Bernice Stern Transcript

Pamela Brown Lavitt: This is the oral history interview of Bernice Stern. Today's date is June 22, 2001. We are in the home of Bernice Stern at 2709 W. Galer, in Seattle, Magnolia District. This is Pamela Brown Lavitt, oral historian for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words Project in Seattle. Before we begin, I just wanted to get your permission to have this interview taped.

Bernice Stern: You have it.

PL: Wonderful. I understand that you were born in Seattle and you've lived in Seattle your whole life.

BS: True.

PL: When did that history begin?

BS: 1916. I was born in Seattle. I believe it's Swedish Hospital and I've lived here ever since. Never wanted to live anywhere else. Never even thought about it. My husband had lived in Seattle all his life. And so it was a natural.

PL: Is there a certain kind of pride associated with being a born and raised Seattleite?

BS: There certainly is.

PL: Can you describe what that is?

BS: Well, I watched Seattle grow, and it's grown well. It's had its moments of retrogression, may I say. One of them is at the present time, in my opinion, and I wouldn't vote for [then Seattle Mayor] Paul Schell for Dogcatcher. I'm very angry at him. Very angry at him. He's too smart a man to have done such a poor job for my city. And

when something mitigates against my city, I take it very personally.

PL: We're going to get back to that because I'd like to take us through the beginnings and that get back to the contemporary moment. Can you tell me a little bit about the situation of your birth? What were your parents' names, and how did they get here?

BS: My parents were from Portland, Oregon. And my father, Abe Friedman, had come with his family from somewhere in Europe. I guess Hungary would be the best guess. My mother was born in Portland to my knowledge. Her family was in the fur business. Both of them, therefore, came from Portland to Seattle for my father to go into the meat business here. My mother came with him. Both of them had short lives. Very unfortunate, in my opinion. My mother died at forty-six of cancer when I was fifteen or sixteen years old. Well, I must have been – yeah, that's true. Just before I graduated from high school. My father married again after my older sister and I were both married. He married again. A wonderful woman by the name of Etta Shermer, who is also a Seattleite and widow and a terrific lady. I was very devoted to her. And she and my father were married for about seven years, and then he died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-seven. Very, very sad because they were a happy marriage. It was a good marriage. He was entitled to happiness. Etta passed away about ten years later from cancer. In those days, they didn't even talk about cancer. It was like having leprosy. They called it everything else but cancer. Today it's so prevalent, very unfortunately, and we have to do something in America and in the world about cancer because it is taking too many good people. At any rate, I was there. Dorothy and I had an older sister who died before either one of us was born. Of course, before I was born and before my older sister was born. She died of spinal meningitis which was a prevalent disease with little children at that time. Of course, today, that wouldn't happen. So many things that happened today would not be possible because of the improvements medically. At any rate, I was born in 1916. One of my early memories is sitting on the steps somewhere in the Broadway district where we lived to watch President Wilson, who was in Seattle. He

was driving through. That was very exciting. I don't know why I have such vivid memories of that, except that the President of the United States was in Seattle.

PL: Can you describe what you remember from seeing him? Was there a cavalcade?

BS: There was a cavalcade. Yes, there was. He was in an open car. I don't think they had so many kooks today, so he was driving around in an open car without any protection, to my knowledge. There must have been Secret Service men around. But I saw him very plainly and thought he was a very good-looking man. I was four years old. I must have been interested in good-looking men even in those days. [laughter] But I got very excited about that because it is a very vivid memory.

PL: Did you talk about it in school? Well, you probably weren't in school yet.

BS: I wasn't in school yet.

PL: Did you talk about it with your mother? Did you learn anything about why he was here in retrospect?

BS: No. No. I don't remember why he was here. I guess he was taking a tour of the United States. Because to come to Seattle from Washington, D.C., was a very big deal. He must have come on a train. I don't remember any president coming except Wilson so far back.

PL: You said you grew up in the Broadway District. Where was that?

BS: Broadway North. The house is still there where I grew up. I went to Seward School, and so did my sons because after I was married and we moved to a bigger house. We moved a block from where I lived as a little girl, and my sons went to Seward School. That was a good school even then. I think it's going to be a good school again now. They changed that school. I don't know quite what is being done. But it's looking very

nice. They've redone it. They've remodeled it.

PL: Who lived in your household, Bernice?

BS: My mother, father, my sister, and myself and two in help.

PL: Where were your grandparents?

BS: My grandparents died when I was a little girl, it seems to me. People didn't live long like they do now. I don't remember my father's mother, but I remember my father's father. He was alive, and my mother's father and mother lived in Portland, and we used to see them, and the rest of her family lived in Portland. The fur business went to my mother's brother, who ran it until he died. An untimely death, and then his wife ran that fur business. His wife was a swell woman.

PL: What was the name of the fur business?

BS: Gumbert's. G-U-M-B-E-R-T. My mother's maiden name is Josephine Gumbert. It was a very well-known fur store in Portland.

PL: Do you remember anything about where it was? Or the fur trade at that time?

BS: It was near the Multnomah Hotel that's all I remember. And the fur trade was very brisk. Very brisk. It was quite acceptable to wear furs. Now it isn't. Nobody was worrying about the animals then. They were just worrying about keeping warm. And it was a very good business.

PL: What do you mean by that?

BS: It was a profitable business and a very highly thought of business, and my Uncle Milton in Portland was a very fine man. He had a lot of friends.

PL: When your father – why did they come to Seattle?

BS: Because I think there were – they needed more meat businesses here, I guess. I don't know. I was too young to understand why they came to Seattle. But they lived here in Seattle after that. Ever after. And Seattle was a good place to live. We lived in a nice house in the Broadway District. In the Harvard Avenue District.

PL: So you said you had help in the house. Can you explain?

BS: Everybody had help in the house.

PL: Explain to me what that means.

BS: That means we had a second maid who took care of the upstairs and waited on table and a cook. Both of them wonderful, wonderful women. The cook particularly was an immigrant from Sweden. I believe, she was Swedish. She was a swell woman. When I got married – she stayed with my father after my mother died. She was with us then, and she came to me the first year I got married. She worked for me to teach me how to cook. And she did. She was a wonderful gal, Magda. But everybody had help. When I first got help in the house, this doesn't count Magda – I think my father paid Magda. [laughter] But when I first got help, I had a wonderful gal for twenty-five dollars a month. That was the going rate. I always had help when my children were growing up. I had a fine Black woman named Willie May who drove me crazy, took care of my kids, ran the house, and was a marvelous cook. I had her for twelve miserable years as one of my friends. [laughter] Twelve miserable years. She was a fine cook, but she ran me too. I was so young at that time that she used to say, "I'm going to tell Mr. Stern when he gets home," if I did anything that didn't please her. She was going to tell Mr. Stern when he got home.

PL: This woman, Magda, that you grew up with in your own home, do you remember having strong relationships with them?

BS: With them? Indeed.

PL: Can you describe what you did together?

BS: Well, my sister and I – on Thursdays, which was the help's day out, my sister and I had to cook. We had to learn enough to cook so that we could cook dinner on Thursday nights. That was our first introduction to cooking, and we both turned out to be very good cooks because of Magda and Susan, who was our second maid. They were very much a part of the family.

PL: What do you remember about the things that your parents did, either hobbies or their businesses?

BS: Well, my father was so busy with his business. He got up at four o'clock in the morning and drove to the packinghouses to buy the meat for his wholesale business. And after he left the Public Market – because he had a market there at the Public Market, and then he and his partner bought the Sanitary Public Market, and they owned that for a while. Then he opened up a wholesale house which was way down on Western Avenue near where you enter to go to the stadium. I'm not sure of the street. But it was Western Avenue – Friedman's Wholesale. And he ran that. He would go to the big packinghouses and buy for that at four o'clock in the morning. He worked too hard, and that's why he died at such a young age. It was very bad for him. They had a wonderful wholesale house, and I used to go put my two little boys in the back of my car – you didn't have car seats then. They stood in the back of the car. Can you imagine? We all came through it all right. But there weren't so many cars on the street, and people didn't speed. No such thing as speeding. There was such a thing, but you rarely saw it or heard of it. But anyway, I put my two little boys in the back of the car, and we'd drive down to Grandpa's big wholesale house and get meat for the whole week. He used to say, "I'm long on T-bone steaks," and then he'd fix a whole thing of T-bone steaks to put in my refrigerator. So we all had very good food at our house because of Grandpa's meats. I used to go to the Public Market and buy all my vegetables too. There weren't

the QFCs and the Safeways and so on. We went to the Public Market to buy. That was fun.

