewish New Year.
95 The official in charge of music or chants who leads liturgical prayer and chanting in the synagogue.
coronary. I don’t know which gave him the worst coronary, my voice, or that a woman was asked to do this. (laughs) [It seemed like an] absolutely horrible crime. (laughs) It was totally intimidating to sing for the cantor, but I think the rabbi wanted me to do it so I would wear my tallit in front of the congregation and they would see that a woman could wear a tallit. And I have to tell you, nobody has worn it since, so I’m not sure if I’m an example for others to follow. (laughs)

But, we have a Black/Jewish women’s group, and Johnnetta Cole and I were talking about meeting. It was right after Johnnetta’s debacle where she was in the [President Bill] Clinton administration, and The Forward newspaper had printed horrible things about her past. Then she was taken out of contest, if she was in contest, for a Clinton appointment. But, Johnnetta said to me when we were meeting, “We need to do something inspiring to bring the group together. Why don’t you share something Jewish and I’ll share something from the African community?” She said, “Bring something you can touch or feel, like that ‘candelabra’ thing.” That was the menorah, so I brought my menorah. And I brought my tallit to share, and everybody was very intrigued with the tallit.

Ann: I would think so, with a pink silk tallit.

Sherry: So I feel that I’m making a very strong statement when I wear it, about equality in our Jewish tradition, and I’m really an advocate for that.

Ann: How about your girls? Are they advocating much the same?

Sherry: My daughters are an actuary and an investment banker. One daughter, who’s married, earns twice what her husband does and probably always will. He’s in a wonderful field of environmental science, but she’s an investment banker. They live in

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97 Bill Clinton, a member of the Democratic Party, served as the 42nd president of the United States from 1993 to 2001. Prior to his presidency, he served as Governor of the state of Arkansas and Attorney General of Arkansas.

98 The Forward, formerly known as The Jewish Daily Forward, is an American news media organization for a Jewish-American audience. Founded in 1897 as a Yiddish-language daily socialist newspaper, it launched an English-language weekly newspaper in 1990.

99 The menorah is an ancient symbol of the Jews and holds seven (if inside a temple) or nine (if in a home or other location) candles. It has come to be connected with Hanukkah (eight-day festival of lights, usually in December, commemorating the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greek army, and the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem by restoring its menorah, or lamp).
different worlds where women’s earning power is different, women’s roles are different. When Jackie goes out on a date, she feels it’s as much her role to pay for a guy as for him [to pay for her, because] she may be making more than he. She moved right into being president of YLC and on the board of her synagogue and her Federation without thinking it was unusual for a woman to be in this level. She never had to go to her husband for her campaign gift. I would say that they are activists but not feminist activists because some of the battles are over. I recently asked Laura, who is very aggressive in business, how she feels as a woman. She says she feels she’s listened to and taken more seriously because she’s in that inner circle at work and because of her educational background—she got a Master’s [degree] at University of Chicago—so I don’t think they feel they have to prove anything. It’s a different kind of world for them, having *aliyahs* and those kind of things as not being unusual. They had *bat mitzvahs*, they’re just not unusual for them. So I don’t see them fighting feminist battles. I count women’s heads wherever I go in Jewish environments, to make sure women are really moving where they ought to be. I look at Deborah Beards, who is president of the [The William Bremen] Jewish Home, and Sheryl Finkle, president of The Epstein School. I get tremendous nauses out of seeing women succeed. When the [Atlanta] Jewish Community Center and Jewish Family Services of Atlanta had executive director positions opened, I waited to see if women would move into the roles. I still don’t think that women are going to move yet—in this community—into those most powerful places, and others. So I’m always looking at women, but only within our own community for some reason.

Ann: Have you aspirations to do something other than what you’re doing right now?

Sherry: No. Actually, when the Jewish Family Service position was open, Jerry Horowitz and some other folks told me to apply for it. Early in my AJC career, probably the first year, Marilyn Shudman’s position as Women’s Division Director at

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100 The Young Leadership Council (YLC) welcomes adults up to age 40, who are single or married, with or without kids; it is dedicated to building a connected community of young Jews.

101 The Epstein School is a Jewish day school that offers integrated, dual-language learning and cultivates Jewish identity. Sherry Zimmerman Frank served as the school’s Vice President at one time.

102 Jewish Family Services of Atlanta began as a relief agency, but merged with Jewish Vocational Services in 1997 to become Jewish Family and Career Services.
Federation opened up and folks told me to apply for it. I went to talk to David Sarnat about it.

I love the American Jewish Committee. The only time in twelve years I have thought of leaving was to go run John Lewis’s district office here. I’ve been offered other positions in the American Jewish Committee field, but I won’t leave Atlanta.

**Ann:** You want to stay here.

**Sherry:** Yes. I have no aspirations to do anything but what I’m doing. I love it.

**Ann:** Well, we’re glad that you’re doing it, and we’re glad you’re doing it here. (laughs) I think at this point we will wrap this for the evening, and I thank you very much. I again, will withhold the right to come back at you some other time, if we deem it appropriate, and do a little further exploration. But thank you so much, Sherry.

<End Sherry Z Frank T2-S1>

<Begin Sherry Z Frank T2-S2-01>

**Ann:** This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Sherry Zimmerman Frank on the 27th of April, 1994, in her home in Atlanta, Georgia, at 140 Abernathy Road. It is about 7:30 in the evening, and this is for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

This is the second side of a second tape that Sherry and I have worked on. We have pretty much covered your earlier life [Sherry], in our previous two sittings, but I did feel that you might want to expand a little bit more on some of the activities that you have been involved with at AJC since you have become a professional. And if there’s anything else that you’d like to talk about as well. But why don’t we start with AJC because I really do think that the work that you’ve done there has been so significant that it’s worthy of further mention.

**Sherry:** Well, I knew when I went through the divorce and had to go to work full time that I wanted to stay in the Jewish community. I also knew that I could make the transition to a professional role from a lay role because I worked with NCJW and

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103 David Sarnat has had a long and distinguished career of service to the Jewish community, including 21 years as Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta.
because it was an organization so tapped in to the community, but working so much in partnership with other organizations that had staff.

When I came on board with the American Jewish Committee, I remember my boss asking me in my interview what I would do with my four little children if someone got sick, not realizing he didn’t have the right to ask me that.

Ann:  Well, in those years, it wasn’t mandated.

Sherry:  Right. As it turns out, I was single with four young children but I had a mother who was widowed and retired and was wonderful. The funny part was that my boss at the time—Bill Growlick—whenever his kids were sick, he was the parent that went to get them and missed a day of work, and not his working wife. So, that was really funny. But I was determined from the beginning to really do a great job, I needed the job. Bill was very supportive. Within four months of my being on staff, Bill was offered a position in Florida, and I knew from January until May that he was going to leave and that I was going to have a crack at being the Director, and that I was going to be the first woman in that job.

Ann:  What was your initial job? What was your title?

Sherry:  I was hired as an Assistant Area Director, and women had had that job before. Bill was very nurturing and encouraging, and told me to find a few mentors and listen to them, and find an area to make my mark in. He had made his mark in extremism and in inter-religious affairs, and he kind of suggested that I look at energy as an issue, and ethnic relations as an issue, and Black/Jewish relations. I jumped in at Black/Jewish relations. Some early mentors like CB. Franklin Lundeen—who has since passed away; Ted Fisher who was the Community Relations Committee chair at Federation who really helped me get into United Way and other community-based agencies, was a mentor of Black/Jewish relations; and that’s really where I made my mark. I had the opportunity of working with Cecil Alexander and John Lewis in just pulling together a group of Blacks and Jews.

One of my colleagues in New York—Heyman Bookbinder in Washington

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104 Cecil Alexander was a prominent Atlanta architect and civic leader responsible for some of the city's most notable public buildings. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, he was a leader in peacefully desegregating the city's public housing and local businesses. He also designed a new state flag that removed one of the last symbols of Georgia's racially divided past.
[DC], who is AJC’s Washington lobbyist\textsuperscript{105}—suggested that chapters all over the country ought to reach out to Black folks. It was 1980-1982, because the Voting Rights Act was up for renewal. He thought it was a very good safe bridge issue. Blacks and Jews had worked together on voting rights in Mississippi in the 1960s. So we actually had a meeting to study the Voting Rights Act, and out of that grew the Black/Jewish Coalition. The first name of the coalition was the “Black/Jewish Coalition in Support of the Voting Rights Act”.

Ann: Who was involved in that?

Sherry: Cecil Alexander convened the meeting, and Cecil has a tremendous long rich history of working in the Black community. His home was one of these homes that was a place that Blacks could go when there was segregation in the South, and restaurants weren’t open to Blacks.

Ann: Why was that? How did he happen to fall into that pattern?

