INTERVIEW WITH NANCY FERST

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INT: I'm conducting an oral history for the Center for American Jewish History at Temple University. Nancy, just in setting this up I want to ask you some basic questions about yourself and then we'll get to basically the main part of the interview, which is about being Jewish and being a woman and how the two intersected and the kinds of choices that you made as a result of those circumstances. Basically I just want to place you and ask you where you were born and what kind of family you were born into.

NANCY: I was born in Wilmington, Delaware. I am the oldest child with one brother, three years younger. We laughingly refer to my parents as a mixed marriage because my father was first generation American. I guess you would say—no, you couldn't; Traditional Jewish just because that's who they were, but not synagogue observant or particularly holiday observant. Kept strict kosher because my father's grandmother lived with them. Spoke Yiddish in the home but there wasn't a lot of synagogue attendance. Big major holiday attendance but not ongoing, all the time.

INT: Did they celebrate Shabbat in the house?

NANCY: I'm talking about my father's family. My mother, on the other hand, is from a real New York Reform background. (Tape is unclear here) I wouldn't say part of Our Crowd financially, but certainly part of the outer circles of that social group. All her friends were Jewish. She grew up going to Hebrew school, was Confirmed, but I think her synagogue had Shabbat services on Sunday and everybody she knew had a Christmas tree. It was not religious. They didn't celebrate Christmas so much for Christmas, but it was considered seasonal decorations.

INT: What was her maiden name?

NANCY: It was originally Gerstenfeld. When she was about sixteen it was changed to Gray.

INT: Why?

NANCY: The only story I ever heard is that my grandfather just wanted to change it.

INT: And her first name?

NANCY: Marjorie. It was Marjorie Gerstenfeld and then when she was sixteen it became Marjorie Gray.

INT: And what year was she born in?

NANCY: '22.
INT: 1922. And she was born where?

NANCY: New York.

INT: And your father—his name?

NANCY: Sydney Balick. And he was born in New York but moved when he was a year and a half to Wilmington, Delaware.

INT: And what year was he born in?

NANCY: '15.

INT: 1915, okay. So they met?

NANCY: At Tamiment on a single's weekend. (Laughter) My mother apparently got dragged there by a friend, as she tells the story, and she was so determined not to go that she didn't put on any makeup and wore her hair in a ponytail and at some point actually met my father and he asked if he could either sit with her at dinner or see her at a dance or something and she was sufficiently interested that she actually put her hair down and put on some makeup and she showed up wherever she was supposed to see him and he didn't recognize her. It's a great story. I love it.

INT: And when did they get married?

NANCY: '46.

INT: Where?

NANCY: New York.

INT: Did they get married in a Jewish ceremony?

NANCY: They were married by a rabbi under a chupah in a hotel. Very small wedding. And I don't think there was ever any question that it was Jewish, but more from a social base. There was always a Passover Seder. There was always a family dinner on Rosh Hashanah. There was never any question that my brother would be Bar Mitzvah. Those kinds of things. But my father always belonged to B'nai B'rith and the JCC and the synagogue. He always belonged, but not with attendance. I actually have a memory of coming home in first grade and saying why is everybody else going to Sunday school and I'm not, and in fact it just kind of hadn't dawned on them that I needed to go to religious school. Now don't ask me where I got it, although we grew up in the bosom of my father's family and Wilmington is a three-synagogue town. My parents were the only ones who belonged to the Reform synagogue. Two of his siblings belonged to the
Conservative and one to the-I think it’s technically not Orthodox but traditional, mixed seating and a parking lot-but an Orthodox program and an Orthodox-trained rabbi. I think I looked at my cousins and thought I was missing something and that’s the only place I can figure where I got it.

INT: Well, before you set the scene, let’s try to set this up. How did they get from New York to Wilmington?

NANCY: That’s a good question. My grandfather, my father’s father, was one of eight, seven boys and a girl. The girl was the oldest. Married the earliest. She stayed in New York. All of these seven brothers moved to Wilmington. I don’t know why Wilmington. Six of them stayed. One of them eventually moved back to New York, although he lived in Wilmington long enough that his son was raised there and ended up staying there. I don’t know when he went back, but he obviously lived most of his adult working life in Wilmington.

INT: How was he educated?

NANCY: My father? Just through high school.

INT: And so what was he trained to do? What was his profession?

NANCY: He grew up working in my grandfather’s grocery store, which was the front of the first floor of their house, and he became a butcher. That was the skill that he learned.

INT: A kosher butcher?

NANCY: No. They didn’t live in a Jewish neighborhood. It was the grocery store for the neighborhood. It was mostly an Irish neighborhood. I’m trying to remember-at some point I think he actually had his own small grocery store, but then this man who became his business partner-they grew up together even though this guy was a few years older than he-and they bought up his friend’s father-in-law’s furniture business and he spent his life in the furniture business. So from his late twenties till he retired when he was seventy.

INT: And your mother? What was her level of education?

NANCY: She did, I think, two years of college and went away to college.

INT: What college?

NANCY: Allegheny. I never quite knew why she didn’t finish. By that time, her parents had moved from the Island back into the city and she lived with her parents and worked, I think, in a radio station in a secretarial position till she met my father and she never worked after they were married.
INT: A more important question is why did she go to college, because that was fairly avant-garde and fairly avant-garde for a woman to go away during those days, wasn’t it?

NANCY: I never thought of it that way. Certainly the away part. If you put it in context of that Reform Jewish community, that while they were all of your social friends were all Jewish, they sort of emulated the Christians who may have been less avant-garde in that perspective.

INT: Where were her parents born?

NANCY: Both in New York City. I’m only chuckling because there’s a very funny story here. I had grown up believing that my mother’s family was German and came in the early to mid 1800’s. Mid 1800’s. And that I was a fifth or sixth generation American. And in fact they all had a lot of the family names—you know, Gerstenfeld and Bernstein and Edmund were all more German names than anything else. My grandmother just died last spring. She was 100. On her birth certificate it had to list her mother’s name and her mother’s place of birth, so we’re now talking about my great-grandmother. She didn’t die until I was fifteen, so I knew this woman. Her place of birth was listed as Poland. So we are now totally confused. I took this piece of paper to my mother and I said what does this mean? And she said I really don’t know. I was always told that the family was German. And in fact, the kind of...there weren’t so much Yiddishisms in her life as there were German words. Like hurry up was mach schnell when I was a kid. There were a few words like that. So I really now should go back and find out more about my grandfather’s family about whom I knew very little.

INT: The name Gerstenfeld would certainly lead you to believe that you were German.