PL: Do you remember the Public Market when your father first initiated his business?

BS: I was pretty young when my father initiated his business. My husband remembered it, though, because he would go down with his mother to the Public Market, and my father, whom, of course, he didn't know as my father, used to give him a wienie every time he went there. He remembered Abe Friedman gave him a weenie. It was a good market. It's still there. It's now Dan's, I think.

PL: The name of the meat market that your father used to own?

BS: Yes.

PL: What floor is it on?

BS: The first, the main floor.

PL: Was it called Friedman's?

BS: Friedman's. Friedman's Meats, yes it was. And then he and his partner bought the whole market across the street, as I told you, the Sanitary Public Market. And so my father and Mr. Mengedoht –

PL: Can you spell that?

BS: M-E-N-G-E-D-O-H-T, Mengedoht. I guess that must be a Dutch name, it sounds to me like. It was a nice market. I liked it.

PL: What did like –?

BS: I didn't get to go very often.

PL: Why not?

BS: Because I was too young when it was there. But I remember the people who worked there.

PL: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother?

BS: My mother was a sick woman. It was a shame. She was such a charming woman. She was very tall. My sister was very tall; she took after my mother. I was short and stocky like my father. Only I was, I think, taller. I was as tall as he was. I've shrunk now. Last time I got measured, I [had] shrunk one half-inch. That's part of old age that I don't like. Very hard to keep your weight down when you keep shrinking [laughter] the other way. Anyway.

PL: What did you do at home with your mother before she became ill or even while she was ill?

BS: Oh, she played marvelous games. She went to New York. I remember very vividly. She went to New York once with her brother, Milton, who ran the fur store. He took his sister to New York on the train, of course. They went to the shows, and my mother, who had some talent – she had to have some talent because she came home and did the shows for us. And played all the parts and did a wonderful job. I remember when she did Ramona and Sally. These are shows you wouldn't even have heard of.

PL: What kind of show were they?

BS: Musical shows in New York she went to see with her brother, and she did all the parts and sang all the music and was wonderful. She was very talented and fun when she was well enough to be fun. As I moved into my teens, she was not well enough to do anything. She was in bed most of the time and had a nurse. And obviously, I mean today, I know that she had one breast removed from cancer when I

was a very little girl. I remember when that happened.

PL: Do you remember her actually going in for the operation or do you remember her physical changes?

BS: Her physical changes more. I mean, I wasn't in the hospital or anything. I wasn't at the hospital even. I was too young when that happened. I think I must have been about four years old when she had a breast removed. But I knew it was cancer. Because she died when I was fifteen, 1931. In 1932 my sister and I went to – 1942 – must have been 1933, right there. Probably in my scrapbook. We went to Europe with our uncle and aunt. My father's brother, who was still in Portland in the meat business, and his wife took Dorothea and me to Europe with them. My father let us go with our uncle and aunt. That was a marvelous trip. That was an exciting trip which the Joint Distribution Committee found out that I had just graduated from high school and had taken four years of German. They asked me if I would go with these men to meet the young people who were coming in from France in probably 1933. 1933. Find out to talk to them. So somebody who knew German could talk to them.

PL: Can you explain the arc of that experience? When did the Joint Distribution Committee get in touch with you? You were already going there?

BS: I was on the boat. On the ship going to Europe, on the Libertee. I think it was the Libertee. Maybe the Isle de France. I can't remember which. Anyway, they asked me if I would go with them to meet young people who were coming from France who had gotten out of Germany or out of France. But many of them spoke German, and they needed some young person who could speak German to talk to them about their experiences and what they wanted, what they needed. Because most of the grownups didn't speak German. So, I'd said I'd like to very much. I did that with them. That was a very great eye-opener to me. I thought everybody was American up until that point.

PL: Well, here you're a young woman, and you've just lost your mother, and you're going on this escapade to Europe, and you're asked to do something very serious. What was going on in your mind if you can recall why you made the decision that you wanted to be a part of this mission?
BS: Because it sounded very exciting and because I knew there was something going on in Europe that was very bad for young people, and they needed to get out of where they lived and go and live either in England or in America, and people weren't very nice about them either. Nobody took them, including America. And President Roosevelt, whom I thought was marvelous until I found out what he hadn't done. Until I knew about his wife who tried to get him to do something, and he didn't do it.

PL: So you went with the Joint Distribution Committee –

BS: With these men who were volunteers too, you know.

PL: What happened? Where did you go?

BS: We went to camps where they had these Jewish families who had come in from Germany, and some of them had been in France too, the camps in France. They were in camps. They wanted to express themselves and couldn't because there wasn't anybody who could talk to them. So, they were glad to meet an American girl who could speak German.

PL: Do you remember what they told you?

BS: No.

PL: What was it like meeting these people of your age from a different country?

BS: It was illuminating. It was illuminating. I said I didn't know about kids my age in Germany. I wanted to know what had happened with them, and they told me. I acted as

an interpreter for these men.

PL: When you said that they told you what had happened to them, just the gist of it. What did they tell you?

BS: Kristallnacht. I didn't call it Kristallnacht. I'm not sure that they called it Kristallnacht, either. I think that was a media word for it. But they told me about their fathers being taken away and their mothers and people coming at night, so on and so forth. They made it very clear to me. I was just crushed. I couldn't believe that you would suffer so for being Jewish. I came from the Reform temple here and from Seattle, where people were very nice to you, never had any bad experiences. I couldn't believe people had bad experiences because they were Jews. It was very illuminating to me. As I said, I thought everybody was American.

PL: How long did you do this work for?

BS: On that trip to Europe. We were only gone three weeks. So, it wasn't any great length operation. But it certainly opened my eyes to what was going on in the world. After that, I read everything and heard it. Well, you didn't hear everything so much because you didn't even have radios so much then.

PL: Would you say that that trip somehow politicized you? Or was that informative?

BS: I don't know that it politicized me, but it informed me about the breadth [inaudible] of the world and about my role as a person in the world. Up to that point, I was just Bernice Freidman, who lived on Harvard Avenue North and who had very little to do with what was going on in the world. I was teaching sewing at the Neighborhood House here, at the Educational Center.

PL: Can you talk a little bit about your introduction to teaching sewing and where did you learn to sew?

BS: My mother was a very fine seamstress. My sister never could put on a button. I always had to put it on for her. I liked sewing a lot, so I don't know what started me out there. Probably my own mother sent me there because they needed young girls to sew. They needed help sewing, so I went. I was very impressed with that. Really, these were the things, the reason I picked out these three things was my introduction to the world beyond Bernice. That was very important for me to learn.

PL: What happened at the sewing center? Who was it that you were teaching sewing to?

BS: The children of immigrants. Children of immigrants. The children who were going to school here for the first time and who needed help because their mothers were very busy. They needed to learn how to put on their own buttons and how to take care of their things.

PL: In the larger context, what was the purpose of the –? Was it called Settlement House back then?

BS: Yes. It was called the Educational Center.

PL: What do you remember of your experiences there and the purpose of this organization at that time?

BS: I remember that it taught me that there were people who didn't live on Harvard Avenue North with help in the house. There were people who needed help, and they were Jewish people to a great extent. I was so surprised that there were Jewish people that needed help. I thought they were all in France. I really got quite a lesson from that. That's why, as I say, I picked out these three things because they were my introduction first to the world. That there were people in the world who needed help, and I could help them in my own crummy little way. But I could help them. The second was Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise because I found out that in my own community, Jews needed

to have a voice.

PL: Do you want to go ahead and describe that, and we can talk about it later as well?

BS: We can talk about it whenever you want.

PL: I think we'll wait to get to that, but I do think it's an area we want to spend quite a bit of time talking about. I wanted to talk a little bit about this area that you mentioned, Harvard Avenue North, and what you call the Broadway District. Is it called that same name today?

BS: It's called Capitol Hill now.

PL: When did that name shift? Do you know why?

BS: Yes. I think the freeway was one thing. The freeway came. And remember, the freeway starts at Broadway there at Harvard Avenue. I think we became part of a bigger city, and they didn't have separate little names for separate little areas. Just because you went to Seward School and lived on Harvard Avenue didn't make you anything. You went to Seward school because it was near your home. Today, this big fight about going to schools in your area is a very important one. I blame myself partly for it because I was on a committee that was appointed by the mayor, whoever was the mayor at that time, to discuss what we could do about schooling and transportation and so on and so forth. There were a lot of people on that committee I remember.