Sherry: Folks say that he was just a civic-minded, generous, righteous person who reached out across race and religion. But some folks say it was his wife, Hermie Alexander, who just was totally color blind. She grew up in New Orleans [Louisiana], and I think she had always had Black friends. Together they were really the friends of the Black community, and they were in the spirit of Jacob Rothschild who thought, after Martin Luther King Jr. won the Nobel [Peace] prize, there ought to be a dinner for him. He [Cecil] was just a forward-thinking guy. We asked him to convene a meeting, we asked John Lewis to speak because he had done so much work with the Voting Rights. There were fabulous folks who came to that first meeting, folks like Julian Bond. I think we asked about 50 folks and 35 came. There was an electricity in the room, everybody wanted to continue to work together. We spent that first summer meeting with our members of Congress, meeting with the editorial boards [of the papers], campaigning for writing letters, speaking out on the renewal of the Voting Rights Act.

Ann: Who were some of the other Jewish members?

Sherry: The Jewish folks from the start were folks who also had a long, rich record

\textsuperscript{105} Lobbying, persuasion, or interest representation is the act of attempting to influence the actions, policies, or decisions of officials, most often legislators or members of regulatory agencies.
of commitment to the city, to moving out beyond their own Jewish community. Elaine Alexander was involved from the beginning. Larry Lowenstein was the president of the American Jewish Committee and very supportive of our efforts. Lois Frank was on board early, and a lot of AJC leadership like Ted Fisher and Marvin Weintraub and Sedrick Sesman(sp). I remember Elaine Alexander being onboard very early.

Ann: Was Barbara Asher?

Sherry: Barbara wasn’t involved with us. Maybe she came to some things, but I don’t remember her very much. Michael Hillman was involved with us from the beginning. My early staff colleagues were real committed to it, Ronnie Van Gelder, Rabbi [Alvin] Sugarman. We did a lot through the years with the Black/Jewish Coalition. We [would] do programs where we just got together to learn about each other’s backgrounds. When I went to Russia and visited Soviet Jews, I talked about it. When Coretta Scott King went to South Africa, she came back and talked about it. We talked about all kinds of social issues.

But then we marched together, and the first time we marched together, John Lewis at that time was at City Hall in Atlanta, a City Councilman. He was going back to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, which was really the seminal event in the Civil Rights Movement. [It was] when the fire hoses and the dogs were waiting for the marchers at the other side of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and knocked them unconscious. It made the front cover of Life Magazine. It really led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and John and I shared the twentieth anniversary [of that]. The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 and this was 1985. We went back and marched for the twentieth anniversary. Rabbi Sugarman said he wanted us to start at Temple Mishkan Israel because it was bombed, and because there was something special about going from that place to another place that was historic. It was so emotional. Lots of us went who had never marched before, people went with their children who didn’t march earlier. I remember when Rabbi Sugarman and John Lewis

106 The 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama became known as “Bloody Sunday” because it ended in state troopers beating nonviolent protesters as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Built in 1940, the bridge is named after Edmund Winston Pettus, a former Confederate brigadier general, Democratic Senator from Alabama, and Grand Dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan.

107 LIFE was an American, wide-ranging weekly general interest magazine known for the quality of its photography.
got at the top of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they kneeled down and said a prayer. Rabbi Sugarman said he kissed the ground, and he looked down, and in front of him were all the media of the world. It was a celebratory day instead of a day for brutality, and he had to say a prayer in thanks for how far folks had gone in twenty years. Ever since then, I’ve hardly missed an opportunity to march with Coretta Scott King.

One of the things we did was march, so we marched in Selma. We marched in Forsyth County [Georgia] one week before King Week\(^\text{108}\) in early 1990 (or maybe 1988). Some of the Black leadership went into Forsyth County, which was an all-White county, to demonstrate that there ought to be Black folks in that county. They were stoned, and hit by Klansmen [members of the Ku Klux Klan].\(^\text{109}\) Hosea Williams, Joseph Lowery\(^\text{110}\) and others said, “We won’t be forced out of that county.” The next week, there was a march called the Forsyth County March Against Fear and Intimidation. During King Week, there’s a certain pattern to things that happen, and on Monday morning of King Week, there’s always an ecumenical\(^\text{111}\) service at Ebenezer Baptist Church.\(^\text{112}\) Elaine Alexander was going early, Cecil Alexander was going early, and there was special seating for dignitaries. Elaine said to me that you could hear at 8:00 in the morning, everybody sang, “We’re not going to be intimidated. We’re going to go back to Forsyth County.” Elaine came home from that prayer service and said, “Something is going to happen in Forsyth County next week, and we need to be part of it.” Elaine and I, the very next day, sat in on all the meetings that the Black leadership were having from The King Center and the SCLC\(^\text{113}\) [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] and Concerned Black Clergy and Labor.

We had never even led a march, or participated in one, truly. And all of a sudden we found ourselves dealing with everything from the portable toilets to what synagogues or congregations we could get open, so folks who came in the night before the march could sleep on church pews and synagogue pews. I didn’t even know that

\(^{108}\) Martin Luther King Day is a federal holiday in the U.S. and falls on the third Monday of January. It is the beginning of King Week which celebrates his life and legacy.

\(^{109}\) The Ku Klux Klan, commonly called the KKK or the Klan, is an American white supremacist hate group, whose primary targets are African Americans and Jews.

\(^{110}\) Civil Rights leaders from the 1960s and 1970s.

\(^{111}\) Promoting or tending toward worldwide Christian unity and cooperation.

\(^{112}\) Pastoral home of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

\(^{113}\) The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is an African-American civil rights organization closely associated with its first president, Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior.
happened. We went to our Board and got monies allocated to rent buses for the march. We had this big discussion about what do we do because we’re going to march on Shabbos, and we decided that those of us who felt that this was in the spirit of Shabbot, we wanted to march. We sent out flyers over the name of the Atlanta Black/Jewish Coalition, and dozens of Jewish folks marched. I remember Steve Selig was an early participant in the Coalition, and he marched. I talked to John Lewis’ wife Lillian to ask her if she was going to march. She said no, John wanted her to stay home, it was too dangerous. And I went and marched.

From the time we get off the bus until we got to the courthouse, there were wall-to-wall National Guards. Flying above us were police helicopters, and all along the side were Klansmen in full robes—I had never seen that before—with disgusting signs. It was James Earl Ray who killed Martin Luther King [Jr.], and there were signs like “God bless James Earl Ray,” or “Send all the Blacks back to Africa.” I just couldn’t believe that Coretta [Scott King]’s kids had to see that, but Coretta was very supportive. So we marched.

We marched for Soviet Jewry. The Jewish community is not a marching community, and in 1987 we had a march in Washington for a Free Soviet Jewry. I’d have to look back in my notes to see who was Premier of Russia at the time—maybe Leonid Brezhnev—but, it was the first time a Soviet Premier was coming to the United States to meet [with the President], and the Jewish community had this enormous march on Sunday to send a message, “Let my people go.” AJC national reached out to me, to help get Black voices there, and John Lewis was one of the speakers. Coretta Scott King sent a statement that was read there, and that was exciting. Some Black folks came up on our plane with us from Atlanta to march.

Then, Coretta Scott King decided to commemorate the great March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King [Jr.] made the “I Have a Dream” speech by deciding in 1985, that every five years she would go back to Washington to reenact the march and celebrate it. So I’ve gone back with her three times now. In fact, this past

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114 Leonid Brezhnev served as Chairman of the Presidium and died in 1982. Mikhail Gorbachev served as General Secretary of Russia from 1985 – 1991.

115 “I Have a Dream” was a public speech delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963—in which he called for civil and economic rights and an end to racism in the United States. It is one of Dr. King’s most famous speeches.
summer, in 1993, it was the thirtieth anniversary of that great march. I co-chaired the Atlanta mobilization for the march, and that was fun. I co-chaired it with Tim McDonald who is the Executive Director of Concerned Black Clergy. I was a duck out of water, not knowing how you march, and how you get Labor money in there, and how you organize the buses. But at the very end, we did something neat. We realized that there were college students from Atlanta who wanted to go march and didn’t have the money to get there. So we sent a letter out to the Coalition to see whether people would sponsor one student for $55, and in four days, we filled a bus that we underwrote to go to the march. So that was very exciting.

But, from the start, we had great Black support in the thing. We had Ozell Sutton from the U.S. Justice Department. Sonny Walker who worked for the National Alliance of Business and Ozell Sutton were two guys who were in Arkansas when the Little Rock schools opened, and they were pulled off their jobs to help the Black students in Little Rock cope with that. The first person they reached out to, while they were helping the Black students at high school, was the Reform Rabbi in that community who became their life-long buddy.

Ann: What’s his name?
Sherry: Ozell and Sunny Walker would still tell you that their rabbi is Zeke Siegel, who I don’t know. But it’s so interesting, because Ozell grew up loving Zeke, and Sonny’s son lives in Little Rock, Arkansas. Zeke has moved on—I don’t know, maybe [he’s] retired now—but Sonny Walker’s son ran for the State Legislature in Little Rock, and Zeke Siegel’s kid ran his campaign. [Walker’s son] ran and won. So we had, early on in the Black/Jewish Coalition, Blacks who had been part of the Civil Rights struggle but who knew Jews were in there. So we didn’t need to convince them.