NANCY: Well, it may have been that at various times in its history, Poland and Germany were part of the same republic, so sometimes it may have been in Poland and sometimes...The other thing is that my great-grandmother never spoke with an accent, so while she may have been born abroad, my guess is she must have come to the States very young. And my grandmother was born in ’96, which means my great-grandmother had to have been born in probably the early Seventies. Somewhere around 1870. So my guess is that she came in, although I just thought she had come earlier. Now maybe her husband’s family came earlier, I would guess. They were in the music publishing business and there were some authors and somebody was in the boys’ pants business. They were always part of that German-Jewish community in New York City.

INT: How about your father’s parents? Where were they born?

NANCY: In Europe. They came in the early 1900’s, 1908-1910, something like that, and they were both born in Russia.

INT: So here you are now in Wilmington, Delaware and you alluded to the fact that you had a family that knew they were Jewish. You were identified as Jewish and yet they were assimilated as well. So first of all, what kind of an education did you have—a secular education.
NANCY: Public school.

INT: Where did you go to school?

NANCY: Elementary school? Wilmington. Junior high and high school in the suburbs.

INT: Do you know the name of the school?

NANCY: Brandywine High School, Springer Junior High.

INT: And then did you go away to college?

NANCY: Yes. Case Western Reserve.

INT: And you did your four years there?

NANCY: Bachelors and then the fifth year did a Masters.

INT: You did. So you have your Masters from Case Western as well. And then what happened to you?

NANCY: Feels like ancient history. I bounced around for a while. I took a job at Penn, worked there for a year and then went back to Cleveland-

INT: What did you do at Penn?

NANCY: Worked in student affairs. Went back to Cleveland because I had an unresolved romance with a nice Italian Catholic boy whose brother was a priest, and decided that was never going to work. Ended up spending two years in Cleveland and came back here and really got a start in my profession through an organization called Project PRIDE, which had results in drug education. It was a city and state sponsored project.

INT: But before you went to Penn you had not been in Philadelphia?

NANCY: No. My Masters was in Organization Behavior and Counseling. I didn’t establish that really. It was an inter-disciplinary program.

INT: So you came back here and you went to work for Project PRIDE and what year was that?

NANCY: Got my Masters in ’73, worked at Penn ’73-’74. About 1977. And Project PRIDE, in those days, was actually based at the old Association for Jewish Children.

INT: So were they connected in any way?
NANCY: Well, there was some supervisory responsibility at the top. We had space in their offices, but we had a separate wing. We didn’t really interact with them, but the guy who was head of Project PRIDE sort of had a duel supervisory reporting, reporting one to the head of AJC and one to the head of CODAP, which was the city agency for drug and alcohol use prevention.

INT: So at that point in your life were you Jewishly connected?

NANCY: I was always Jewishly connected.

INT: So tell me about that. Let’s go back to that a little bit. The holidays in your house-what were they like? Do you remember Seders or-

NANCY: Oh, we were always together with my aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents for Seder. Although in my own house, even the Seder was at my house, the morning after Seder there would be bread and matzah both on the table. Never any semblance of that. Rosh Hashanah the family was always together for dinner. You know, what you consider traditional dinner for a holiday.

INT: But when you had a Seder, did you actually go through the Hagaddah?

NANCY: Oh, absolutely.

INT: You did.

NANCY: Oh yeah.

INT: That was usually at your house or-

NANCY: It was often at my house but through the years...there was never a firm assignment. Some of the holidays floated back and forth between the aunts and uncles and our house.

INT: And Shabbat?

NANCY: No recognition.

INT: And what about the holiday season, as it were. Did you then have a Christmas tree in your house?

NANCY: No.

INT: So you dad sort of prevailed.

NANCY: I never even heard it discussed. It must have been resolved before I ever came on the
scene. It was never an issue. We always lit Hanukkah candles and my mother would always make potato latkes and we had presents, and Rosh Hashanah the family was always together for dinner, and I always remember fasting, although I don’t remember my parents fasting, for Yom Kippur. I don’t consciously remember having break fast in a way that we do today.

INT: How about Succot?

NANCY: No. Hanukkah, Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. I think really that was it.

INT: Did you go to Hebrew school when you were a kid?

NANCY: As I told you, I was the one who came home and said how come I’m not going and everybody else is. I went to Sunday school through tenth grade.

INT: Which one?

NANCY: Beth Emeth. And the way the Reform congregations were set up in those days, there was Sunday school all the way through and then you had three years of Hebrew school that was two afternoons a week. That was in addition to Sunday school, but just for those three years.

INT: Did your parents belong to Beth Emeth?

NANCY: Yes. So I did that, and then after Confirmation I was a student aide in Sunday school for younger kids.

INT: So you didn’t have a Bat Mitzvah because the Reform movement at that time did not have them.

NANCY: Did not. But I was President of my youth group. After trying some other overnight camps that my parents suggested I finally said I really want to go to Harlem and I went to Harlem and stayed there for five years. Most of it I was already a counselor. I started when I was fourteen, I guess, so I was beyond the official camper stage.

INT: In the broad scheme of things, first of all, what did you learn in Hebrew school? I know that’s a huge question, but was it particular life cycle events, did you learn Hebrew? What kinds of things do you remember taking away?

NANCY: My memory of the Sunday school curriculum was we had two textbooks every year. They got increasingly more detailed, the print got smaller, and there were a few more facts each year, but one was the holidays and one was history.

INT: What kind of history?
NANCY: The curriculum for my kids Hebrew school has no history. All Jewish history. Through the beginning of time. Jewish history. And I remember history and holidays. I don’t remember life cycle events until sort of the post Bar Mitzvah classes, and then there were—I distinctly remember a course on comparative religion and we went to Latin Mass and things like that. But I don’t remember particularly life cycle events, and the Hebrew curriculum really was reading Hebrew and some basic prayers.

INT: So you read it but you really didn’t know what you were reading, so to speak.

NANCY: Any different than the conversation we had before?

INT: Exactly. So then did you attend services in your synagogue at all?

NANCY: Yes. It was a clear requirement from Sunday school to go a certain number of times a year, and then I got involved in youth group, but my parents didn’t go. And to get my parents to go on a holiday, I had to sort of insist. You know, you’re coming with me. I think my Mother would have gone more. My Father just was not really inclined and he said to me, interestingly, right before he died, that it was always very hard for him because he had trouble believing that there could be a G-d that allowed for not only the Holocaust but some of the other horrors in the world that we live with and that...I mean he would go for me and he always belonged because he believed in Am Yisroel, not that he would have used those terms, but he believed in that, in the people. but not so much in the G-d part, so that services qua services as opposed to synagogue support institutional was more of value to him.

INT: But you said he belonged to B’nai B’rith and those organizations, so apparently there was some connection.

NANCY: There was no question. It was just the G-d piece. He would have gotten along very well with Mordecai Kaplan.