PL: Was this part of the – with the Rabbi [Raphael] Levine?

BS: No.

PL: Okay.

BS: No that wasn't part of Rabbi Levine. Rabbi Levine and a priest and a minister were on a program. I think it was television. A television program done by Marty [Martha] Wilson, who is a friend of mine, a very good friend of mine, and she died unfortunately very young. And that was a great program there. The rabbi and the priest and the – the rabbi and the priest and the minister they would rake – that's what you're referring to, isn't it? Or not?

PL: I think so. I think I want to backtrack a little bit, and I'll have to look up exactly what it is where my question came from. So many things in your life that – so many things we can talk about.

BS: So many things that I can't remember without help.

PL: You're doing a very good job. I want to talk about his avenue and the area you lived on Harvard Avenue. So there was no freeway there yet. What was it like?

BS: No.

PL: Can you visually describe what Seattle was like and what it looked like at that time in your neighborhood? And who your neighbors were?

BS: One of my – well, our next-door neighbor was Jim Clemmer, who owned theaters here in Seattle. They were nice neighbors when I was growing up. Then on the other side, part of the time, a Jewish family by the name of Hamburger, and he was in the dress business. His daughter was a good friend. I think she is still alive. She lived in San Francisco the last time I contacted her.

PL: Would you say it was a Jewish neighborhood?

BS: There were Jews in that neighborhood. Across the street were the Schoenfeld family. Right across the street on the corner. Herbert Schoenfeld's family of whom there

is only one left, and he's about to have a ninetieth birthday. He had a ninetieth birthday, Ralph did. Ralph is the only one left.

PL: In terms of Seattle and its neighborhoods and where Jews settled when you were growing up, what was your neighborhood, was there something distinct about what we now call the Capitol Hill neighborhood or the Broadway neighborhood compared to other neighborhoods that you knew other Jewish families lived in?

BS: It was not a Jewish neighborhood. There were Jews. But Jews were all over the place. Whereas before me, when my mother-in-law, Louise Stern, lived here, many of the Jews lived in Yesler Way or that area further south. That was a Jewish neighborhood, very definitely. But not where we lived.

PL: Why do you think you settled in that neighborhood?

BS: Because they found a house that was right for them. And because the Schoenfelds lived across the street. And they were friendly, and a lot of my mother and father's friends lived in Capitol Hill or Broadway.

PL: And did you all attend a similar synagogue?

BS: Yes, the Reformed synagogue.

PL: What was the name of that synagogue?

BS: Temple de Hirsch.

PL: Can you talk about your early experiences going to Temple de Hirsch?

BS: Of course. Of course. Yes. I started Temple de Hirsch. I don't think they had any kindergarten area. I think I must have started in the first grade at Temple de Hirsch for Sunday School. Rabbi [Samuel] Koch was the rabbi. He used to pinch your cheeks; it

hurt. He pinched them much too hard. Much too hard. He was a very nice rabbi, but he was definitely – he was so Reformed that anything that wasn't Reformed was an anathema to him.

PL: How do you recall that? What are memories that you have that mark that in your mind?

BS: Well, he wouldn't like anything that is going on at Temple today. When I go to Temple today and see men with yarmulkes and tallises and things like that, I think, "Oh my God, Rabbi Koch would have just had a fit." He wouldn't have permitted it. And my husband, who had gone to his temple, wouldn't put on a yarmulke. They tried to pass him a yarmulke once when I was on the pulpit, and they tried to pass him a yarmulke at Temple, and he wouldn't wear it.

PL: Do you think that was a particularly Reformed decision or a Seattle Reformed decision?

BS: Seattle Reformed decision, I think. Because other Reform temples weren't quite as narrow in their view as Rabbi Koch was. He was very narrow. And today, it's going the other way.

PL: As a leader of the Seattle flock at that time, people clearly felt a certain – they agreed to some extent with his decisions that he made.

BS: I think they did.

PL: Why do you think the Seattle Jewish community Reform Temple de Hirsch community didn't want to necessarily, outwardly wear the tallises and all that? Do you remember?

BS: Yes. I think they came from – if they had lived in Seattle, they came from all this background themselves. It would have never occurred to me, and I wouldn't wear a yarmulke or anything today. I don't like it at all. I liked it when he went to Temple. You had a nameplate in front of you that had your name on it. When you sat down at Temple, you sat in your seat. Now, you sit wherever there is a seat.

PL: What's the difference between sitting in a seat versus sitting wherever?

BS: Snobbishness. No question about it.

PL: What do you mean by that? Can you describe –?

BS: We liked our group. I'm speaking for my parents as I was growing up. They were proud to be a part of our group. That meant you came from the Northwest. We didn't care for people who came from far away and spoke differently or thought differently. We weren't very happy with that.

PL: And how did that manifest itself in other ways? In terms of your schooling? In terms of the way that you celebrated holidays.

BS: We didn't celebrate holidays as much as – the Stern family did better with holidays than my family did. When I got married and had children, I tried to steer them the way the Temple was being steered now away from Rabbi Koch's mission ideas.

PL: Were you still in school when Rabbi Koch retired?

BS: No. I think Levine came in, in 1950-something. I was an old married lady by that time. I was married in 1935, so, of course.

PL: So you went through to confirmation?

BS: Of course.

PL: Can you describe what confirmation at Temple de Hirsch was all about? And how many girl? How many boys?

BS: I probably have pictures somewhere.

PL: What did you learn to make that major marker?

BS: Very little that I should have learned. One of my friends today, Henry Kotkins, who is going to have his ninetieth birthday in September and who will be at my birthday party, was one of my teachers in Sunday school. Now I remember he kicked me out of class along with my friend Flo [Florence] Guthman Schoenfeld, who was later married to Ralph Schoenfeld. He kicked us out of class because we talked when we shouldn't have been talking. I keep reminding him of that. He is about to be ninety.

PL: So, did you learn any Hebrew? Was it all in English?

BS: It was almost all in English. And the Hebrew I learned would have been the Hebrew we needed to have for the prayers, that's all. Nothing else.

PL: Were girls and boys tracked differently? Or taught the same?

BS: No, no. The same.

PL: Did girls and boys socialize differently?

BS: Well, I socialized with people in my own class and who were from "our group" so to speak. I'm using that in quotes. Because I don't think that way now. And I didn't think that way after I had children.

PL: So at Temple, since you're talking about how there was "our group," to use your phrase, it sounds like there were people that also went to Temple who weren't part of that group. Why was that?

BS: Because they came into Temple from other synagogues, and they wanted to be part of the Reformed Temple.

PL: What kind of groups were those?

BS: I imagine some of them came from Orthodox who did not want to follow the Orthodox tenets and who came from away. People were coming from away then, of course, in the 1950s. And they were welcomed then with open arms.
PL: Do you remember much about your interaction with other Jewish children from other synagogues and other day schools?

BS: You know that didn't start until after I was married. One of the things that happened was that the Federated Fund decided that they should have a Women's Federated Fund because one was starting nationally. I was part of – I was one of the members of the first National Women's Federated Fund Group, or whatever they called themselves at that time. I went to New York to a meeting, and I was amazed about what was going on in other communities that we were so far behind it seemed to me. We weren't spreading out as we should have. I wasn't very pleased with that. I thought it was so snobbish. It wasn't very pleasant either. Because they were excellent women. Excellent.

PL: What do you mean by spreading out?

BS: Well, they had taken in – they weren't a separate Reform group keeping [inaudible]. They didn't have "our group," it didn't sound to me like and liked it much better. Now I like the Council of Jewish Women at that point.

PL: Is there something about Seattle and the way that it teaches people the ethos of the Pacific Northwest that made that difference for you? Why it is that maybe Seattleites kept to their own a little more and didn't spread out as you said?