Marvin Goldstein was an early supporter of our efforts. Eldrin Bell, certainly Andy Young and Maynard Jackson, and Bill Campbell. Our current mayor—Bill Campbell’s—wife, Sharon Campbell, has been on the Steering

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116 Chartered in 1983, the mission of Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta (CBC), is to provide leadership, advocacy and service to the homeless, helpless and hopeless in our community.
117 The Little Rock Nine was a group of nine African-American students enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957, who were initially prevented from entering the racially segregated school by Orval Faubus, the Governor of Arkansas. After the intervention of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, they were allowed to attend the school.
118 Long-serving Atlanta police officer and public servant.
Committee as many years as I can remember and chaired our first two team retreats.

We had a great Passover Seder one year, and it was the same year that there was a race for Congress, and it became a political thing. Charles Johnson was running, and his whole family and entourage came. John Lewis was running, and his whole entourage; and Julian Bond—it was like everybody running. We’ve done two Seder, one time Alvin Sugarman and Andy Young co-led it. The next time we did it, we had Black seminary students join us, and that was powerful.

**Ann:** What was their reaction, how did they approach the Seder?

**Sherry:** The Seder was wonderful because we used a Haggadah\(^{119}\) which I just picked up this past year and realized how unusable it is today. It really shows you that we’ve lived in magic times. The Seder was called “Passage to Freedom,” and, of course, Seders are always the story of moving from bondage to freedom. But in this Seder, along with all of your traditional readings, we read what [Nelson] Mandela said in prison, and Robin Olive. We read passages from Winnie Mandela. We read passages from Zacharab, we read passages from [Natan] Shuransky. The only one that’s relevant anymore is the passage from the *Diary of Ann Frank*, where she dreams that tomorrow will be a better day. But, so many struggles have passed, and we talked about it in terms of our commitment to those in our communities who had gone from slavery to freedom [and] have understood the slave experience. Some of the Black folks helped us sing, “Let My People Go” in the middle of the service. We did a lot of wonderful singing, it was great. It was a real bonding experience.

We’ve been to synagogue together and church together. And we’ve had some very sticky issues we’ve faced together, too, at least a half dozen times. We did press conferences on very important issues. We spoke out in favor of the pardon for Leo Frank\(^{120}\) at a press conference.

**Ann:** And was there Black support for that?

**Sherry:** Always. What was so wonderful was that John Lewis was our chair for four years, and he was a member of City Council. And the press hangs around the Council chambers looking for a story. There’s always press assigned to the Legislature,

\(^{119}\) The Jewish text that sets forth the order of the *Passover Seder*.

\(^{120}\) Leo Frank, a Jew, was falsely accused of murdering 13-year-old Mary Phagan. He was convicted and jailed, then kidnapped from jail and lynched in 1915.
assigned to City Council, there are certain peak places. So, in the first eight years of the Coalition, any time we did a press conference, we did it at City Hall, and whoever was mayor—be it Andy Young or Maynard Jackson—would come out of their office and John would set it up.

We had Joe Roberts, who is the minister at Ebenezer [Baptist] Church. We had McKinley Young and Bill Guy who are prominent Black ministers, and support from concerned Black clergy. We spoke out when President [Ronald] Reagan went to Bitburg [Germany] to visit a cemetery where SS [military branch of the Nazi Party] soldiers were [buried]. That was gratifying. Norman Rates is the head of the Religion Department at Spellman [College], and Norman Rates and some other Black leadership helped write the statement that we released. It was really Black folks who said, “We really feel like we need to speak out about Reagan going to Bitburg,” and that was gratifying.

We spoke out about violence in South Africa. In fact, over the years, I have been called by Black friends, a lot of times, to speak out in public here [at] forums about South Africa. In the early 1980s, Jews could speak out about violence in South Africa and we were allies. As we got to the late 1980s—once the Sullivan Principles came in, and the sanctions against South Africa became an issue—that was a horrible wedge between Blacks and Jews because, the only folks not living up to the sanctions were Israel. There was all of this concern about the relationship between Israel and South Africa that I think was really outrageous and unfair on Israel’s part. They should have been better than that. But, Israel was in the same boat that all of Black Africa was, and that is, when you don’t have any other trading partners, you trade with who will do business with you to stay alive. So I’m not really proud of what Israel did in those years in terms of continuing to sell arms to South Africa. But Israel looked at the fact that there were a 140,000 Jews in South Africa that needed to be watched and protected, too. So that was a difficult time. That was difficult for a Jew to really work with Blacks

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121 In 1977, Rev. Leon Sullivan—an African-American minister and member of the board of General Motors—developed the Sullivan Principles. General Motors had a significant presence in South Africa where apartheid (a harsh program of state-sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination targeted primarily at the country's black population) was in force. The Sullivan Principles were developed to apply economic pressure on South Africa in protest of apartheid and the principles eventually gained wide adoption among U.S.-based corporations.
on South Africa for about six years. That’s over, now it’s a bridge issue again, but we spoke out on that.

I had some gratifying experiences because there were times, for instance, when the scuds [ballistic missiles] were falling on Israel during the Gulf War. The American Jewish Committee wanted to let Israel know they weren’t alone and that there were Americans of all walks of life who would reach out to them. I reached out to the religious leaders that I knew. In a Christian denomination, “Judicatory” is a word that describes [something] like a Judicatory head of the Methodist church, or a Judicatory head of the Lutheran church. It’s like a judicial area or a district. We got the bishops from every Protestant denomination, the Catholic Archbishop, Concerned Black Clergy, Coretta Scott King, [and] the head of the Black seminary in town, to sign on to this, urging support for Israel. In fact, there were so many names that they asked us if we would extend it to a full page ad in the New York Times. So I went back again, always, to Coretta Scott King, to see if we could use her name in the New York Times ad. She said, “Yes, submit it.” We got John Lewis, we got Andy Young.

Then, just this year, with Saracen’s poison that’s been spread everywhere, the American Jewish Committee—on Presidents’ Day—wanted to do an ad called “We Are One People,” celebrating America as a pluralistic democratic state. The AJC said to us, “You reach out to people in your state who are nationally recognized, and all races, all religions.” We made a list, and in three days we got the Governor of Georgia, Zell Miller; the Mayor of Atlanta, Bill Campbell; Andrew Young; Coretta Scott King; Jenetta Cole, President of Spellman [College]; Dr. [James] Costen, President of the Interdenominational Theological Center; Leon Sullivan, who is now back at Morehouse [College]; Louis Sullivan who was Secretary of Health and Human Services; Senator [Paul] Coverdale; it was just . . .

Sherry: We had just honored President Carter that year, and we asked him to sign on. He wrote us a magnificent letter saying that he was with us in spirit but that he just doesn’t use his name in ads, and we understood. A President has to keep a certain

122 Saracen was a term widely used among Christian writers in Europe during the Middle Ages to refer to Arab Muslims.
distance. But we were really thrilled at all of the connections that we made. The Archbishop of the Catholic Church signed on with us, the new Archbishop Donahue. So we were feeling good that all of our contacts and all of our bridge building really did pay off.

<End Sherry Z Frank T2-S2-01>

<Begin Sherry Z Frank T2-S2-02>

**Sherry:** So, the Black/Jewish relations have been a journey of love.

**Ann:** Trouble testing. How do you feel the relationships are right now? There’s been a good deal of discussion because of all the [Louis] Farrakan and [Elijah] Muhammad business of late, the speeches that have been well documented.

**Sherry:** Right.

**Ann:** And the fact that even though Muhammad was invited to speak at Emory University, [he was] then uninvited to speak, because of problems concerning perhaps safety and security issues. But he did speak in Atlanta to a rousing round of applause and ballyhoo that evening in a church here locally. How has that whole issue impacted the relationships that you’re finding in the Coalition today?

**Sherry:** Well, it’s definitely impacting them, and there’s definitely anger and hostility out there. It’s really created a gap between us, being the American Jewish Committee, and the Black/Jewish Coalition, and Concerned Black Clergy. When Farrakan tried to meet with the Jewish community when he was in town two years ago, and the Jews refused to meet with him, it really created a chasm that we haven’t been able to bridge with Concerned Black Clergy.

**Ann:** Do you feel that it was right to refuse to meet with him?

**Sherry:** Yes. Lots of folks say to us, “Gosh, if Arafat and Rabin can shake hands, why in the world can’t you?” And my response is always that a lot of behind-the-scenes negotiations took place before that handshake. And everything that Israel had demanded for years, Arafat was prepared to say—like he would stop terrorism, he would recognize Israel’s right to exist. So our view is, Farrakan is selling books that are

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123 Louis Farrakhan Sr. is an American minister and leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI), which the Southern Poverty Law Center describes as a black nationalist and black supremacist group. Elijah Muhammad is a former NOI leader.