INT: I think Mordecai liked G-d, just that it was alright to be a Jew and image G-d in a different way.

NANCY: Well, it was really sort of more of a spirit of G-d and the image G-d is my understanding of it. But be that as it may...

INT: What do you remember taking away from Camp Harlem? What did you get from being a camper at a Jewish camp?

NANCY: I think Jewish camp is critical. I don’t think it’s the only thing. I don’t think it’s the single the-all and end-all, but I think it’s really critical.

INT: Why?
NANCY: Because it’s an immersion in living in a Jewish environment and it is for most kids the opportunity to live Shabbat on some kind of a regular basis, which is different than youth group participation when you go to a couple of conclaves or conventions during the year and you have it two or three times. This you get, you know, eight times in a row. It gives you that. And it gives you more; there was shiur, there was study every day.

INT: And it was Torah study?

NANCY: It was not necessarily Torah study but there was some study component, depending on the age group different study, different projects.

INT: Were your campfire songs sort of Jewish campfire songs?

NANCY: There were lots of Jewish songs and lots of singing in the dining room, more at the dining room than the campfire, but lots and song leaders and there were always a couple of counselors that not only played the guitar but really knew how to teach and the lead singer.

INT: Do you remember those songs?

NANCY: Oh, absolutely. There is no question. And I also did youth groups in a big way, which...I mean you ask about camp and it’s funny. To me, they were very connected. In my memory. Not that they were connected then because it wasn’t always the same people but it was some of the same people. It’s what kept that kind of spirit alive during the year.

INT: What else did you take away from it besides the songs and the memories and the shiurim and the other things that you did. What else about it is so ingrained in your memory that you think it’s critical for Jewish children now?

NANCY: You should think I could articulate this better, given that I’ve got three kids at Jewish camp. I don’t know. It’s just...it’s like it gets in your kishkes. It’s just an opportunity to live Jewishly and do not have to think about it, do not have to think about what language you’re using. It’s not so much what you say, because I certainly don’t count when people are talking derogatorily about people who are not Jewish or not white or not, you know, those things that we are, whatever that is. But it’s a place to just know that you can be yourself and talk about those things and there’s nothing...I mean I went to a high school, for instance, that had less than five percent Jews. Sometimes I would wear a Magen David or a mezuzah, but more often I chose not to. Now I do management consulting and I’m in all sorts of clients’ offices and in companies that have historically either not hired many Jews or still don’t hire many. I think about that kind of stuff. I don’t want every Yiddishism to come out in my normal everyday language. Somebody says merry Christmas to me I just say thanks, and you have a good holiday too. In Jewish camp you don’t have to do that. It’s just a time to just absorb it and to be there.

INT: So you had said to me that it was sort of part of your soul and you’re not exactly sure what
it was that inspired you, but you just don’t ever remember a time in your life where it just sort of wasn’t a driving force. Have you thought any more about that and thought about where that came from and what it was that was moving you forward?

NANCY: I don’t know. I really don’t. Other than looking around and seeing that my cousins’ households were a little different than mine.

INT: Different how?

NANCY: My father was one of four. Of his siblings, three of them kept kosher. The other three all kept kosher, at least at some point, when I was young. And one of them still keeps a kosher home. Well, one is gone. And the other one, while she doesn’t keep kosher per se, still doesn’t bring treif into the house and stuff like that. Two of the other three households, the parents spoke Yiddish. Now, albeit most of the time when they spoke Yiddish they did it so the kids wouldn’t know what was going on, but there was that presence in the house. There was more proactive synagogue participation. And the only thing I can imagine is that I looked around and wondered why we didn’t do it, and that was my base of comparison. But I can’t tell you that consciously. I only say in retrospect.

INT: So there was some piece of it that just seemed comfortable and desirable to you on some level, and so there was a piece of you that wanted to pursue that. What about your friends? Where were they in this scene?

NANCY: Growing up, you mean?

INT: Yes.

NANCY: Until I was in sixth grade, beginning of sixth grade, we lived in Wilmington proper. I mean in a residential neighborhood but inside the city limits. Most of the Jews that lived in Wilmington lived on-I don’t want to say the other side of town because I don’t mean the other side of the tracks, but lived in a different neighborhood that we did. There were clearly Jewish people where we lived, but fewer than the other neighborhood where every house was Jewish. So in elementary school, my friends weren’t particularly Jewish. When I was young I went to day camp and it was a JCC day camp, so there was that piece of it.

INT: Did you spend Christmas time with them, for example, with your non-Jewish friends? Were you invited in to some of the things that they were celebrating, Easter, for example, or Christmas, or any of their holidays? Did you participate in that way?

NANCY: Well, definitely I remember going to neighbors for Christmas, but we still do that. I think it’s important to share the things that your friends celebrate. One of the favorite things that we do is we have friends, a couple that are both Christian. They have no children and for years now they’ve invited us and a couple of other families that are either Jewish or religiously
intermarried to come and have the kids decorate their Christmas tree, and it's wonderful. My kids have a share in somebody else's holidays. There's no confusion about what it is.

INT: The only thing that I'm getting at or asking about is that sometimes if you're a minority in a school and then the whole school is celebrating Christmas or has prayer and that's not your theme, how do you feel about that? Do you feel marginal? Do you feel bothered in any way by being Jewish and being in a predominantly non-Jewish neighborhood where they were celebrating the way they do?

NANCY: I didn't. I don't know why. And we did lots of Christmas singing at school and there were Christmas trees in the lobby. I don't know. Maybe because my mother had grown up with more of that. It just—it was not an issue.

INT: But early on then, you were saying, that your friends were mostly non-Jewish. Then what? Did you make some friends, some lasting friends, in your camp days or your confirmation classes that you did some Jewish things with?

NANCY: Yeah, because I had friends from camp and friends from youth group and my school wasn't totally un-Jewish. There were a couple of Jewish kids right in my neighborhood, including two cousins that I spent time with. So there was enough Jewish content and activity all the way through high school. It was not an issue.

INT: How did you and your friends spend your time, other than doing these Jewish things? What other interests did you have?

NANCY: Flute lessons.

INT: Are you a flutist?

NANCY: I am. I started college with music ed. major.

INT: Do you still play?

NANCY: A little bit. Mostly because my daughters nag me.

INT: You were involved in sports in any way?

NANCY: No.

INT: It wasn't a girl thing so much.

NANCY: Right. I didn't do sports. I did a lot of music stuff, a lot of youth group stuff. A little bit of pep rally stuff. That kind of booster club. I was in the school band, not marching band but
concert band. My memory of high school is—you say, what did you and your friends do, but there was never time.

INT: Well, that’s what you’re doing. You were in any clubs or groups, besides your youth group?