BS: That was through [the] “our group” thing. That was from Rabbi Koch and the Reform movement here, which separated itself. It is not separate any longer now, which is good. I was thinking of the fact that when I came back from my honeymoon at eighteen – we went to Honolulu for our honeymoon. When we came back, my mother-in-law, Louise Stern, took me to a Council meeting, and on the steps of the Temple where the Council meetings were held at the Reform temple, she said, “Bernice, this is where you are going to be active.” You’ve probably heard me quoted on that. I love that story. Mothers-in-law wouldn’t do such a thing today. Wouldn’t dare do such a thing today. But mothers-in-law told their daughters-in-law what they were going to do, and my mother-in-law didn’t hesitate to say, “Bernice, this is where you’re going to be active.” Many years later, when I was on the national level, and I was going East to a meeting for about the third time. Because I went four times a year to these meetings. My mother-in-law said, “You’re going to leave that boy again?” I said, “Lulu, you told me this is where I’m going to be active.” She said, “The trouble is I didn’t tell you when to stop.” She was a very cute lady. And we got along just swell because we were both very feisty. [laughter] But anyway, she started me out in the Council of Jewish Women, which was not “our group” necessarily it was more our group then than it is now, but it was a mixed group. That was very good for me. I liked that very much. Lulu, on the other hand, years later when she was quite deaf and spoke very loudly – she didn’t know I was there – was at a meeting and one of the women spoke and [unclear] I know who she was. I think she has died since. She was the head of some educational part of Council. Particularly educational part of Council. And she got up to speak and my mother-in-law said in a loud voice, “Where did they get her with an accent like that?” I almost died right then and there. [laughter] It never occurred to her that she was heard throughout the whole Council meeting.

PL: What was the accent of the woman who was speaking?

BS: A little Yiddish. A little Yiddish. Maybe she came from that part of New York. I don't know. [inaudible] part.

PL: Well, speaking of Yiddish, did you hear any Yiddish growing up or in the community?

BS: You hear something like meshuggeneh. You'd hear a few, a handful of words that'd you hear. You knew that meshuggeneh means a little nutty and so on. But you never heard it in my house. My parents didn't talk like that.

PL: Did you the way that folks that don't speak Yiddish incorporate a lot of the Yiddish words into their language today? Did you do that at all when you were growing up?

BS: No. No.

PL: Was that considered anathema?

BS: Well, I don't know what it was considered, but it just wasn't done by our group.

PL: What do you remember about confirmation?

BS: Oh, confirmation was very good. I did the flower, the flower, whatever it was. It was a special speech that woman – the girls in the confirmation, and the boys did the flower thing. I was a very good student in spite of Henry Kotkins saying that he kicked me out of class, but that was later.

PL: What was the flower thing?

BS: It was something about the flowers for the confirmation. I gave a speech about that which I wrote myself, of course, with the approval of the rabbi. It was very much an occasion, and there was a confirmation dance. It was a very social occasion, and you wore very fancy white dresses, which I'm sure were quite expensive for those days. It was very nice. It was very nice. I don't think they make it that social anymore.

PL: How would you say in your mind the confirmation, the bar mitzvah –? Were bat mitzvahs yet instituted?

BS: No. Definitely not. When I first heard about them, I was shocked that we were going to do that at Temple de Hirsch.

PL: At what point did they introduce bat mitzvahs into Temple de Hirsch?

BS: Much later. Much later. I don't think – my boys were both bar mitzvahed, but my grandchildren – there were bat mitzvahs. Somebody was bar mitzvahed in my family, one of my granddaughters, so it must have been twenty years ago.

PL: So, it sounds like the confirmation was quite a celebration. Families came?

BS: Oh much.

PL: Boys and girls?

BS: Much to-do. Much to-do.

PL: How many folks graduated in your class?

BS: I can't remember precisely, but I'll bet you about thirty or forty.

PL: Do you remember anything about the ritual aspects of it?

BS: It was very Reformed, it seems to me.

PL: Did they hand you a diploma of some kind?

BS: Yes. Yes. Or a present from the Sisterhood or a present from the Brotherhood or something like that.

PL: And did it happen all in the temple or did you—

BS: All in the temple.

PL: Including the dance as well?

BS: The dance was in the Temple.

PL: Were there other dances and social events that you went to at Temple?

BS: No, I don't remember that.

PL: Are there any other Jewish experiences around this age, fourteen and under, that you thought particularly had a big impact on you outside of your schooling?

BS: I think if I hadn't been invited to the dance, it would have had a big impact on me. It was completely social. Not Jewish. It could have been anything.

PL: Tell me where it is where you went to secular school.

BS: You mean regular school?

PL: Regular school, yes.

BS: Secular. [laughter] Regular school. Well, I went to Seward School, and then I went to Broadway High School. Everybody who lived on Capitol Hill or Broadway or anywhere near went to Broadway High School. Broadway High School was a big deal.

PL: What was that like? Why was it a big deal?

BS: It was a wonderful school. It was a very good school. I loved Broadway High School. I've been honored by Broadway High School as one of their honorary students. Because I got into politics.

PL: Did you study politics while you were there? Were you particularly interested in history?

BS: Well, I liked history, and I was a very good student. I was fifteen from a class of five hundred. I can remember that very easily. See, there are things I can't remember, and there are things I can remember. Fifteen from a class of five hundred. I don't know how wonderful that was. You were probably first.

PL: Nope.

BS: Well, you got into Duke, I'll tell you that. That had to be damn good.

PL: Talk about me later. What activities and classes did you feel were most formative in your experiences of high school?

BS: Well, I had one teacher called Miss Woodcock –

PL: Could you spell her name?

BS: Woodcock, W-O-O-D-C-O-C-K. All one word. I remember I have something in one of my scrapbooks about Miss Woodcock, or she wrote a letter to my parents about how good I was. She really gave me a good send-off and wanted me to go to an Eastern college.

PL: What did she teach? What was her subject?

BS: I don't know, but she was head of the Girl's Club too. Whatever she did that was on the side. But she was very, we were very friendly with each other because of the Girl's Club. I was involved in the Girl's Club. To give you some link.

PL: What was the Girl's Club?

BS: It was a club of girls to be sure that girls get an even break in high school when I was – in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

PL: When you say that they needed to get an even break –

BS: Well, you know that.

PL: No, you're going to have to describe what you mean by that. What was the difference?

BS: Well, because boys were everything. Girls sort of came along with, and Miss Woodcock took care of that all right.

PL: How so?

BS: She pushed girls into activities and saw that they did their work well. And she liked me because I was a good student and a good girl leader. I know some of the women who came from Miss Woodcock today, and they're still leaders. They are younger than I am. [inaudible]

PL: How do you think she motivated you?

BS: To let us know that women could play the same kind of a role as men were playing. Just because we weren't on the football team wasn't a terrible thing, and we had opportunities in every field. She was very good.

PL: Were there particular things that she motivated you in particular to do?

BS: Damned, if I can remember. It couldn't have been that important.

PL: Do you remember any books or authors that really impacted you or that you to this day think, wow, that was an incredible book that somebody introduced me to?

BS: I read all the books. I was a good reader. And I still am. Slow now. But good. I'm reading a good book now. Good book that I'm enjoying thoroughly that you would like.

PL: What book is that?

BS: Called Protect and Defend by Richard North Patterson. My son told me about it. I'm loving it. It's full of Planned Parenthood and abortions and a woman who is selected by a new president to be the head of the speaker of the Supreme Court, and this whole thing is involved with today. He's a new president. And the speaker of the Supreme Court dies on the day he's inaugurated, and he has to do something about it and fast. He chooses a woman to be the speaker of the Supreme Court. It is so timely, and it's so good that I'm reading it like I'm – I'm reading it fast. Because it's a big book. It's about a five-hundred-page book.

PL: Now, we'll get to some of your work in Planned Parenthood in a little bit. But actually, it makes me think about what, at this time, how did you and your girlfriends talk about sex? How did you learn about sex?

BS: We didn't. I learned about sex from my older sister, who knew all about sex. All her life, she knew about sex. She tried to get Edward Stern away from me, and she didn't succeed. [laughter] She was that kind of a sister. She was a very sharp and attractive woman. And very smart.

PL: Your sister was – what was the age difference between you and your sister?

BS: Twenty-two months.

PL: She was older?

BS: Oh, yes. She didn't think people guessed her as being younger.

PL: Describe your relationship with your sister.
BS: I was crazy about her, and she couldn't stand me when I was a little girl because I kept following her around and stuff. But she was quite a woman, and she had a very different life than I did. She didn't make a good marriage like I did, and she had a difficult life. But she loved – she thought her life was much more interesting than mine. She would have loved to be interviewed for this. But she died at the age of seventy.