124 Yitzhak Rabin was Prime Minister of Israel and Yasser Arafat was a Palestinian political leader and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
antisemitic,\textsuperscript{125} that say Jews were responsible for the slave trade. As long as he continues to say we’re the blood suckers of America, there’s nothing to negotiate. If tomorrow he denounced antisemitism and said something about Judaism and pluralism, then maybe we would have the beginnings of the grounds for negotiations. I believe, though, that responsible Black leaders feel Jews should meet with Farrakhan and we’ve made a mistake. But, hey, the plate is just too big with too many critical issues on it. We’re not going to stop loving you just because we disagree on this issue. That’s the way I feel with most Blacks, particularly Blacks in the Civil Rights Movement who still want me to keep marching, want me to fight against the bigoted flag we have flying over the Capitol.

\textbf{Ann:} And want your money behind their efforts.

\textbf{Sherry:} Well, some of that, too.

\textbf{Ann:} I think so.

\textbf{Sherry:} But then there are others that are in that hard line, grass roots, angry camp that we’re not going to win over. It’s interesting, because I’m developing ties with the Muslim community, and there’s a wonderful Iman—Iman is I-M-A-N. An Iman is like a clergy in the Muslim community, and there’s a wonderful Iman who leads a very big mosque. When I said to Plemon—P-L-E-M-O-N E-L-A-M-I-N—Plemon El-Amin, “Will you meet with Farrakan?” he said, “Absolutely not. Nation of Islam is abhorrent to those of us who follow Islam. It doesn’t begin to teach what we believe in the Koran. And if I’m not meeting with him, for goodness sakes you have no business meeting with him.” And I’m finding that there are more and more Muslims who really do ascribe to that view, and I think we need to give the Farrakan issue a little less hype. It’s hard to do because his folks are disgustingly vitriolic and antisemitic, and they grow crowds.

\textbf{Ann:} Well, they make very good media events.

\textbf{Sherry:} Black folks say that people go to see that like they go to see Michael Jackson and other entertainers, and I just can’t believe that some folks aren’t vulnerable and some folks don’t take some of that Black antisemitism to heart. But my view is that where there’s trouble, that’s where we ought to be. So if, in fact, there’s

\textsuperscript{125} Antisemitism is prejudice against, hostility to, or hatred of Jews.
problems in the Black community, then I think we need to double our efforts. One of my officers, Arnie Rubenstein said to me, “When I hear Farrakan and Elijah Mohamed, I want you to double the time you spend in Black/Jewish relations just to say ‘In your face! I won’t let you tear down what I’ve built.’”

So now, the Black/Jewish Coalition has finished this Fall, its fifteenth retreat, bringing eleventh grade Blacks and Jews together for a weekend, trying to overcome stereotypes and empower kids to work together in their schools to break the racism, to stop the antisemitic jokes.

This past weekend we had, for the second year, a retreat for young leaders where we do a lot of serious prejudice reduction work with them. John Lewis, both years we’ve done it, has come out and talked to the folks. It’s my hope that we will get emerging leadership to begin to reach out to one another and see each other as allies. I said to the group, “You know, next time you’re sitting on a nominating committee of a board you’re on, and they’re looking for a minority person, think of someone you spent this weekend with. Or, the next time you’re filling a table at an NAACP126 dinner, think of someone [here]. Because that’s how it starts. When John Lewis kicks off his campaign, think of this list and bring folks together. Because you begin to work together and begin to overcome stereotypes.”

I just wrote a proposal—and I’m scared to death I’ll get the money, then I’ll have to do it—to do a similar kind of thing now with college leadership. That’s where the anger is. It’s Black college leadership that’s bringing Mohammed onto campus.

Ann: I was going to ask about that, because what you have spoken about so far have been the two extremes of the ages.

Sherry: Right.

Ann: You talked about those who lived through, and remembered, the help of Jewish leadership and laypersons during the time of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. And you’ve talked about these young people who have yet to really be impacted by the Farrakans and Mohameds of the world. But there’s that group in between, and those college kids are really out there in force with their mouths wide

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126 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a civil rights organization in the U.S., formed in 1909 as a bi-racial endeavor to advance justice for African-Americans.
open and speaking.

Sherry: The anti-Vietnam protest, and so much of the kind of advocacy movements of our last twenty years, have really found a kind of birthing ground on the college campus. It’s almost as though that’s your most radical period in time. So I say to some folks, even being left alone, these radicals are going to realize they have to be more moderate if they want to succeed in the work place.

Ann: I was just going to say, that’s the time when you have the least to lose.

Sherry: Right.

Ann: You’re aware, but you really don’t have anything to lose at that point, either.

Sherry: But I still think it’s worth trying to bring our young folks together to see if we can’t begin to nurture a little community spirit. I’ve thought of one person. When Atlanta opened up and there was a realization that we had to integrate, there were two major companies in Atlanta. One was Delta [Air Lines] and one was [The] Coca-Cola [Company]. Each of them were probably the first to take a Black person and put them in a position of importance in the company—kind of the Black community breaking into the corporate White world. And Bill Allenson was the one who moved into Coca-Cola and John Cox into Delta. They were with us from the beginning of this Black/Jewish Coalition, and they had worked in the Urban League and NAACP and Community-Coordinated Childcare and those kinds of movements of the 1960s to the 1980s. And they knew that there were Jews in there and friends. John Cox said to us about eight years ago, “If I go to lunch with Elaine Alexander for the rest of my life, I’m not going to love her any more. It’s as though we’ve developed a relationship and a trust. We now need to go talk to folks who haven’t done what we’ve done.” That was really our motivation for reaching out to teenagers and to rising young leaders, because we had to create opportunities for those relationships to begin.

Ann: So what kinds of settings? You said you had a retreat, where do you go? How do you go about identifying with youngsters?

Sherry: Well, there are two situations, and one is very interesting. Sharon Campbell, the wife of our new Mayor, works with the Atlanta Public Schools. She’s in charge of all the international programs, so that she selects the students who go abroad
to study in various countries, including Israel. She also selects the Atlanta host families for visiting international students. She really knows the *creme de la creme* of the public school system. She calls the kids that do this, “student ambassadors.” So when we decided to do the high school program, she co-chaired it with Sherry Labovitz, and it’s very interesting because at that time Sharon Campbell’s husband Bill was a law partner with Steve Labovitz. Now that Bill’s the Mayor, Steve’s the Chief of Staff. But Sherry and Sharon were [like] soul mates, sisters, law partners’ wives, and they chaired the project. It was very easy to find Black eleventh and twelfth graders because Sharon had them in the palm of her hand. She has the addresses and parents’ names on her desk. What was more difficult was to find the Jewish kids because most kids by eleventh or twelfth grade have passed confirmation and passed BBYO and they’re harder to reach. But we did reach them through synagogues, through youth groups, through Yeshiva [High School].

Over the five years, we’ve learned that [having] counselors in all the schools looking for us [is key]. Because they know it’s a really growth experience for the kids. We found [that] if we can go to schools where there are both Blacks and Jews [it works best]. It doesn’t work at Mays [High School]—which is all Black—or Yeshiva—which is all Jewish. But if we work at North Springs [High School] and Riverwood [High School] and [The] Padeaia [School] and Woodward [Academy] and a lot of [other] schools—even Grady [High School] that has Blacks and Jews—if we can get two to four kids from a school, when they go back into the school, their relationship continues. This is very interesting. The Jewish community is very over-organized in terms of . . . everything. But honestly, every agency today has a young leadership program. Most are called Young Professionals. We’re light years ahead of the Black community in reaching out and giving opportunities to young people for leadership. But last year, at the Project Understanding Retreat, which is our young leadership retreat, one of the Black women—Catrice Lindsey, who works for the Democratic Party—was captivated to find so many of the young Jews were involved in Access, which is the American Jewish Committee’s Young Professionals group. It blew her away that there were junior groups of organizations. Well, one year

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127 Yeshiva High School (grades 9-12) was a Jewish High School in Atlanta. In 2014 the Greenfield Hebrew Academy (grades pre-K through 8) merged with Yeshiva into one college preparatory day school now called the ‘Atlanta Jewish Academy.’
later, she has now created a Black young leadership group called “Inner Circle,” and they have a hundred people, in a year. You have to apply to go to all of these things—the Teen Retreat or the Project Understanding Retreat—and we screen them. If you’re a teenager, you have to have a reference, and we sometimes check. We want to make sure somebody knows they’re not just a bad kid looking to get in trouble, because we’re responsible for them overnight. In the Young Leadership Retreat, the criteria is [that] you have to be working in the community. So we look at what boards or agencies they’ve begun to work on, and all these Black applicants put down Inner Circle, and we said, “What is Inner Circle?” We realized it was Catrice’s advocacy group for young leaders. So there was a direct result of our work to begin to introduce developing young leadership groups in the Black community. So that was very exciting.

**Ann:** And these Young Leadership groups are people in their mid to late twenties and thirties primarily?

**Sherry:** Yes, and the American Jewish Committee membership is $35 if you’re thirty-five and under; $100 if you’re over. So that was kind of a natural [age division]. Federation, and most of the other groups, do thirty-five and under. I would say my first ten years on the AJC staff, one of my real hallmarks was our work in the whole area of inter-group relations—Christian/Jewish as well as Black/Jewish. But I think my hallmark in the last five years is the growth of our young leadership group called Access, and that’s given me a tremendous amount of joy.