NANCY: Well, but that was very time consuming. I had a flute lesson one day after school and a piano lesson one day after school and Sunday morning I was teaching Sunday school for four and a half hours and Sunday night was youth group meeting that I had and if I was at school every morning, which I was, because band rehearsal started at 7:25. I was on the early bus. I was there by 7:10. There wasn’t a whole lot of time left. And I had a real serious boyfriend my senior year of high school. I spent Saturday nights with him.

INT: This was the non-Jewish boyfriend?

NANCY: That was in college. That was college and post-college. This is high school. I mean, that filled the days.

INT: How old were you when you were teaching Sunday school?

NANCY: My junior and senior years in high school. And, you know, I was a student aide but I still was there from a quarter of nine until one thirty every Sunday.

INT: Do you remember the courses you were teaching?

NANCY: It was back to the history and holidays curriculum.

INT: So from there you went to Case Western, received your Masters, went to Penn for a little while and then eventually decided to go back to Philadelphia and you were working and now what happens?

NANCY: Gee, that’s a good question. There’s an important piece that got lost here and it’s not important in the rest of my life but if you look at my Jewish life it’s important. When I left Cleveland the second time, having gone back and then left, I ended up living in Wilmington at my parents for nine or ten months before I got that job at Project PRIDE. During that time, I was doing just some temporary work and really looking for a job in organization development and management development, and just doing whatever it took to kind of make some money along the way when the Jewish Federation of Delaware had a real staff problem. The executive director left unexpectedly. There were some problems and he left very unplanned and there were two other staff people and one of those other two staff people—I don’t remember if she was ill or if she just left because she was fed up—but p.s. they were down to one professional level staff person. And the president of the Federation was a friend of my parents and he came to me and asked if I would work at Federation. I said but that’s not what I want to do and he said please. Look for a
job. Whenever you need to leave for an interview leave for an interview. If you need to make phone calls make phone calls, but we need somebody there helping us go through the mail, putting things together, that kind of stuff, and I said yes. And the most significant thing that came out of that was that they sent me to the G.A. and that was my first look onto this whole national scene.

INT: What year was that?

NANCY: Actually, I should not say the first look. It was the year that Golda spoke in Dallas, so it was ’77. ’76 or ’77. Something like that. And if you take that with the fact that I went to a two week national NFTY thing at Warwick.

INT: Reform movement.

NANCY: Yes. Then I was in between my junior year and senior year in high school, and then I have this sort of more adult view of this national Jewish community. It was really significant.

INT: Okay. Tell me a little bit about the NFTY trip first.

NANCY: It wasn’t a trip. It was our leadership training institute in Warwick, New York, which was the NFTY leadership training camp.

INT: And what did you come away from that with?

NANCY: Oh, that’s just a reinforcement of all the stuff. Again, it was-for most days it was less Jewish study. There was just less emphasis on that. It was how do you run programs and learning new songs and creating the Jewish experiences that you lived then. Not so much study. But, you know, Hamotzi before a meal. I think that was even before anybody benched after a meal. Those kinds of things.

INT: Sounds like you took away a little competence too.

NANCY: Sure. It always connects because I did that, I did my senior year in high school as president of my youth group and very active in the region, and then proceeded to go off to college with three of the kids that had been at my NFTY Institute were at college. So there was an immediate entree. We actually started-here you go. You didn’t grow up in the Reform movement. I’ve got to give you some history. In late ’60’s, the Brotherhood, through the Reform movement, the National Federation of Temple Brotherhood, sponsored an effort to start-I don’t know if it’s fair to say a program parallel to Hillel, but they wanted something to help with the Reform Jews on campus, the NFTY kids that went on to school, because in those days so many of the Hillels were really driven by Conservative rabbis who didn’t know how to deal with the kids that came out of Reform movement. And in fact that was true my freshman year at Case Western Reserve. The rabbi was-in my mind he was old. G-d only knows. Maybe he wasn’t old. He was probably
only in his fifties but he'd been a Conservative Hillel rabbi for years and years and years and we came in and we were looking for spirit and singing and creative services and he didn't know what to do with us. So I was actually part of the group that started this what we hoped was going to be national-I don't think it ever really took off-movement for reform kids in college.

INT: What was it called?

NANCY: Sambatyon. By my sophomore year-I think my sophomore year-the new Hillel building on campus was open and there was a new rabbi who was wonderful and open to everybody and, in fact, really built bridges between the reform kids and even orthodox kids so that we were all doing things together and learning from each other. So that was really wonderful.

INT: I'm not so sure that we ever really established the name of your youth group, the youth group that you were involved with.

NANCY: The Beth Emeth youth group was called BESTY. Beth Emeth Senior Temple Youth. Which was part of MAFTY. which was the Middle Atlantic Federation of Temple Youth, which was part of NFTY. So you just have to move over to the Reform movement. You can pick it all up.

INT: We have that on the record now. So let's go back, then, to the G.A. and Golda. So tell me about that.

NANCY: Seems like a million years ago and so many G.A.'s ago I can't remember.

INT: But you mention it as being formative so there must have been something happening.

NANCY: Well, I guess because it was a time in my life that there was very little that was stable. I mean I was living at my parents but I was clearly an adult, meaning I didn't want to be living at my parents. It wasn't my choice.

INT: How old were you?

NANCY: Twenty-four, twenty-five. twenty-six. I was working at a temporary job, looking for a job in my field, which were not easy to come by because they all wanted people with experience. There are many people who used to get into my field through public sector jobs. The public sector money was starting to dry up by the mid Seventies. So it was hard to find something. And I was back in Wilmington and most of the people I knew had left Wilmington so I didn't really have a social base. I didn't have a job. So there was really no way to relate if you were connected to the Jewish community, so that was really sort of really enforced that and brought it back to sort of consciousness-not consciousness but action.
INT: Do you remember anything specifically powerful about that G.A.?

NANCY: Oh, everything.

INT: Name one.

NANCY: A couple of thousand people in one place all because they were Jewish and they were interested in the future of the Jewish community.

INT: And how about Golda?

NANCY: Well, to be in a room with Golda, it was just incredible.

INT: Do you remember anything specifically about her presence?

NANCY: Her clarity, her commitment, her certainty about what she was doing.

INT: And when you left there, what did you take away from that experience?

NANCY: I guess an understanding about what the national Jewish community was all about. Clearly an understanding of what Federation was all about, which then when I actually got a job, which was-the G.A. was in November. Must have been-I started right after Labor Day, nine or ten months later, and I moved to Philadelphia, one of the first things I did was call Federation and got involved in their young leadership so it just gave me-even though there wasn’t such a thing as leadership at the Delaware Federation in those days, I knew that it existed elsewhere.