PL: So, when you were young and in school together, and she is the knowledgeable, older sister –

BS: She told me everything. But when she would talk to me. She didn't think I was worth talking too much. [laughter]

PL: How did she introduce you to this information? What was the public discourse about?

BS: I would ask her questions. Because my mother died when I was fifteen. And you didn't learn anything at fifteen. I don't know whether you did at your age. But your mother was involved in Planned Parenthood, so you probably – that would take care of it. But I didn't learn anything from my mother. She was too sick by that time. But my sister told me everything. Told me more than I needed to know.

PL: When you started dating then – when would you say you started dating?

BS: At fifteen, sixteen.

PL: Who did you date?

BS: All kinds of fellows in the Jewish group, and I cheated and went out with a Jewish friend and then would meet the fellow in my life who wasn't Jewish. And that was just unheard of. You didn't go out with non-Jewish. Did you go out with non-Jewish fellows?

PL: This is not about me. [laughter] We'll talk during lunch. But was there a prescription within the community, or you just knew it? You knew that you weren't supposed to date non-Jewish boys.

BS: That's right. My mother and father made that very clear.

PL: Do you remember those conversations at all?

BS: They weren't long: "You are not to go out with a non-Jewish fellow. If he invites you, say I'm sorry, I can't do that."

PL: Yet you did.

BS: Of course I did.

PL: Why did you?

BS: I made it very attractive. They made it much more attractive than it was by saying you couldn't do it.

PL: So, what was it like exploring a non-Jewish relationship for the first time? Do you have any recollections?

BS: Oh, yes. It was when I was a very young girl. Very young. Must have been thirteen or fourteen. And there was a boy at Three Tree Point, and he was very fond of me. So, I used to go out with Buddy, who was Buddy Shopero at that time; he became a Dr. Sheridan. And Buddy used to take me out, and then he would deliver me to Bill Lindersmith.

PL: Can you spell that last name?

BS: Lindersmith, L-I-N-D-E-R-S-M-I-T-H, and I don't know whether he's alive or not today. If I knew, I can't remember. But he took me out several times.

PL: So, where did you go? Did you go to different places with the Jewish –

BS: We went to a movie or went out for a cup of cocoa or a milkshake or something like that because I was too young to do anything else.

PL: Did you have to be secretive about it?

BS: Oh, yes.

PL: How did you do that? How did you accomplish that?

BS: By going out with Buddy and then being transferred and then Bill Lindersmith would bring me back to where we met Buddy, and he would take me home. And it wasn't worth it really. As I recall. It was sort of disappointing.

PL: Did you and your girlfriends talk about this? Were they dating non-Jewish boys at the time too?

BS: I don't think I said anything much to anybody about this. I think my sister knew. That's all.

PL: I think maybe the last question before we break for lunch is, where did the Sephardic community and dating, I've often heard that people called that intra-dating or intra –

BS: It never occurred to me in a million years, and I didn't know any Sephardic kids. They didn't go to Temple where I went to temple. I would have had no occasion, first time I met the Sephardic community was much later when they wanted to have a Women's Division of the Federated Fund. So, Sally Levine, have you heard that name? Sally Levine, who is my good friend and a marvelous woman and who died much too young, and I took on the job of starting a Women's Division. One year, we went every morning for six months. We went to call on Jewish women to find out if we could get them involved. We were absolutely stymied when it came to the Sephardic community

until we found Mrs. Nessim Alhadeff. Did you ever hear about her? She was a terrific lady, and she welcomed us and served us a cup of coffee and sat down with us and talked about it. she opened the Sephardic doors to us and got Sephardic women to talk to us.

PL: How old were you at this point? When you started the Women's Division?

BS: When the Women's Division, I can't remember when the Women's Division was started.

PL: Were you married at that time?

BS: Oh yes. I was married always. From the time I was eighteen.

PL: So how, even if you didn't necessarily have social interactions with Sephardim in the community, were you aware of their presence in Seattle?

BS: Yeah. But we never saw them or talked to them. Or knew anybody our age.

PL: What were you told about them? What did you think they were like?

BS: They were a different group completely. I wasn't told anything about them until it came to the Federated Fund. Then they wanted us to get the Sephardic women involved, and it was impossible for them. Until we met Mrs. Nessim Alhadeff, and she opened the doors. She was a lovely woman.

PL: Why don't we break here, and then we'll continue?

BS: Fine. Shall I tell her fifteen minutes or do you want—

PL: No, one-half hour is fine. So, continuing here. Up until that point when you had graduated high school – I just want to set up some of this. What did you think you were going to do with your life?

BS: Find a nice husband and marry him. That's what all the women, all the girls my age, wanted to do. We didn't know – women didn't go to work unless, well, they were very unusual women.

PL: So, how did you set out on that path?

BS: I went to college. I wanted to get more education. I was enjoying my education very much, but my mother died, and we couldn't leave our father. My sister and I were both about the same, ready to go to college. And I guess, I made high school in three-and-a-half years. Because Buddy Shopero, my friend Buddy Shopero was very bright, and he was graduating ahead of me and that bothered the heck out of me. Why he should graduate ahead of me when I was just as smart. [laughter] So I doubled up on my classes and graduated that year. But we couldn't go East to school and leave my father here. So, I was very disappointed and disconsolate. So, for the high school present I got, my sister and I were allowed to go to Europe with my aunt and Uncle. And then when I came back, I went to the University of Washington. That's all.

PL: So, you entered the University of Washington, and what did you decide to study when you were there?

BS: Something very easy so I could go out on lots of dates.

PL: What subject was that? [laughter]

BS: Oriental studies.

PL: What was Oriental studies?

BS: As I recall, it was we studied all the Oriental countries, I think. I don't remember very much about it because I didn't pay much attention.

PL: So, what were you doing instead? What were organizations you got involved with to meet people?

BS: I didn't have to get involved. I was going out on dates at that point.

PL: So, tell me about dating in that period of your time of life?

BS: There were lots of men in my life. Lots of men. Jewish men. And someone I know today. Some of them have died already. But Edward Stern was among them. He was eleven years my senior and he, I was going out with Joel Staadecker at that point who has been long dead who was from Yale, and he was very attractive, and I was smitten with him. He was pretty old for me too. He was only six years older, but that was a lot at that point. So, I had a good time going out with all these men.

PL: Do you remember the organizations that had social events like the Menorah Society and –

BS: I wasn't part of that.

PL: Yeah. Did you make a conscious choice not to be part of those organizations?

BS: I wouldn't have had time for them. Nor did I know the people who were in them. I really didn't.

PL: What was the University of Washington like back then?

BS: It was small compared to what it is now, and it was sort of separated. It depends on what you were doing and what kind of student you were. I did not join the AEPhi sorority. It was just beginning then. I was a member of Sigma Theta Pi, which was a social sorority, very snobbish. Very snobbish. Rotten. Today I would never belong to something like that. But that was very important then.

PL: Now, you made the decision not to join AEPhi?

BS: Yeah, because I was already at Sigma Theta Pi, and that was enough sorority for me. I didn't like the whole thing anyway.

PL: Now, was the Sigma Theta Pi, was that a Jewish –

BS: Jewish social sorority.

PL: What did you do together?

BS: Gave parties. And went to parties together. I don't remember that we did anything worthwhile. I'll tell you that.

PL: So, there was no necessarily social service involved?

BS: No. No.

PL: How do you remember the relationships? Did you ever socialize with non-Jewish sororities or fraternities? Or do you remember –? You said it was a very separated campus.

BS: Yes.

PL: How do you mean?

BS: It was separated by sororities and fraternities and non. And those who were non. I don't approve of sororities and fraternities my sons are both ZBT's. Didn't approve of that either.

PL: What is it that you don't like about the whole Greek system?

BS: I don't like the whole Greek system because it involves separatism, hazing. I think it's very unworthwhile except for people who need a place to live. Maybe that's the best answer for them. I suppose it's good to be a member of a sorority or a fraternity, although, I think less and less. I think now they are building dormitories for people, and they don't have to belong to sororities and fraternities, and every time I read something awful about sororities or fraternities, I think, "Why don't they just say, go away, everybody?" You can't do it anymore. Because there are still doing terrible things. Terrible things.

PL: Why do you think it was particular important that Jewish students had their own sororities and fraternities?