**Ann:** Who are some of the young ones whom you feel have real potential?

**Sherry:** Well, I get a thrill out of the fact that I’m seeing sons and daughters, in the group, [of people] who I know. For instance, my early presidents were people like Tom Asher, and his son Hugh is active in the group; Elaine Alexander, and her son Kent is in the group; and, I’ve always loved Madelyn and Leon Eplan, and Elise Eplan was an early chair of the group; Janna Eplan is now on our Board and chaired the Teen Retreat and the Project Understanding Retreat.

That’s another neat thing. The young leaders that went to the Project Understanding Retreat last Spring chaired and staffed the Teen Retreat this Fall. So teenagers could see role models of young people in their twenties and their thirties...
working together. They spoke their language. But, you go around the room and there is a “little” everybody. Bootsie and Jerry Siegel’s kid was at the Black/Jewish Retreat; Marcia and Michael Schwartz’s son Herman is on our Board; Jerry and Pearl Ann Horowitz’s son Scott is on our Board; Jerry and Judy Dubroff’s daughter Sidney Dubroff is a leader in our group. It is so much fun to see these dynamite kids, whose parents were involved—and even kids whose parents aren’t involved—who are so thrilled. The kids are connecting Jewishly, that they’re feeling closer to us.

Ann: It’s sort of natural for a child who has seen his or her own parents doing things within the community to themselves do something when their time comes. But I wondered if there weren’t young people whose parents really weren’t that active. And if maybe it’s going the other direction—the parents are becoming activated in later years because they see their own children . . .

Sherry: Definitely . . .

Ann: . . . showing an interest.

Sherry: . . . there’s some of that.

Ann: That’s great.

Sherry: Parents are very excited about it, also, kids are expanding parents’ vistas.

Bootsie and Jerry Siegel were involved in the Jewish community, [and] were in a traditional kind of background. Their daughter Adele spent the weekend at the Black/Jewish Retreat. They probably never spent ten minutes thinking about Black/Jewish relations. So, there’s some folks expanding through their children.

The other thing [that] is in my heart of hearts, I always say that in a different time I would have been a rabbi, that I’ve always been drawn to Jewish things. And Access is taking me back to that as well, because I’m finding in the young kids that I work with—I call them kids, but they’re really in their twenties and thirties—they grew up with a lousy Jewish education, a woefully inadequate education in their religious schools and in their congregations, and sometimes even in their family life. They are hungry for Jewish study. I find that we are doing so many programs, everything from “Israel and World Jewry” and “Antisemitism” and “Traditional Jewish Things,” to a series on “How to bring the Jewish Holidays Home” where we’ve cooked latkes.128

128 Potato pancakes.
we’ve had a *Shabbat* cooking class, and a *Passover* cooking class. We’ve met with almost every rabbi in town. We’ve done sessions on “Jewish History,” and “Can You be Jewish and Not Believe in God?”. [We’re discussing] will we have an organization if we don’t have ritual, will we have a community? It’s so nurturing for Jewish identity and Jewish education issues. On one hand, they want to be part of the world around them and they want to deal in Black/Jewish relations and Christian/Jewish relations, and respond to domestic issues. On the other hand, they really want a lot of Jewish programming. Sometimes I feel like I’m running a synagogue adult education program, the programs are so tremendously religious-based rather than social justice-based. It’s very interesting.

**Ann:** It sounds as if those who have become active are also those who are across the board. They’re not all children who grew up at the Temple or at the more liberal religious institutions.

**Sherry:** That’s true.

**Ann:** They’re children coming out of much more of the traditional, not hard line really, but more traditional backgrounds,

**Sherry:** You have some of everything. You have kids that are very assimilated and very Reform. You have kids that grew up in Hebrew Academy. We have a host of Hebrew Academy graduates. Children of Federation leadership like David Rubinstein’s father. Arnie chaired the Federation campaign the last two years; Mindy Selig, Steve Selig’s daughter. A lot of leadership potential for the community. I think we’re really building folks who will stay with the Jewish community and all of our agencies. We try to not to be a turf-oriented agency and encourage the fact that you can be involved with Federation and ADL and your synagogue and AJC and JNF. It’s inclusive. We have leaders like Jay Tenenbaum and Terry Uhrinoff (sp.) and Joe Larigety (sp.) who have been presidents of *Or VeShalom* and *Shearith Israel’s Young Men*. We have folks like Ron Slotin and Doug Tebor who are Jewish members of the Georgia State Legislature; folks with affluence and folks without.

**Ann:** People [from] two extremes of the State Legislature, actually.

**Sherry:** Right. So we really have quite a diverse group at Access.

**Ann:** And you have a diverse group at AJC now?
Sherry: We have. I remember when Elliott Arnovitz used to pride himself on being the only European Jew in this crowd of German Jews. And I remember the first year or two when Silva Makover (sp.), or Gerald Cohen or Billy Schatten or maybe even Sidney Felman, would come to a fundraiser for the American Jewish Committee and come to our dinner. It was real easy to do the tables because, everybody who went to the Temple fit at one table of ten. That was them, they were complete. Now, when Elliott Arnovitz walks into a fundraiser, I say, “Look around you, smarty. You’re not even unusual anymore.” Now we’ve got dozens of Ahavath Achim (AA) folks, and dozens of Temple Sinai folks, and activists from Or VeShalom and some of the new synagogues.

Ann: How about . . .

Sherry: The Orthodox still . . .

Ann: . . . Beth Jacob, I was going to ask.

Sherry: . . . they are still far from us, they won’t give us a fair chance. They don’t leave their community enough. But Rabbi [Ilan] Feldman, I think, has fallen in love with us. He can feel how he’s appreciated in the group. We have folks clamoring to study with him, and we used him in our “Why Be Jewish” series. Our young professionals, a hundred of them, went to hear him at his synagogue last summer in their summer series on “Jewish View of God.” As they’ve begun to plan their summer series again, they want to go back to Beth Jacob. So, I think that we’re doing a lot to open people’s views of different segments of the Jewish community.

Ann: Does the Orthodox portion of the community . . . I gather they still are not very receptive to Black relations.

Sherry: I would say our agenda is not one that they are interested in. Their primary agenda issue is continuity, and ours is much broader.

Ann: And Israel.

Sherry: We do great things in Jewish identity; we do great things in Black/Jewish relations, but we [also] do fabulous things in meeting with Councils. In Atlanta today, there are fourteen Council General offices. We meet with the Japanese Council, the German Council, the French Council. We deal with them about arms sales to the Middle East, about Holocaust revisionism, about voting patterns at the U.N. We deal
with Congress members on all kinds of social justice issues, everything from family and medical leave, to foreign aid to Israel for a woman’s right to abortion. Our agenda is multi-faceted, and for most of the traditional and religious community, theirs is rather narrowly focused. We would love to have more Jews from traditional [organizations]. In some communities as well as our inter-faith activities, AJC did Intra-Jewish Dialogues. We found Conservative and Reform Jews willing to do it, but we couldn’t get Orthodox to the table. It was a shame, because Sunny Stern—my partner—tried, and she has roots in the Hebrew Academy and lots of friends in the Beth Jacob community. She couldn’t even get them to come, so we can’t break that area.

**Ann:** Tell me about the Jewish/Christian relations. There is a very strong National Council of Christians and Jews here. Do you interface at all with them?

**Sherry:** Not much. I want to be generous and just say no. I don’t know what they do here, and I haven’t seen any impact that they make here. I’m sorry about that, because in my first few years, the Director of the National Council of Christians and Jews—from about 1980 to 1985—did some significant work in trying to get us to bridge across Christian/Jewish lines. Atlanta is interesting because it’s got pockets. There’s the Concerned Black Clergy for Black clergy; there’s the Atlanta Rabbinic Association for Jews, for Rabbis; and there’s the Christian Council. I think all of these are necessary. I wouldn’t want each denomination not to have its umbrella working together, cooperating. But we’re one of the few cities that doesn’t have an inter-faith body. The earlier director, in the 1980s, of the National Council of Christians and Jews really tried with our help, ADL’s help, and the Federation CRC’s [Community Relations Committee] help, to bring clergy together across religious lines. But, when he left, that effort kind of died out. So I don’t know what Jimmy . . .