INT: So was that your next entree into the Jewish community again?

NANCY: Yes.

INT: What were you doing professionally at that time?

NANCY: Well, I was at Project PRIDE.

INT: Okay. So you were at Project PRIDE and you were living in Philadelphia and you were a member of Young Leadership.

NANCY: Right.

INT: And what else was going on socially for you?

NANCY: Well, I met my husband through Federation not so long after that. I had some friends that I knew that were here from college and I guess they formed my first social group or
connections, because they weren’t necessarily a group but people I knew from college and then people really I met through Federation.

**INT:** Were you living alone at that time?

**NANCY:** Yes.

**INT:** So what other Jewish things were going on in your life? What other Jewish practices or events or commitments or involvements?

**NANCY:** Federation quickly became all consuming. If you’re active in Young Leadership you can go to stuff twice a week without blinking an eye, and I was traveling for my job and in graduate school, so there wasn’t a lot else. I lived across the street from Germantown Jewish Center, went there for holidays although never really got clubbed in.

**INT:** Who was there at that time?

**NANCY:** I think Sandy was there but don’t quote me on that. I didn’t go often enough. (End of tape 1, side 1)

**INT:** ...about your Wexner program and how transforming that was. Do you have something to add to that?

**NANCY:** A couple of things. One is that the learning was unbelievable. There was everything from history to tradition to understanding prayer to Torah study. It was really everything. But it was always just challenging and meaningful and important. The trip to Israel was wonderful and we did lots besides study. We were out a lot and not so much touring in the traditional sense, but doing things that then tied back to what we were studying. And Walter and the kids met me at the end of that with our parents. It was four years ago this summer. ’93. And having the kids come and be part of our final Shabbat-it was just unbelievable. But the teacher for me who was—it’s almost unfair to single out one teacher although there was one who really made a difference for me—I mean big time made a difference—and that was Irwin Kula, who’s now president of CLAL—whatever his title was-director, executive, whatever he’s called. There was one particular lecture—of all the stuff that one thing should stand out is kind of amazing to me—but there was one that did stand out and I think this in one paragraph can summarize what a two hour lecture that left me speechless for the next four hours is—according to Rabbi Irwin Kula, “many think of kedusha as a separate domain, an unnatural pious overlay on life. This attitude toward the sacred as separate has weakened Jewish identity, marginalized it to a few moments and a few places, so the modern world has divided up human experience into different categories. We knew that raw human experience knows no rigid boundaries.” And then it goes on. “The kedusha is not about separation. It’s about an intense and continual awareness of life step, in every act, in every moment. Kedusha is an expansion of consciousness that evokes commitment and empathy and increases our capacities to sustain and nurture life.” Reading this now from The Kall, October
31st edition. When you talked about how some Jewish sense or Jewish learning or sense of Jewish purpose guided what I did professionally, I think this summarizes it. What I’ve really learned to do and I think that my Wexner experience really helped me do, is find that kedusha in every act or every person. You know, come on. I don’t look at the grocery store as being a holy act but when I stop and think about what I’m doing, I know think about it and consider it in terms of does it fall back to the why am I here or the purpose of my life.

INT: So tell me about the grocery store. How does that tie back?

NANCY: It’s making a Jewish home. And when I got sick my whole response was G-d’s not going to let me die now because He and I have a deal. I have to raise my kids and my kids aren’t raised. I may not get to sit on a rocking chair on the porch with my husband, but we’ve got a deal. I’m not done what I have to do for my kids.

INT: I want to talk to you a little bit about that too but we’re not there yet. We’re not exactly there. Actually, you did answer one of the important questions I was going to ask you but I’ll ask you again. Other than Irwin Kula, was there anyone else, was there a woman perhaps who was a significant role model in your life or who made an impact, other than Golda?

NANCY: Yeah, Mimi.

INT: Mimi?

NANCY: Mimi Schneirov.

INT: Tell me about that.

NANCY: What’s to tell about Mimi? I mean we’ve continued to do this together back and forth. Mimi’s bright. She’s committed. She’s energetic. She’s positive. She doesn’t see the world in political terms but she sees it in people terms, which is what I see how I see the world. I don’t think of myself as sitting in a meeting as a woman or as a woman chairing this large campaign.

INT: Aren’t you ever?

NANCY: No.

INT: You never look back and say wow.

NANCY: No, I don’t see it.

INT: And you don’t think Mimi did either?

NANCY: No.
INT: She didn't say wow, I'm the first woman on Federation in Philadelphia. She had to-there was an awful lot of press about it.

NANCY: For me it was about who she was and what she does and how she approaches it, and I think that it did for her. It gave an extraordinary sensitivity to everything she did and said because she knew it was all being looked at under a microscope. And there were certain people who never took her seriously and there were certain things that she could never make happen because she wore a skirt instead of a pair of pants.

INT: Did you ever get past that fall promotion or was the decision not made in your favor because you're a woman, do you think?

NANCY: I don’t know. I think there may have...there were things that I specifically wanted to do, that I sought out, that I was told no. Were there things that I might have been asked to do otherwise? I don’t know. Maybe.

INT: But you just didn’t let that affect you.

NANCY: No.

INT: You just didn’t think about it. You just went and did what you needed to do. I want to know what is it that you learned about yourself through your involvement in the Jewish community?

NANCY: What I learned about myself? That I’m stubborn and bullheaded and I’m not afraid to speak my mind. That I sometimes think in bigger pictures and grander terms than other people. That it’s alright if everybody doesn’t like me, but there is a cost to that. I don’t mean like, best friends, but that there are people when you want to move faster or you want to do things that are deemed to be radical or when you don’t shut up and go with the flow, there are people that will pull back and don’t want to look to be with you, support you, and there is a cost to that.

INT: How is that formed by your Jewishness? What’s the intersection there?

NANCY: I don’t know. I don’t know. I just have to be honest and straight. I might be more effective if I was a little more political sometimes or could bide my time or would build coalitions behind doors. I find the older I get the less patience and tolerance I have for that, and I think it doesn’t always do me in good stead.

INT: On the positive side though, what do you think that your strengths were in the Jewish community?

NANCY: Probably the same things. And I’m well organized and that I’m real energetic and that I speak easily in front of a group.
INT: And while this was happening and particularly now, how is your spirituality actualized, self-actualized? I mean what are your practices and your prayer modes for example? We didn’t talk about where your kids are at school, but I know that there’s some involvement. So what’s the intersection? Let’s first say where your kids are at school.

NANCY: Judah’s at Central and the girls are at the Philadelphia School, which is a K to 8 nonsectarian private school.

INT: And tell me about their Jewish education.