BS: Because, at the time, they couldn't get into others. My sons were both asked to join non-Jewish and pretty good ones, I think. I don't know. I didn't look at them very much because they both were going to be ZBTs. They wanted to be. All their friends were. I said that's fine. But then I had a terrible fight with a rabbi at the Mother's Club. I can remember that. I haven't forgotten him. He's still around, that rabbi.

PL: What kind of fight did you have with the rabbi? [laughter]

BS: Because he got up and spoke at the Mother's Club meeting and said that we should not permit our sons to invite non-Jewish girls to a ZBT party. And they should not be taking out non-Jewish girls. And I got up and said, "That is old hat. I do not agree with it for one moment and I hope other mothers will not agree with that for one moment." I said, "If that's what you do, you're going to chase, you're going to send your boys into the first non-Jewish girls camp or social life that is available. Instead of accepting whatever they do about that. That's just not, its separatism is unnecessary." So, anyway, as a result of that rabbi's talk, and I think my sons would agree with me. In fact, I've heard them say this too. One of their good friends committed suicide because he was smitten with a non-Jewish girl, and he couldn't bring her to a party or something. Whatever it

was, it was a terrible thing. Terrible thing. I don't remember the particulars, but they do. But I didn't like that whole set-up. I still don't.

PL: You attended the University of Washington for how many years?

BS: Two years, and then I married Edward.

PL: And so, you ceased going to college when you married?

BS: Yes, because as I said, you went out for lunch, you didn't go to college. Today both my daughters-in-law, two of my three daughters-in-law, my older son has been married twice, and this is his second wife. But two of my three daughters-in-law—what did they do? They went back to college; they finished college after they got married. Because they got married before.

PL: So, when did you meet your husband-to-be?

BS: Oh, I met him a long time ago because he was Mary Louise's older brother. And Mary Louise and my sister were best friends so we would be over at her house, or she would be over at my house at, our house and when they went over sometimes, they let me go too. They weren't very nice to me. [laughter] They were very mean.

PL: So, when they let you go.

BS: When they let me go, I met Edward Stern.
PL: What do you remember about that first meeting? Were you immediately smitten?

BS: Oh, I knew him from the time I was a little girl. I knew him.

PL: Were you the same age?

BS: He was eleven years older. That's why. He was eleven years older, and he took me out.

PL: So, how old were you when you first started dating him?

BS: Seventeen. Seventeen, eighteen right in there. He had a girl in Alabama. Those southern girls, you have to watch out for them. Very attractive to men. Anyway. We had met. We knew each other. And one time, my friend Joel took me to some friends who monkeyed around with fast girls. In those days fast girls had a place, and it was called the Wolves. Ralph Shoenfeld, at ninety, they still call him The Wolf. So, Joel took me over there. There were all kinds of girls running around in their underwear. It was very shocking. I was just thrilled with the whole thing, but Edward Stern was there, and when he saw me come in with Joel, he was furious at Joel for bringing me there. Joel took [off] the minute he saw the girls with busts, and I [didn't have] any bust. He left me. Flat. But Edward was there, and Edward said, "You're going home now." And I said, "I don't want to go home. I want to stay."

PL: What was The Wolves?

BS: That was the nickname they gave these guys. A wolf was a guy who picks up girls and stuff like that there. Anyway, Edward Stern said, "You get your coat on; we're going home." He took me home, and I was very annoyed at him. He said, "Some night soon, I'll take you out. We will go out, but we're not going to any place like that." He took me out after that, and then I bet Mary Louise, his sister, and my sister that I was going to marry him. My father also bet me that Edward wasn't going to ask me to marry him. That he was too old for me. He did. So, I won. I won something like fifteen dollars on that. [laughter]

PL: What is it like to start dating a man at that age who is eleven years older than you?

BS: Oh, it's very exciting. He was very nice to me. It was a great change from Joel, who dropped me anytime he saw a woman with a bust.

PL: What was Edward doing at the time? He's an older man?

BS: He was practicing law, and he was dating this girl from Alabama when he went to Pi Tau Pi. He was a big Pi Tau Pi. Did you ever hear of that?

PL: What is Pi Tau Pi?

BS: Pi Tau Pi is the male equivalent of the Sigma Theta Pi. It's a Jewish social fraternity. Very selective about the members it takes in and so on.

PL: And had he gone to school somewhere other than the University of Washington?

BS: He went to the University of Washington and then Michigan.

PL: For law school.

BS: Michigan for law school. He belonged to a different fraternity there.

PL: So, what was your courtship like, and how long did it last? What did you do together? What kind of things?

BS: He took me to the movies, and he took me to dances. I don't know. He had to be very careful where he took me because I couldn't drink. He could drink, but I couldn't drink. I don't know. But it was very fun. It was very nice. I liked him a lot. Then he asked me to marry him, and I said yes. But I was a little disappointed that he wouldn't wait until I finished college. He said, "I'm twenty-nine years old. I'm not going to wait. Now either you're going to say yes or no."

PL: So, what were you thinking at this time? What would you have preferred?

BS: I was thinking he was too old for me. But I liked him a lot. And I thought I'd be lucky to be married to him. So, I said yes.

PL: What did you like about him so much?

BS: He was so nice compared to Joel, who wasn't very nice to me. Very exciting but not very nice to me. And Edward was nice and interesting and bright and a great catch. Great catch.

PL: Did he already live on his own?

BS: No, they didn't live on their own then. He was at home.

PL: So where were his parents? What part of town?

BS: Capitol Hill. 930 16th North. I remember that well.

PL: So, when did you get married? How long after your first date?

BS: Well, I would say after we really started going out together it was six months.

PL: Can you describe everything that led up to your wedding? Did you plan your own wedding?

BS: Oh, yes.

PL: Did you have help?

BS: Oh, yes. My sister was available. She married in December, and I married in May, and my father married in June after he got rid of both of us.

PL: Where did you get married?

BS: At the Olympic Hotel. Now the Four Seasons.

PL: Can you tell me, what was that wedding like? What did you wear?

BS: It was a small wedding. I wore a white dress, when we look at my scrapbooks, I'll show you a picture.

PL: Did you make any strong decisions about how you wanted to get married?

BS: No. Not strong. Not terribly strong. It was a small wedding. It was smaller than it should have been. But it was in 1935, and my father was not able to afford as much as a great big wedding would have cost. He had taken a beating in the market just like everybody else did in those days. So, it was a small wedding. Family wedding.

PL: What do you remember about the wedding? Is there something in particular that you –?

BS: Well, I think it's interesting that Edward's older sister, Carolyn, who was a wonderful woman and a great friend of mine and his – she went with us on our honeymoon. [laughter] She didn't go with us. She went as far as San Francisco on the train with us because that's where she lived. So, I said Carolyn went on our honeymoon with us. And then, we went to Honolulu on the boat from San Francisco.

PL: What was it like in those days going to Honolulu on a honeymoon like this?

BS: It was a lovely, wonderful place to go. And Edward Stern, who was red-headed as was the rest of his family, got a second-degree sunburn, and I couldn't go near him for weeks. Weeks. He was in terrible shape. That should have told me something.

PL: What else did you do on your honeymoon?

BS: What else? I learned to do the hula from a Hawaiian band who met us, and I could do the hula, and we went to – there were all kinds of things because honeymoon couples in those days were not so – there weren't so many of them. They weren't so plentiful, honeymoon couples.

PL: Why so? Is that on account of the Depression?

BS: Because on account of the Depression and because it was a great big trip on a boat. You couldn't fly over to Honolulu like you can now. And it was expensive. It cost us thirteen dollars a day. American Plan [everything included]. Can you imagine? And we had a lovely honeymoon except for the sunburn.

PL: Do you remember if the reason you chose the Olympic Hotel was for any particular reason? –
BS: Because that was the best hotel. The only hotels were the – what is now Catholic Assisted Living, and it had a different name. The Washington Hotel, I think it was called. There wasn't any Benjamin Franklin, I don't think.

PL: This tape is about to end, so let me put in another one.

[Recording paused]

PL: We're continuing with the oral history interview of Bernice Stern, and this is mini disc tape number two. We were talking about the Olympic Hotel and the Washington Hotel. I do know from having learned a little from the [Washington State Jewish] Historical Society here that the Olympic Hotel, I believe is one of the first kosher hotels. Did that have any factor or weigh-in in any way in your decision?

BS: I don't think it was kosher at that time. No, I don't think it was kosher. I think they became kosher in order to accommodate the Jewish community.