<End Sherry Z Frank T2-S2-02>

<Begin Sherry Z Frank T3-S1-01>

**Ann:** This is Ann Hoffman Schoenberg interviewing Sherry Zimmerman Frank on the 27th of April, 1994, in her home in Atlanta, Georgia, for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, Atlanta Jewish Federation, and National Council of Jewish Women. This is the third tape, the first side.
Sherry: It’s interesting to think about inter-faith relationships in Atlanta, across race lines. And then I want to say something about inter-ethnic, don’t let me forget. Because Atlanta is really growing in a diverse ethnic community now. But Atlanta did not have an umbrella that brought folks together along religious lines. The State Legislature created something called the Georgia Human Relations Commission about five or six years ago. Rabbi [Alvin] Sugarman was on it at one time, now Rabbi [Arnold] Goodman is, so there is Jewish presence there. Gayle Cohen Gross is on it as well. One of the things that grew out of the Georgia Human Relations Commission was a recognition that we didn’t have a body in Atlanta that brought folks together. And I played a role in helping to create the Atlanta Inter-Faith Coalition. Elaine Alexander and I helped to create the Atlanta Inter-Faith Coalition which now is so wonderful. It’s about two or three years old. The two co-chairs are Reverend Perky Daniel who is a Presbyterian woman and Iman Plemon El-Amin, who I mentioned earlier, who is the Muslim Iman. So even just the diversity of a Black Muslim and a Presbyterian woman says something. Around the table today are Buddhists and Hindus and Sikhs and Catholics and Christians. The Catholics are Hispanic, as well as English-speaking. There are Christians of all denominations, and seminary folks, and Jewish folks. Rabbi Stanley Davis is on it, Schulum (sp.) Louis was, and Rabbi Goodman got off. Rabbi Harvey Winokur is the leader in the group. It really is a coming together across a tremendous diversity, and we’ve done so many things together. We had a “Shake Hands Atlanta Day” last year at Grady High School, a coming together across all cultures and races and religions. The group is working on a wonderful document called “Common Threads,” and it’s looking at what each of our traditions—the Koran, the Old Testament, the New Testament, other books which I don’t know the name of from Sikhs and the Buddhist and Bahai—what they say about social justice, belief in God, community responsibility, mercy. It’s very interesting that even though we say it in different ways, we have a message that’s kind of . . .

Ann: A universal message?

Sherry: Yes. It’s very neat. It’s very inspiring to work with these folks. And it’s interesting, because I always go to the King service that marks the beginning of King Week, and it’s always inter-faith. For the last eight or ten years, Mrs. King has always
presented the—Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr.—Daddy King’s Community Service Award to a minister. And this year, they asked me to present the Honoree to Mrs. King. I began by saying, “Here I am, a Jewish advocate in a Christian Presbyterian Church giving a Southern Baptist award in memory of a Southern Baptist minister to a Muslim Iman, and if that’s not ecumenical, I don’t know what is.” It really brought down the house.

Through networks, that’s been really exciting to work with, and these folks are really good people and good friends. Over the years, we’ve had real struggles. The Presbyterian community nationally has been the most anti-Israel community of the Protestant denominations throughout the 1980s. And as I learned more about it, I understood it was with good reason. It wasn’t reason that I was happy about, but most of the Presbyterian operations overseas were in Beirut. So as soon as Israel began having trouble with Lebanon and the massacres and the sovereign chalutzim129... Beirut University130 [American University at Beirut] was a Presbyterian-run university, so as Lebanon became almost demolished... Lebanon is not what it used to be, as a real flourishing... Ann: ... and never will be... Sherry: ... right, island, kind of the “France of the Middle East.” As Lebanon really took its beating, the Presbyterians nationally became harder and harder line against Israel. So we would find the most vitriolic statements in the World Council of Churches in whatever came from the Presbyterians. At one point here a number of years ago, the Atlanta Presbyteries were going to have a dialogue here with a Jew and an Israeli Presbytery. They asked if I would co-sponsor it, and I said no. I actually didn’t say no up front. I said, “I will if I check it out and it’s going to be good.” But it’s my experience [that] when another group picks the Jew... I don’t care who you pick from the Christian [side], they can be as hard line as they want. But don’t pick my representative; let me pick him. When I checked it out and found out who it was, it was

129 Chalutzim (Hebrew: pioneers) were Jewish pioneers who immigrated to the region of Palestine especially as part of a movement in the years after World War I to work the land and create Jewish settlements.
130 In 1956 the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon assumed total charge of the ministries of the Presbyterian churches. The schools include American University at Beirut, Lebanese American University and some 20 elementary and secondary schools.
a disgusting self-hating Jew who gets up and bashes Israel, and the Presbyteries were sending him around the world with this Israeli friend. I said to the Presbyteries, “What you’re going to have is a program that’s on extremism and you’ve got a Neo-Nazi and a Skinhead and you think you’re going to get two points of view. You’re not.”

They looked at me like I was crazy, and when the two folks came to town and did their damage and we monitored their programs, the Presbytery leaders who put it together came to my office and said, “You were right, and we’re sorry, and we’ve done terrible damage. What can we do to change it?” We began a four-year journey of Presbytery/Jewish dialogue. It was such a test of how far relations can go, because through the discussions, two of the Presbytery leaders went to the Middle East. And while they visited with the PLO and lived among the West Bank, they also heard the Israeli point of view through our staff and our contacts and meetings we set up. They were quite taken by the folks from Oz Ve Shalom, which is the religious movement for peace.

One of the people that they heard in Israel came to the United States, and at the very same church, at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Northside Atlanta, we co-hosted—the Presbyterians and AJC—a forum with the Oz Ve Shalom spokesman in the very place that this vitriolic horrible thing had happened before. So we really knew that we had come a far way. There were many other instances of Israelis that came, or Palestinians who came, and they would have me sit in on dialogues. All of a sudden, the Presbyterians were feeling uncomfortable if Israel was bashed. They were seeing the propaganda in a different light. So that was very exciting.

With the Catholic Church in Atlanta, the Catholic Church was active in the Civil Rights Movement and continued to have very good relations with AJC. AJC was the only Jewish organization that had representation at the Vatican during the Declarations of Nostra Atatae, N-O-S-T-R-A, and then Atatae, A-T-A-T-A-E. Nostra Atatae was the document that came out of Vatican Council II, when Catholic teachings were purged of the diatribe charge that . . .

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131 Oz Ve Shalom is an Israeli religious peace movement based on an ideological forum that advocates moderation, tolerance, and pluralism in matters involving religion and the state and a compromise solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

132 Nostra Atatae is the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian religions of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 by Pope Paul VI.
Ann: That was under John the whatever [Pope Paul VI].

Sherry: It was a time when Catholics removed the death of Christ as being on the hands of Jews and when they committed to change their liturgy and their teachings to remove their own liturgy of antisemitism. Rabbi Mark Tenenbaum, a leader of the American Jewish Committee and our Religious Affairs Director, was at the Vatican and participated. So, through the years, we’ve celebrated the anniversaries of Vatican Council II, and we did that here with the Catholic Church. In fact, we had a kosher dinner at Christ the King [Catholic] Church, which I think they cooked at the AA and brought it over to West Wesley [Street] and Peachtree Street to Christ the King. I thought that was kind of funny.

For a decade, we had a Catholic/Jewish dialogue. Then, in the last ten years, the Catholic Church has [taken] a beating here. Two Black Archbishops have come; one died, one got involved in a scandal where [it] was said he fathered a child. But when the last archbishop was here, Archbishop Marino, I think that was the one in the scandal . . .

Ann: That was the one that got in the trouble. Lyke was the one . . .

Sherry: Archbishop [James Patterson] Lyke was the last one. He died a terrible death of cancer. Each time [an archbishop] comes, we do our official meeting, and one of the things I said was, “I have this dream of going to the Vatican and [to] Israel with Catholics and Jews from Atlanta.” Archbishop Lyke said, “I’ve got a trip overseas this summer, but next summer I’ll promise to co-lead it with you.”

Ann: He died.

Sherry: He died and didn’t [go]. So now we have [Archbishop] John Francis Donoghue who came here from Charlotte [North Carolina], a White Archbishop, not a Black one. We’ve met with him again and raised the issue of the Vatican and Israel trip. If we can do it in 1995, we’ll have the opportunity to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Nostra Atatae and we’ll also be able to go to the diplomatic offices—in the Vatican and Israel—of each other’s, since there is now recognition. So we have very warm and good ties with the Catholic church. The Baptist denominations, our national office has closer ties with them than we do. They’re pretty evangelical, and beyond Holy Land tours there’s not a great deal that has brought us together with the Baptists. But we have
close ties with the rest of the Protestant denominations.

What’s interesting and emerging now is Atlanta’s ethnic community. While we’ve reached out in a small way, I see all of that accelerating. When the Rodney King verdict came out in Los Angeles [California] and there were riots in Los Angeles, there were riots in Atlanta. If you remember, one of the places that got really trampled was a Korean grocery store right on the Atlanta University campus. When we were concerned about Atlanta exploding, we quickly called Maynard Jackson—who was Mayor [then]—and said, “What can we do through the Black/Jewish Coalition and the American Jewish Committee? We’re here to help you.” Maynard said to us—within twelve hours of the little bit of a riot we had in downtown Atlanta—“Help us bring this city together, and let’s get a religious voice. It’s kind of a chorus of “there’s much more that unites us than divides us.” So we got on the phone. I remember Richard Cohen and I were at a luncheon that the Mayor was hosting for a German ambassador visiting the city. [When] the Mayor told us that, Richard Cohen did not even go back to his medical office, he came straight to my office like he was on my staff, got on the phone, and between us—in I guess, four hours—we had orchestrated Concerned Black Clergy, the Christian Council, the Catholic Archdiocese, The Hundred Black Men—which is an emerging Black power group—all of the Jewish agencies, the State Human Relations Commission, and the Atlanta Inter-Faith Coalition.