NANCY: Well, the girls are still in Hebrew school at the synagogue and Judah is at Gratz twice a week and the older kids are at Ramah and Sarah’s at Harlem. And Judah is active in USY.

INT: And you had their Bar and Bat Mitzvah?

NANCY: Well, had a Bar Mitzvah. First Bat Mitzvah is not until next April.

INT: Okay. So what was that Bar Mitzvah like for your family?

NANCY: Wonderful. It was the first time I read Torah, which was pretty neat in and of itself. To me, the quintessential moment was when Musaf was over and the sun was just streaming into the sanctuary and Judah was still up on the bimah. It was this unbelievable moment, and I’m sure it just lasted a moment, of this connection, historic connection, and that sense of being the next link in the chain for three thousand years and living Jewishly and being there on Shabbat and having everybody in the world that I cared about all in one room, and to see his achievement and, you know, my own personal sense of achievement in having read Torah and knowing that we really made it the way we wanted to make it. Walter read Torah also.

INT: Do you remember what the parsha was?

NANCY: Vayeshev. And he had picked out his tallit two years before in Israel and his grandparents bought it for him and it was woven for the artist colony right outside the Old City.

INT: In Jerusalem?

NANCY: Yeah.

INT: In Ein Kerem?

NANCY: Yes. It was just incredible.

INT: So your spirituality now. What are your practices at home? You have Shabbat, you mentioned.
NANCY: We do Shabbat always Friday night and Shabbat is lighting candles, kiddush, challah. We always have a story. It may be a Midrash. It may be, as my kids call it, a picture book. It depends whose turn it is to pick out the story.

INT: And who tells it?

NANCY: Well, it’s read from a book. There’s pushka on the table first and we always bench after dinner and there’s always a special dinner. My house it’s usually fish. My kids are going to grow up not knowing that most people have chicken Friday night. They’re going to say, no, you eat fish on Friday night. And we often have company. Not always but the kids know that Friday night they can bring home whoever they want. I prefer advance notice, but that they could bring home whoever they want. And they have to come to the table looking respectable. Saturday morning we always make Hamotzi and we usually have a ten minute discussion about the parsha. We’ll go through stages where we remember and stages where we forget to do Havdalah. Everybody likes to do it but sometimes Saturday afternoon gets pretty meshuga, especially if you’re not Shabbos observant during the day. It’s hard to remember the end of the day. We observe in some fashion or another every holiday. These days, erev Rosh Hashana dinner is always at our house. We don’t go to shul that night but we always go the next day and the second day. Yom Kippur we have dinner at home before Kol Nidrei because it’s too meshuga to do anything else and break fast is always at our house. We build a sukkah. I usually go to services on Sukkot, although everybody else doesn’t. They do Chanukah I guess the same way everybody else does Chanukah. Where do we go from there? Tu B’shvat before Purim or after Purim? Help me. And this year we’re actually going to do a Tu B’shvat Seder which we’ve not done in the past.

INT: With friends?

NANCY: Yes, with friends. At Purim we always go to shul and some years we make little packages and take them to our neighbors.

INT: Shaloch Manos.

NANCY: Shaloch Manos, thank you. I’m losing my mind here. And our neighbors love it. They just think that’s the best thing they’ve ever seen. We make hamantashen almost every year. Somehow or other last year we got caught in the squeeze, and the last couple of years when we’ve made them we’ve taken them to our neighbors. Pesach we do in a big way. As I said, we don’t have a kosher kitchen but we move all our-anything chametz stays out of the kitchen. We don’t give it away but it gets put away downstairs and we clean pretty much big time and there’s no obvious treif. If we eat it it’s not kosher meat but we also don’t eat anything that would be treif in the house during Pesach. Shavous-I sometimes go to shul, sometimes don’t. Sometimes unfortunately it gets lost a little bit. I did say kaddish when my father died every day. I did that. And I think the sad thing that’s happened since then is that I’m really not going to shul on a regular basis.
INT: Do you pray on a regular basis?

NANCY: No.

INT: But your spirituality takes on the form of practice. When you go to synagogue do you wear a tallit and a kippah or one or the other?

NANCY: I'm at the transition stage. I'm working on this one. Actually, Devra made a tallit last year at camp that she said she made for me, but she has not gotten to needle her grandmother to put the buttonholes in so we can tie the tzizit.

INT: Did you ever put on tefillin?

NANCY: No.

INT: Is that anything you think you would be interested in doing?

NANCY: I don't think so.

INT: So in the twentieth century, what does being Jewish and being female mean to you?

NANCY: It largely defines my life. We certainly have friends that are not Jewish but there are fewer of them and I'm clearly aware of what some of the differences are in what drives their lives or the rhythms of their lives. This is going to sound G-dawful traditional for somebody like me but making a Jewish home and raising Jewish children, having a Jewish marriage as part of that making a Jewish home is very important to me. I really see that as my responsibility. I don't see it as a role that somebody's forced me into. I see it in the proactive sense, a responsibility that I have, that's mine just by being Jewish and wanting to live that way. That is part and parcel of what comes with it. It's connected. It's almost not a choice. It's the choice I made by wanting to live an active Jewish life. So I don't see that inhibiting anything else. One of the things that I really struggled with when I said kaddish was my father was the whole notion of time bound mitzvot and really coming to grips with understanding why women were not required historically to honor time bound mitzvot, because going to shul every day was stressful. Not being there. Being there was wonderful most of the time, but to plug into the kavanah sometimes-forget it. To turn off my brain from how quickly I had to get out of there to run what car pool, to get dinner on the table so the kids could do homework before they went to bed. Or leaving before the kids left in the morning to sit there and wonder did they get out, did they lock the door, did they remember everything they needed. It's really-it was like this incredible awakening of oh yeah, there's really a reason that I wasn't required. I felt I was required. One of the things you asked about women teachers before and there weren't a lot at Wexner. I think they make an effort to do more, but as you know from your own study, there aren't a lot of women teachers out there yet. We had one woman come in who did two sessions on women in Judaism. And one of the questions she posed-it was really a thought provoking question-she wasn't looking for an answer but she
looked at the women in the room and said were you at Sinai, and to me there was an instant response-of course I was at Sinai. It wasn’t just Walter that was there or my father or my brother. Of course I was there. I mean I just never had a...maybe that’s a fault I live with, that I’ve just always seen myself as equal. I don’t see myself as less. Separate, different-that’s okay. I don’t care. We have different responsibilities and maybe that’s the issue of time bound mitzvot.

**INT:** It’s interesting that you should say that because as it were, I was looking at Bleu Greenberg last night and it was the first edition of her book and she talked about...and she was searching, searching at that time too and she was just sort of wondering out loud in that book whether or not there could be possibly just a time when women are exempt, perhaps while they were raising children, and then be obligated.