PL: Was being kosher part of –? Today, so many organizations, whether they're reform or not, will have a kosher event because they want to make sure everyone can come. Was it that way back then?

BS: No. No. And I don't like it today. I'm not going to move into The Summit because I don't want to live in a kosher place. I have great regard for those who do, but they should have their own kosher place and not bother me with it. I'm still pretty snippy about

that. I really am.

PL: You wouldn't be the first person I've heard that from. And I'm wondering when or if you recall anything about – actually, scratch that question. I guess I'm curious to ask a little bit about your marriage. I want to explore that a little bit with you. Can you describe where it was that you made the decision to live with your new husband when you got back from Hawaii?

BS: Where we could afford to live. We lived first in an apartment for a short time. Then we moved into a rental house on Fuhrman Avenue with our two little, tiny children. Then we bought the home. We bought a home about two blocks from Seward School, right around the corner from where I had grown up. It was a new home, and it was a lovely one. Still is. We bought it for $13,000.00, and the last time it sold, it was $450,000.00, and it's a block from the freeway. Can't get over that. But it's looking very lovely.

PL: Did the difference in your ages bear on your relationship at all? Were you equals? Did it seem as if he was an older man in any way?

BS: Yes. He was a boss. As I said, the maid I had who took care of my children and who bossed me around considered him the boss. I was always another child.

PL: Did you feel inside that you were a child still?

BS: Yeah. I think so. I think so. I missed something. I had missed growing up. And Edward Stern brought me up. He was great, and he got me involved in the things I got involved in. He used to say don't pay attention to anybody else, I'll help you do it.

PL: So, when you say he helped you get involved in the things you got involved in, what are you speaking of?

BS: When the Council of Jewish Women came and asked me to be the president when I was twenty – I can't remember whether I was twenty-five or twenty-six. That was the youngest president they'd ever had around here. Lulu, my mother-in-law, said, "She can't do that, she hasn't any following." My stepmother, who had married my father after I was married, who had also been a Council president, said, "Of course she can do that." And Edward Stern said, "You go ahead and do it, and I'll help you." So, I did it. He did help me. I used to call him "the power behind the phone" because he would pick up the phone and take care of anything that I couldn't do when I wasn't home or even if I was home.

PL: So, let's talk a little bit about your involvement with National Council for Jewish Women because that was such an important part of your life. Go ahead and start and tell me the story about when did you first learn about the Council for Jewish Women?

BS: Council of Jewish Women.

PL: Council of Jewish Women.

BS: Yes, Council of Jewish Women. From my stepmother and from my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law was past president. She was a past president during World War I, and I was the president during World War II. There's another Mrs. Stern. [laughter]

PL: What had they told you about Council before you got involved? Why did they –? How did they encourage you? How did they entice you to be involved?

BS: Nobody needed to entice me. My mother-in-law said on the steps to the Temple this is where you're going to be active. That was it.

PL: Why do you think she said that?

BS: Because she had been, and that was the thing – she thought was going to be right for me.

PL: In those days, what did the Council do?

BS: Did a lot of things. It was a good organization. But it was having trouble, troubles. That's why I got to be president. The woman who was president wasn't doing a good job. So otherwise, they wouldn't have asked me.

PL: Do you recall your –? I'm going to pause this for a moment. So, we were talking about your first involvement, can you describe your first Council meeting when you went to it with your mother-in-law?

BS: Yeah.

PL: What happened?

BS: I don't remember the details of it at all. But I remember being very much interested. Everybody was much older than I. I didn't know how was I going to be active. But this was 1935. Great concern about what was going on in Europe. I had been involved in that and the Neighborhood House, which I had been involved in. So, I was interested in what was going on and how they ran the meeting. That's all I remember. I signed up for something – whether it a book club, or it was something like that, I signed up for it.

PL: Was there a Junior Council at this point?

BS: I don't think there was. I don't think there was Junior Council at that point.

PL: So, who would you say were the women, when you entered the room, who were the women that were in this room? What group of women were they?

BS: My mother-in-law's friends and my stepmother's friends. They were all my senior. And I thought, "What am I going to be doing here?" But anyway.

PL: Who was not there?

BS: My age group. I was too young for everything.

PL: Was there also –? Was there a class –?

BS: I'd just come back from my honeymoon. I was not nineteen yet when I went to that first meeting. There weren't any eighteen-year-old girls there. Most of my friends hadn't married yet.

PL: So, was Council something women did when they were married?

BS: Yes.

PL: So, can you talk a little bit about what encouraged women to get involved with volunteerism, such as with Council? Was it a post-marriage experience? Did any woman younger than marital age get involved with volunteerism?

BS: I doubt it very much, except that what was going on in the world was of such interest to everybody that you sort of felt that going downtown to lunch was out-of-season. At least I did. Besides that, you didn't want to spend the money when you were first married. It was after the crash, and you stayed home with children.

PL: So, can you describe how you responded to being a young woman in an older women's organization? Did you take that on as a mission, to get other younger women involved?

BS: Well, because at the time that I became involved, we were very concerned with the world, and that made great good sense to me, much more sense than going downtown to

lunch. I'll tell you that. I was pregnant then, very soon after I got married.

PL: When did you get pregnant?

BS: Very soon. 1937. Socco Jr. was born in 1937. He's sixty-five.

PL: Can you spell your son's name?

BS: His name is Edward. [laughter] His father was known as Socco, which is a nickname.

PL: Do you know where that comes from that name?

BS: Yes. We talked about it the other night around here because several people hadn't heard why he was called Socco. His father, at the age of fifteen, was playing blackjack with his friends. He was losing. He was down to his last quarter, and all of a sudden, instead of saying, "Hit me," he said, "Socco." He didn't know why he said Socco, but he immediately began to win. So, he got the nickname "Socco." When his first son was born, he got the name Socco, Jr., little Socco, who grew to be bigger than his father as he grew up. Now are we stopping? I can't tell when we're stopping.

PL: I think we'll stop now.

BS: Whatever time you say.

[Recording paused.]

PL: So, when we last finished Bernice, we were talking about your early involvement with NCJW. Could we go back to that a little bit? And tell me about – what was the first activity you got involved in?

BS: It wasn't the Braille? It wasn't the Braille because I was involved before that – with Braille.

PL: What do you mean you were involved with the Braille?

BS: A woman by the name of Helen Blumenthal, who is a very famous woman in Seattle because she was involved in so many things, taught Braille. She called me, and she said she wanted some young women to learn Braille. So, I got together the young women, and I took Braille too. And loved it. Loved doing it. The first thing we did was to – I got in touch with—I won't start with the first thing because this could be too long a story. We, a couple of us who were very good at it, taught the mothers of blind children how to do Braille because I said it was ridiculous that their children had to go to that school for the blind in Vancouver, Washington, which was crummy. So, we taught the mothers how to do Braille, they helped their children, and we would do their work in Braille too, so that they could go to public school. Through that means, we got children into the public schools and took a little legislative activity and so on and so forth, and we got them into the public schools. And then, I began doing Braille for some blind students who were going to the University of Washington and couldn't keep up. They needed their work done in Braille, and they were going to law school. Edward Stern being a young lawyer – he wasn't so young, but he was a lawyer, and he sat next to me and helped me with the Braille.

PL: What was the process of creating Braille reading at that point? You were translating texts into Braille?

BS: For them.

PL: How did you learn how to do that?

BS: Helen Blumenthal had called me to find some young women who wanted to learn to do Braille. And I was one of the young women.

PL: Did you do it on a typewriter?

BS: At first, we did it by hand. In the hand.

PL: Like with a stylus?

BS: A stylus and a wooden board. We had a wooden type of board that we did, and then they got us Braille writers, and we did them with Braille typewriters. But Edward Stern needed to help me with the “legalese” talk and the “legalese” writing so that I could translate that into Braille for these students. And it helped me put, I think, four to six blind kids through the University of Washington.

PL: And there was a need for this because there was no Braille at the time for students?

BS: That apparently was true.

PL: This was a project—

BS: And just because you’re blind doesn’t mean you can do Braille. You have to learn how to read Braille.

PL: Did you get involved personally or meet any of these students that you were working with?

BS: Yes. The person who corrected the Braille I did was a blind man who rang the bells at the University of Washington. Rang the chimes at the University of Washington. But he was a good Braille teacher.