The next day we convened a press conference at [Atlanta] City Hall, and Eldrin Bell spoke and the Mayor spoke. As we were reaching out, we opened a book of all the various ethnic leaders in town, and we called them. And when we got down there, three Korean leaders were there and said to us, “Will you meet with us afterwards and help us learn how to work with the Black community?” Jews were in those positions.

So we have had now, three or four, fabulous dinners with Korean leaders. In fact, the first time we did it they asked us to “come to their house” and we went to a Chinese restaurant in a little area called Korean Town, which most people don’t even

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133 Rodney King was a construction worker turned writer and activist after surviving an act of police brutality by the Los Angeles Police Department. On March 3, 1991, he was violently beaten by LAPD officers. The officers were acquitted, which sparked the L.A. riots of 1992.
realize [is there]. It’s great, it’s on Buford Highway. We wanted to tell The Jewish Times, but we didn’t want to come in with cameras, taking pictures, “look at these people who look different than we do.” So we held back, and when we got there, they had three newspapers from the Korean community covering us, and they were taking pictures all night long.

**Ann:** And did you get copies for The Southern Israelite?

**Sherry:** Well, you know, the Korean . . . is that going to be on there [the tape]?

**Ann:** Of course. (laughs)

**Sherry:** We were told by the Koreans that it was the talk of the town in the Korean community for weeks. We met with the Jews, and that was interesting because . . .

**Ann:** Well, obviously the parallels were definitely there because who had occupied those positions in the Black communities prior . . .

**Sherry:** Right.

**Ann:** . . . and met, what, fifty, sixty, eighty years [ago], the Jews were the ones who had the little stores.

**Sherry:** Right. It was very interesting because it was typical of an AJC way of doing things. We invited about eight Jews. We invited Candy Barman who had just got into Leadership Atlanta and was working outside the Jewish community and beginning to really make contacts and care. We invited the traditional bridge builders—Lois Frank, Elaine Alexander, and Elaine’s son Kent wanted to work with us. But we also invited folks who weren’t part of the normal dialogue like Gerald Cohen who had a business in the inner city, who hired Black folks, who cared about the community around him. And we brought to the table some Jews who had a history, and they were transformed by the older folks. The Koreans have high regard for older folks and their wisdom; but also their hands-on experiences of working in the neighborhood and caring about the neighborhood, and still coming home to your kosher home and your own kind of cultural life.

So we’ve stayed close to the Koreans. In subsequent dinners, we realized that the Koreans really did not know how to use political advocacy like we do. We take for granted how savvy we are as Jews. So the next time we met, we invited all the Jewish politicians that we’re close to. We invited Liane Levitan who now is the Chief
of DeKalb County, CEO. We invited Ron Slotin and Doug Tebor who are in the State Legislature. What happened for that, we invited Elliott Levitas because we wanted to give them a contact with how Congress runs and when you use your Congressman, even though Elliott had been out of Congress for several years. He was unable to attend, but wants to continue with us. Since then, Liane Levitan is the darling of that community. They call on Doug Tebor. He has some supporters there. We really opened some neat doors for them, so that’s one close tie.

In the last number of years, we have [also] been asked during the Legislature, a number of times—by the Latin American Association, which is the umbrella agency for twenty-two Spanish-speaking countries, citizens who are in Atlanta—to work on every kind of issue from English only, to immigration issues, to a number of nuance issues that deal with various things that are important to the Latin American community. We found lawyers like Larry Apel who are young leaders in AJC who work and advocate for them. We just had a fabulous dinner about two months ago that Lois Frank hosted. We had the Board of the Latin American Association and the Board of the American Jewish Committee have dinner together, and it was just great. There were 15 or 18 people from each side, and beside talking and eating and enjoying, our program was that each community was supposed to present their three top priority issues for their community. Three different people had to present it, so six people spoke. We talked about Israel, antisemitism, and Jewish continuity as our issues. They talked about jobs, and legal barriers, and poverty or discrimination, still as bridge issues for them. So, we are clearly moving into more ethnic relations.

The final thing is that the American Jewish Committee does trips to Israel for non-Jewish leaders regularly, through an institute called Project Interchange. When we were asked to suggest people to go when they were doing an African-American trip, we sent Veronica Bigens who, at the time, was a Vice-President of NationsBank and is now President Clinton’s Personnel Director. We sent Earl Shinholster who was the Regional Director of the NAACP who, for years,

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134 AJC Project Interchange brings global decision-makers to Israel to learn about its reality and complexity for themselves.
had worked with us in the Black/Jewish Coalition. I forgot him [earlier]. Now he’s the number three man at the National NAACP headquarters in Baltimore. But, for the first time this Spring, they did an Asian leaders trip to Israel. We invited a woman whose name is Pinpin, P-I-N-P-I-N, Chau, C-H-A-U. She is President of Summit Bank, and we asked her to go to Israel. Jack Halprin, who is an officer of AJC, invited her to go. He is on the Board of her bank. It’s an interesting bank because the Chinese and Japanese are the ones who are investors in the bank, and the Koreans are the borrowers in the bank. She is able to balance those Asian differences. She just came back and spoke at our Board and she had [them] captivated. She talked about how you could love your country and work for your country as Americans, because you were born here, but you could still understand [that] your roots and your heritage was somewhere else. For her, China and for us, Israel. It was captivating to hear her. So we will be moving much more, in the years ahead, into Asian and Hispanic interaction because that’s a tremendously growing part of our city.

Ann: Yes. The Hispanic portion in particular, is going to be more and more significant, even here in the South. Because, generally speaking, that particular part of our population is projected to be much more significant than the Black population, as far as numbers are concerned . . .

Sherry: Yes.

Ann: . . . in the next fifty years or twenty-five years or so.

Sherry: Yes. I love it when people reach out to me. The Indian community—not Native American, but India—very much wants to have a street near the King Center named for [Mahatma] Gandhi.135

Ann: Really?

Sherry: Yes, because Gandhi was Martin Luther King’s inspiration. India now has developed ties with Israel. There’s a troubled past there between India and Israel, Gandhi and Israel. But the Indian community has reached out to me to help them get the street changed, and I’ve been down at City Hall lobbying with them. They just called and asked me to come to a banquet this Saturday for the Asian Pacific

135 Gandhi was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist, and political ethicist, who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India’s independence from British Rule.
community, which is Philippine and Malaysian and Korean, and all the ones that we think of, but not India. India is part of that Asian Rim of countries. So that’s neat.

The Black community has asked me already to help in the battle next year to change the flag in Georgia. Another neat thing that has grown out of our Black/Jewish dialogue is a Women’s Dialogue Group. We meet quarterly, and the women are so high profile it’s just unreal. We made a commitment to go to Israel and Africa together this summer. The Black women just were too busy to take off the time to do both, and they’ve all been to Africa, and they really wanted to go to Israel. The Jewish women wanted to go to Africa. So we’ve committed that we’ll go to Africa next year with Johnnetta Cole—the President of Spellman [College]—when she speaks in Ghana. So this summer we’re going to Israel as a prelude to the Israel trip. We went on a private Coca-Cola plane—because one of the participants is a vice-president of Coke—last month to see the Holocaust Museum together. And Veronica Bigens, who is now in Washington [DC], is still part of this group of sisters and she is going to Israel with us. So she met us in Washington for the tour. But, the Black women [in the group] are Johnnetta Cole, President of Spellman [College]; Ingrid Saunders Jones, Vice-President of Coke [The Coca-Cola Company]; Veronica Bigens; Myrtle Davis, who ran for Mayor; Shirley Franklin, who is one of the top leaders of the Olympic effort. She was the Chief of Staff under Andy Young and Maynard Jackson’s mayors office; and Nancy Boskill who is a County Commissioner. The Jews are Barbara Asher, who is the City Council woman; Elaine Alexander; Judith Taylor; Diane Cohen; myself; and Lois Frank. So it’s a hell of a good group. There are lots of folks that want to go with us as a fly on the wall.

My dream is—I’ve written a proposal for it—to take a trip of non-Jewish leaders every year to Israel. One year of Black women, and another year of Catholics, and another year Asians, another year Hispanics, another year maybe high school teachers or university leadership. I just would love to be able to have the funding every year to bring a different targeted group to Israel.

Ann: I hope that there will always be an Israel to bring your people to. The way

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136 A segregation-era flag bearing the Confederate battle emblem was changed in 2001 and then again in 2004 amid strong debate and disagreement.
things are going over there right now, it’s not too promising, either.

I’ve been very quiet. I really haven’t had much that I needed to ask, because you’ve been so forthcoming. Is there something else, some other programming . . .