**NANCY:** Yes. That’s something...but I absolutely understand that. I could never take that I perceived to be the position that the radical feminists have taken inside Judaism.

**INT:** Which is praying at the Wall?

**NANCY:** No, that’s not radical. (Laughter)

**INT:** Well, then we have to define radical because that’s radical to some people. What would you define then as radical?

**NANCY:** Well, I guess the assumption that we have to accept all of the requirements all of the time. Because this making it a home and raising the children...and Walter is incredible. He’s really there. He’s not-it’s not like I see it as my job alone. I see it as our job. But I clearly feel-I live that responsibility differently than he does. That responsibility to me plays out in making lunch for my kids. He could say-they’re old enough to make their own lunch and he could leave the house and they can make their own lunch, and it’s not that he’s less responsible.

**INT:** He’s a guy, Nancy. (Laughter)

**NANCY:** But he wouldn’t walk out of the house without thinking about lunch. That’s what I mean by he doesn’t-he lives the responsibility differently but he doesn’t feel the responsibility less.

**INT:** I think that is male-female. I do think. I want to say on the record that not for everyone, but I think in general that’s a male-female response to those responsibilities. I’m not making a judgement, but I just think that it could be. I’m sure you have already, but if you were the mentor of some young women, women who are coming up and asking you for some advice-I want to live a rich life. Tell me what would be the ingredients to lead a rich and fulfilling life. What would some of the advice be that you would give to her?

**NANCY:** Study. In whatever way you want to study.
INT: Are you saying Jewish studies?

NANCY: Yes. Well, I thought we were talking about in a Jewish context.

INT: We are, but we’re also women. I guess we’re stating that we are the sum of that, being a woman and being Jewish and...

NANCY: I guess the most important thing, just as a woman, if you don’t make it specific, is to get clear on your priorities. I have a friend and the friendship is waning because this gets in the way for us because I’m clear about what my priorities are and hers aren’t. She one day is busy being a lawyer and running around and getting in positive verdicts in these incredible cases that are in the newspaper and the next day she’s closing her office and telling the courts not to appoint her to cases because she’s got to be home and be a mother and she’s getting rid of whatever support help she has at home so she can be there and then she gets crazy being there and she goes off and decides that she needs to open a pastry-coffee shop and she’s going to do all the baking and she’s going to find some cute little place and make...and I’ve watched this now over eight years and it’s cycles. It just keeps going around the same crazy circle.

INT: Okay. I’m going to respond to that by saying I know a lot of that woman, whomever she may be, and I think it also may have to do with how we were raised as women, so the question for you is what was it about your past, about your upbringing, that gives you the kind of clarity that you have? What enables you to define your priorities?

NANCY: My father. You can do whatever you want to do.

INT: But that may also say your next message because your lawyer friend may think that she could open up a pastry shop and be a mother and be a-

NANCY: But she doesn’t know. She knows she can’t do it all but she can’t-

INT: Separate it.

NANCY: She can’t say all right, I’m going to do this one and I’m going to do it with a passion and maybe not for the rest of her life but for some reasonable period of time and when she says she’s had enough to just close that door and move on. There’s always, for her, regrets, and always going back to see if she still misses it or likes it or wants it.

INT: So using her as a foil for you, what is it about—what is it that you see in what you perceive to be not terrific about how she’s going about things that makes you really clear about how you’re conducting your stuff?

NANCY: I’ve been clear since my kids were born, since Judah was born, that I wanted to work part time. Part time because it gave me the flexibility to do a variety of things and part time rather
than not working because from the very beginning I thought I was a better mother because I had an adult outlet and continued to have other outlets rather than just focusing all the time on one child.

INT: And yet you were willing to make the compromises, because we know that people who opted, particularly women who opted for part time positions in many cases didn’t get the benefits, in many cases were not- 

NANCY: Yes. Absolutely.

INT: So that was very clear.

NANCY: That was real clear. I took myself off the career track. It’s why this isn’t a business with a multiple office and minions running around. It’s this size business because this is where I can get my hands around and for now it has to be something I can get my hands around, and I’ve walked away from opportunities because of this.

INT: So play our ties. If you were talking about being Jewishly connected you say study as much as possible. Anything else you want to give to your women?

NANCY: Hold the line on living Jewishly. You do things like saying I won’t go out Friday night. Not that that’s the end-all. It’s not the only thing. Hold the line on saying if you study, if your way of study is to take a course or to do Wexner—it was every other Tuesday night for two years. Not in the summer, but I did not miss a class. I can’t tell you I didn’t miss one here or there.

INT: But that was your sacred space.

NANCY: Yes. Hold the line. Don’t let other things run over you if you establish it as a priority. (Tape shuts)

INT: I’m here with Nancy Ferst. This is Lynnda Targan. It is December 10th. We are continuing our interview in her office in Philadelphia and we left off speaking about advice that Nancy might give to other people who were coming up, other young women who were coming up in her footsteps, and following on that, I would like to ask first of all Nancy, what have you enjoyed the most about your involvement in the Jewish community?

NANCY: What did I enjoy the most? Boy, that’s interesting. I guess this sense that I can make a difference, that I can ensure continuity of service and high quality service in whether it’s a day care or a Hillel or the synagogue education program or whatever it is that I’m doing is one, and I think the interaction and the opportunity to be with other people who share similar values and commitment is also really personally fulfilling.

INT: What’s been difficult?
NANCY: When politics get in the way. When the right things can’t happen for the wrong reasons. When people who either give a lot or have historically had significant positions in the community can influence decisions when they’re not well grounded in their opinions. That’s what I don’t like.

INT: Well, what have you had to overcome to push through some of those difficulties?

NANCY: I don’t know if I’ve had to overcome but I guess I’ve had to get to a point that I was...I was always willing to express myself. I guess what I’ve had to overcome is my willingness to speak out in either the wrong forum or in too sharp a tone or in too accusatory a tone and really learn how to say what I want to say in a way that people can hear it and don’t feel that they need to defend themselves, but that clearly states another way of looking at something.

INT: How does being a woman play into that?

NANCY: It’s interesting. I was thinking about what we talked about the other day. In some ways, I guess, being a woman plays into it in that I don’t always think that men hear women the same way and I guess I’m finally passed young leadership, but for so many years of my involvement I was—I think I was seen as one of the young people so I was dealing with the gender issue as well as the age issue. What I’ve been thinking about since we meet the other day is that for me—the defining issue for me isn’t being a woman. I guess I’ve just never seen myself as not equal. Different, but not seeing myself as not equal. So it doesn’t play for me.

INT: So you never experienced gender discrimination or you never think that there was an opportunity that could have come your way that maybe went to a man or anything like that?