**Sherry:** I would just say that AJC has really allowed me the opportunity to follow all of my fantasies. I would say two others are that I’ve always loved the issue of Soviet Jewry. I chaired a Soviet Jewry Women’s Plea when I was President of Council in 1973. I participated in a march in the 1980s. I adopted a Soviet family in the late 1970s, when they started coming to the United States. I’ve adopted a family in Atlanta, that is now part of my permanent family, about eight years ago. My daughter in San Francisco is 30, and she’s on her second adopted Russian family—two young couples—that she’s brought into her social network.

One of my greatest thrills was in 1987 [when] I went with a group of members of the Atlanta chapter, five of us, Larry Thorp, Rabbi Ichay from Or VeShalom, Beatrice Gresh, Cookie Shapiro and myself. We went to the Soviet Union, to Moscow, Leningrad, and Rega at *Pesach*. We went there when the Hebrew teachers were imprisoned, and Rabbi Ichay left tapes all over Russia. We brought *Pesach* food into places where there were people who wouldn’t eat other food during *Pesach*. We went in front of the great synagogue in Moscow and handed out Passover candies and *Haggadah*. It was just unbelievable, and I remember, before I left there was a meeting of cantors in the United States. Jews did wonderful things during the Soviet Jewry movement. One of our crazy ideas was that we would flood the mail system between the United States and Russia with boxes of *matzo*. And every single cantor who came—and there were several hundred—who came to a program at Ebenezer Baptist Church when Coretta Scott King spoke, symbolically brought a box of *matzo* that we were then going to send to the Soviet Union. Well, when the program was over, Lois Frank and I were looking at 400 boxes of *matzo* that had to get to the post office to clog the mail to the Soviet Union. Coretta [Scott King] was so taken with that, she said to me, “What can I give you to take? I want you to take something to the Soviet Union.” I said to Coretta that we’d been told that at that time, news was really censored. Among

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137 Unleavened flatbread that is part of Jewish cuisine and forms an integral element of the *Passover* festival.
the many things we were taking—medicine and Judaica—we were told to bring
information, such as dozens of [issues of] Newsweek and Time, and the Weekend
Review from the last six weeks in the New York Times; magazines to give people the
news, and books. The next day I got a call from Coretta, and she sent me three books
that were entitled My Life With Martin. It’s her biography of how she continued his
work after he died, and she wrote messages in them. We saved them for three
Refusnik° women, who we were to see, whose husbands were in prison but
who—like her—were carrying on [their] message. We gave one in Moscow and we
gave two in Leningrad, and in each place they knew of Martin Luther King.

Ann: Yes.

Sherry: They had heard of him, and the most exciting thing was when we got to the
third visit in Leningrad, [one of the] husbands had just been released a day or two
before. So we brought pictures—for Mrs. King—of each person we gave the books to,
and of course, one [person had been set] free, so that was very gratifying.

The other thing is from my early NCJW days. I’ve been a feminist and
worked on the Equal Rights Amendment—which never passed—the ERA, and
worked on a woman’s free right to choose, which we’re still doing in our agency. But I
have started a Rosh Hodesh group. Rosh is R-O-S-H, Hodesh, H-O-D-E-S-H. It’s the
Hebrew word for the first day of the new month. Women around the country are
starting women’s study groups, and they are doing it on Rosh Hodesh. I started one
three years ago at the Ahavath Achim synagogue, and many AJC members participate.
Many Jewish women in the community, who are not members of the synagogue but are
heads of agencies, like Molly Aczel, A-C-Z-E-L, from the Davis Academy; and Janice
Alpren, the new Director of the Jewish Education Service; and Deborah Lipstat, the
scholar at Emory. Wonderful women are in the group. I lead it once a month, and we
study Judaic issues—but women’s issues—how Judaism treats women, and we look at
women’s writings and women’s liturgy. And for three years we’ve had a women’s
Seder in the middle of Passover, and that’s really been fun.

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° Refusniks were individuals in the former Soviet Union who were refused permission to
emigrate—in particular, Jews who were forbidden to emigrate to Israel.

° The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution designed to
guarantee equal legal rights for all American citizens regardless of sex. It seeks to end the legal
distinctions between men and women in terms of divorce, property, employment, and other matters.
So I’ve been able to chase all my fantasies and all the things I care about, my Jewish community, my feminine community, world Jewry, Israel, inter-group relations.

Ann: And you still have time for your kids?

Sherry: I do, and I bring all of this to them. All of my kids are real socially motivated, each differently. Jackie is a leader in the Jewish community and Andrew is a kid who really won’t let you say anything slightly racist or bigoted in front of him. He tells me his teachers in high school want to know when he’s going to run for president so they can vote for him.

Ann: (laughs) Where does he go to school?

Sherry: He goes to Riverwood. He’s graduating this year and going to the University of Georgia.

Ann: I was going to ask if he had decided where he wanted to settle on.

Sherry: They’re all activists.

Ann: Do you have anything else you want to add to?

Sherry: I guess, a real indebtedness to NCJW for getting my roots there; a commitment to synagogue and Federation for enhancing my Jewish identity; and then just a total thirteen-year love affair with the American Jewish Committee. I sometimes feel like Alvin Sugarman. Rabbi [Alvin] Sugarman does outrageous things, and frequently I don’t agree with him. I’m sure, frequently, his congregants don’t [either]. But, they really love him, and they really know he’s there for them when they need him. They give him a very long rope to live out his view of Judaism or follow his passions, and I frequently feel like him. I feel like I have so much trust in the community, and particularly in the American Jewish Committee, that they’ll let me be as liberal as I want to be or as Jewish as I want to be or as feminist as I want to be and just consider the source and accept it.

And my children are like that. Jackie talks about telling her grown-up friends what it was like when she was 28 to get off work to go home to her mother’s bat mitzvah. It was totally outrageous. Now, our family gets together every year in San Francisco for Passover, and her friends like to see what feminist or radical thing I’m going to add to our Seder. They all just give me free license to do it, they love it.
Ann: What you’re trying to say is that they all take you with a grain of salt and say, “Oh well, she’s done it again.” Right?

Sherry: (laughs) They know they broke the mold when I came out. But I love it, I love political advocacy, I just love it all.

Ann: It seems to me that Atlanta organizations, the chapters in Atlanta, seem to be more and more important on a national level. That there are national leaders and national issues that are being led out of Atlanta. That things happen here that are replicated elsewhere or on a national scale because this is an innovative area.

Sherry: I think you’re a hundred percent right. I have been given the opportunity to leave Atlanta. With AJC, I never will. I think there is an openness here, a possibility here that doesn’t exist in other places, a dynamism with the young folks coming here, a progressiveness in part because the Civil Rights Movement started here. It’s just amazing. Our Federation campaigns are increasing when communities are shrinking. You go to these national Black marches and events, everybody who is anybody started here, from Vernon Jordan with Urban League to Coretta and John Lewis and all the others. There is just an openness. I think anybody who wants to work hard can get involved in this city. It’s progressive.

Ann: I’ve always had the feeling that it was different in that respect. I think that, generally speaking, it is sort of expected that the business leaders of the community will also be social issue leaders.

Sherry: Right.

Ann: That they will be the ones who will have the reins for the United Way campaigns, and the Chamber of Commerce and all these other community organizations which do and shake and change.

Sherry: Women are succeeding in this city, not as fast as some would like, but they are. Even though some of our leadership is parochial and just focused on our agency, we see a lot of Federation leadership in other organizations. I know, of my own leadership, some are just solely AJC folks. But most are involved across the community. There is a real spirit here, and along the way, I’ve had friends who were mentors who loved what I did. Ronnie VanGelder worked for me for a long time as an NCJW woman, and my best friend. I’ve had a supportive network of family. My
sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Barb and Charles Golson; my cousin, Helen Hunn who is like a sister; April Levine who worked for me who is now the Director of ORT; Ronnie at the Temple. [They have] been there, supportive, or just not said, “You’re really nuts. What are you doing?” And for a lot of the formative years that I did this back in Atlanta . . .

**Ann:** Doesn’t someone occasionally say, “You’re really nuts.”

**Sherry:** Mostly they tell me I’m going to burn out, slow down. But in the early years when I worked here, mother was here [and] my mother was a tremendous backup to me. And I must admit, though my marriage ended unhappily, my husband Leonard was a real supporter of all that I did for a very long time, and that gave me a good start.

**Ann:** Well, I guess that having said all that you’ve said this evening, I really think we’ve done a fairly comprehensive job. And, indeed, I don’t know where else to go from here, other than to thank you for all the time you have given, out of this busy life of yours, to this wonderful project which—of course—is partially supported by your organization.

**Sherry:** I love it. We love it.

**Ann:** I feel that it’s a project that has not only enhanced my understanding of the community personally, but should be of great value, I think, to scholars of the future.

**Sherry:** Right.

**Ann:** I hope so.

**Sherry:** Right.

**Ann:** Okay, thanks so much.

<End Sherry Z Frank T3-S1-01>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**