NANCY: If I have, I’ve been too dense to see it.

INT: Hardly.

NANCY: But I mean it. I can’t think of a community responsibility that I wanted and didn’t get or couldn’t have. I just haven’t seen it.

INT: They what do you count among your successes in the Jewish community?

NANCY: In terms of style or achievement?

INT: Both.

NANCY: In terms of style, my willingness to put the time in to be prepared. To know my stuff. To work behind the scenes if need be. To be at meetings so that I know what’s going on and to speak from a position of knowledge rather than just an opinion. And I think that makes a difference because people can’t come back at you. I guess stylistically also a willingness to take
risks if I have to. Not being afraid to say what it seemed like other people won’t say. And that, I think, makes a difference. I won’t sit in the back of the room and say well somebody should say this and everybody looks at each other. I’ll just stand up and say it. In terms of achievement, I guess getting day care to where it is now. There were some real specific things in terms of suburban expansion, changing the mind set to dealing with what we’re serving, dual career families not just single parent families, really emphasizing in day care and ensuring that there was a firm Jewish curriculum, not that it was just a socially Jewish place but that it was practically a Jewish place. The whole fundraising thing, the capital campaign we talked about and instituting a gala and a yearbook—all those kinds of things we all wish we didn’t have to do but it seems like we have to do it. And I think those are some real achievements. The redefinition of young leadership, the merging of the campaign and leadership development I think was significant, albeit a long time ago. The definition of the human resource development function, which is now defunct. Unfortunately, some of the things I’ve worked on haven’t necessarily been seen as so important by the powers that be.

INT: I don’t want to put words in your mouth but the fact that you were seen as a person who does not see herself as having experienced gender discrimination but obviously was perceived as equal and yet maintained a family, a position, a job in the market place and then also did this volunteer work, nursed a child or children while doing all of these things, I wonder whether or not you don’t, in fact, think that they might have helped to change some of the perception about what women could do.

NANCY: Maybe. You know, it’s hard...I guess you never see yourself the way others see you and I also think that my involvement has come along at a point in time in generational change. Our mothers were perfectly happy and content to be in a women’s division and a friends of kind of an organization and there clearly is value there. There’s a place for that and there are people that identify that way and work that way. I just never went up any of those chains. I don’t know if that’s historic happenstance. It was clearly not...I mean there was no young women’s division when I first got involved and it just never dawned on me that out of young leadership I would move into women’s division, because I was too used to working with and interacting with men and women and couldn’t see separating from that.

INT: So if I were to ask you then—we spoke a lot about the intersection of the Jewish life and the volunteer life and the professional life and a little bit about the values that you brought to each of them, your Jewish values and so forth, so if you were asked what it means to be Jewish and female in the twentieth century. how would you respond?

NANCY: I think we all, but maybe women particularly, have a special obligation when it comes to raising our children, helping them to enjoy being Jewish, to want to perpetuate their Jewish life, to know how to be that, to have the skills and the knowledge to know how to do that, and that for our daughters, that they shouldn’t be afraid to make what choices work for them. That if this period of time should have achieved anything, it should be that we don’t have to live a stereotype life, that if I have a daughter who chooses to stay home, that that would be okay and
she shouldn’t have second thoughts about and nobody else should have second thoughts about it, and if I have another daughter that chooses a career track and to not have children, although that would make me sad, but what their choices are should be acceptable and okay for them.

INT: How about where it relates to the Jewish community-let me say their Judaism and the Jewish community.

NANCY: There’s a real conundrum here. I firmly believe that women are able and capable to do any of the jobs that men have done, whether it’s from the pulpit or the executive director position at any of the agencies or if it’s on the faculty of the seminaries or Jewish studies, faculty at any of the universities, there is no place that’s inappropriate for women. On the other hand, we haven’t yet fully transitioned to make that acceptable and where there is dated a quantify and one of the places is in the Federation world, small Federations that have had a number of women presidents, which large Federations haven’t had, the small Federations are showing that there is a decline in the involvement of men and a decline in the giving when there are too many women successively as president. And I think we need to be attuned to what that means and maybe as Jewish women we need to address that with our sons so that they see women equally and we make our generational transitions sometime sooner rather than later. But I think we also can’t be naive to put at risk the involvement of men. We have to recognize that it’s a transition time and deal with it that way. not be afraid of it and not walk away from it but who does better...not necessarily. I was going to say change does better when it comes slowly. Not necessarily. Sometimes radical change works, but I think we would benefit by analyzing is it a time for radical change and is that going to work and can we afford the cost that it might incur, or are we better off figuring out how to not just let it happen but manage its happening over a period of time in which we can all end up at a successful end or new beginning, so to speak.

INT: So here we are, on December 10, 1997. Where are you? How old are you? What are you doing professionally? What are you doing in the Jewish community? How old are your kids? What’s the state of your marriage? That kind of thing.

NANCY: I’m forty-seven. I’m very happily married and I still have—one of the components of that is a partner who shares similar views about commitment to the community, men and women each can do whatever it is that needs to get done. Our children are-

INT: Name them just in case we didn’t before. I think we did.

NANCY: Judah is almost fifteen and Devra is twelve and Sarah is nine. My work life is a consulting practice. It enables me, I guess, to do all that I do because it does have some flexibility, it’s not being somewhere nine to five. It is a clear choice that I made. One of the things that I’ve said when you asked what is my advice if I was a mentor was to establish clear priorities. Well, I have a clear priority and that is that I don’t want to work fifty or sixty hours a week. But that doesn’t mean that there aren’t some weeks that I don’t do that, but then the trade up is the other weeks that I don’t have to and I can manage the integration of my life, which is
work and family and community-and community includes synagogue.

**INT:** Presently, what other volunteer activities specifically that you are involved in?

**NANCY:** I'm still on the executive committee of Federation Day Care, an officer at Hillel and on the board of Jewish Federation and sit on the allocations and planning committee and the population study committee. I chair the education committee at my synagogue. I think that that's it.

**INT:** That's a lot. It's up to you how much you want to reveal about this, but we know that recently you were diagnosed with a serious illness and I guess the question that I would have for you is in what ways has it made you see the world in a different light, if at all, and has there been any spiritual significance attached to this diagnosis?

**NANCY:** Two things I guess. One is watching myself make the clear decision, and I don't know that I really thought about it but it was clear that it happened in practice, that I wanted to continue my life as normally as possible, that for some people faced with this challenge there are major changes in their life and that I could have either chosen not to do that. And of course I haven't been told I only have six months. That might be different. We're talking about the doctors saying well, this treatment plan should give you any from ten to twenty years, at which point we think we're going to have a whole new way to deal with this, so-(end of tape 2, side 1)