PL: Did you learn to read Braille yourself during this period?

BS: A little bit. I can still read the Braille in the elevators, one letter at a time: it’s up, down. [laughter]

PL: How did you feel about doing this work? Was this your first –?

BS: I loved doing Braille, and I did a number of books.

PL: What books did you translate?

BS: I have some in the library. Books that needed to be done. Books that they didn't have in the Braille library for kids. Not for kids, necessarily. For grown-ups as well.

PL: Do you remember if it was fiction or non-fiction?

BS: Fiction and non-fiction. Whatever needed to be done, we did. There was a number of others. I taught a number of other sighted women how to do Braille because that was a different kind of learning.

PL: What would you say were some of the greatest satisfactions and rewards that you received from doing this work?

BS: The knowledge that I was helping somebody who wouldn't have to go to the school in Vancouver, Washington, who could go to public school, was the important part. And helping their mothers so the mothers could help instead of just getting somebody else to help them.

PL: How long did you do that for?

BS: Years. And today I couldn't do it because my eyes wouldn't be good enough; you have to have very good eyes and very sharp abilities.

PL: I imagine it also took a great deal of patience.

BS: Yes, it did. But that was my big side work.

PL: Now, when were you doing this? How old were you when you started doing the Braille work? Just married?

BS: Soon after I was married.

PL: When did you have your first child?

BS: Soon after I was married. In 1937.

PL: So, how much time did you spend committed to translating Braille? Did you do it at home? Did you do it in social settings?

BS: No. Home. The only place you could do it was home. You had to concentrate very carefully.

PL: So, give me a sense of how you did it. You'd sit in front of the – listen to the radio, listen to music.

BS: You wouldn't listen to anything. I was very, very concentrated about Braille because you made mistakes, and Mr. Bailey, who would correct, it would find the mistakes, and then you had to do them all over again. It was awful. A lot of work.

PL: Sounds like it was very laborious but very rewarding.

BS: I liked it.

PL: You liked it. Did you meet the students that you had helped or watched them graduate?

BS: No.

PL: So, you didn't necessarily have contact with them after?

BS: Not necessarily.

PL: But you did teach their mothers?

BS: The mothers. Oh, I was differentiating between the students at the University of Washington. I didn't meet them. I knew the mothers, and I knew the little children I was working for. Teaching the mothers.

PL: When did you teach them? Did you go into their homes?

BS: I went into their homes because it was easier for me to get out than for them to get out. They didn't have help in their homes. And they had blind children.

PL: What do you remember about that interaction?

BS: I remember liking my two sons better, even though they were usually fighting. I was very grateful that they weren't blind, that's all. I was lucky.

PL: How much time every week would you say you spent doing that work?

BS: You mean working on it at home?

PL: Yes.

BS: I spent a good twenty-five or forty hours.

PL: So, that's almost a full-time job.

BS: It was when I would work on my Braille because I was translating books.

PL: So how was it that you were balancing being a new mother?

BS: I wasn't such a new mother. I mean, this went on over a period of years I'm answering you, and I had help at home. Good help. That was very lucky. And Edward Stern was very helpful.

PL: You mentioned that you and your husband had very different political views. Can you talk about that a little bit?

BS: Yes. Sure. I can remember crying myself to sleep about Adlai Stevenson. I still cry when I think about Adlai Stevenson that we missed having him for president. He was a great guy. Edward Stern talked me out of that one. He made me vote for Eisenhower because he said then my sons wouldn't go to war. If we had Eisenhower, my sons wouldn't go to war. I didn't ask him what was going to happen if Stevenson was president. I wasn't smart enough to fight with him about stuff like that there, but I knew that Stevenson wasn't going to make it, and it upset me to no end. I thought he was great.

PL: What did you like about him?

BS: Because he was an egghead, I guess. Because he talked, and I had to listen very carefully to follow his vocabulary and because he was a great man. I just loved him.

PL: So, you were considering yourself a registered – were you a registered Democrat at that time?

BS: We don't register in Seattle.

PL: Oh, that's right.

BS: In the state of Washington. We still don't register, and I want to keep it that way.

PL: So, there was an open ballot back then as well?

BS: It was an open ballot. There still is. It's going to go away.

PL: So, your husband, though, would have considered himself a what, Republican?

BS: Yes.

PL: So, what do you remember about your conversations? Did you get into those heated conversations?

BS: Of course we did. The only reason he got me over to Eisenhower was because Eisenhower would keep my sons out of war. Dumb kid that I was. That's a long way away. Anyway, I shouldn't have voted for Eisenhower. I should have voted for Stevenson. It wouldn't have made a darn bit of difference, would it? But I haven't gotten over that yet.

PL: So, how supportive was your husband of your work with NCJW or Council?

BS: Very.

PL: And I understand that you became president at the ripe young age of twenty-six years old.

BS: That's right.

PL: Can you describe the things that lead up to your decision to become president of this organization?

BS: Because Edward Stern said, "Go ahead and do it. I'll help you." And because it needed a new president. I couldn't have been worse than the one they had. She was terrible. Just terrible. And because my friends said they would help me.

PL: What makes a good president?

BS: Makes a good president? Somebody who likes the organization. Somebody who believes in it almost entirety. Someone who wants to be involved. And if you're going to be involved, you might as well be involved and have something to say about it. In my

opinion. I believe that about anything I do.

PL: So, when you became president, was there over-arching support in your family? It sounds like your husband was very supportive. Was your mother-in-law?

BS: My mother-in-law said I couldn't do it. I didn't have any following. My stepmother, who had been a president, said, "Of course, she can do it. Her friends will help her." They all said they would, and they did.

PL: What did you understand being president to mean at that time?

BS: Getting people to help me. Getting people to do it with me. Getting people to believe in it. I was pretty good.

PL: Were there any values around this being a Jewish organization that you felt particularly drawn towards taking a leadership role? Were there values of the NCJW at that time, the things they were doing? What kind of things were they doing that you felt strongly about?

BS: They were involving themselves in the whole war picture. I know that we in the Seattle section sold more war bonds than any other organization until I went to the other leadership and said I think we have to stop now. It isn't great to have the Jewish organization selling the most war bonds every year. I said next year, we're not going to sell the most. Let's sell the second best.

PL: Where did you get that caution from?

BS: I was concerned about somebody saying well, the Jews will sell all the bonds. I didn't want that. The Jews were certainly playing their part. That I wanted.

PL: What other organizations were quote-unquote "competing" with you for that title of selling the most war bonds?

BS: I don't even remember. But I remember being concerned and talking to Edward Stern about it. Saying, "Do you think I'm right? That this is something we don't have to be the first every year in selling war bonds. We can be the second." And he said, "You're right. Do something about it." And I did.

PL: So, how did the ladies understand that?

BS: Some of them liked it, and some of them were not so happy who sold most of the war bonds. Everybody didn't love me. But they almost all liked me. And they almost all did it with me. I can remember it very well. I remember the big fight about the Red Cross. Now, do you want to hear that, or do you want –?

PL: Absolutely. You mentioned it, so, please.

BS: Because I was thinking about it just the other day. I don't give very much to the Red Cross today, and I should have gotten over it by this time, but I haven't. We were Gray Ladies too. We started a Gray Ladies Group because they needed Gray Ladies in the Red Cross.

PL: What does that mean, Gray Ladies?

BS: Gray Ladies were people who helped at the Naval Hospital or whatever needed help. We needed more gray costumes, and we went out every week. We were with a whole bunch of very socialite ladies who weren't so happy about all these Jewish women joining them. They weren't crazy about us. One of my good friends is a bridge player. Her mother was one of them. I haven't forgotten that, either. [laughter] But her daughter isn't like that at all. Anyway, what upset me about it, to get to the crux of the story – my husband would say, "Get to the point, woman." They didn't have – there were a lot of Black servicemen who were at the U.S. Naval Hospital, where we worked every week. They'd play music, and there were no Black girls with whom they would dance. So, we were young. Here I was, twenty-six years old. So, I would dance with the boys that

didn't have anybody to dance with, and so would some of the other girls, women who were with me. At the next meeting of the Gray Ladies, they had a meeting once a month; they spoke about a dance coming up. The head of the Gray Lady Unit – not our part of it but the whole head of it – stood up and said, "We do not wish you to dance with the fellows, with the serviceman. You are not here to dance with them. You are here as chaperone types." I stood up. I knew this was going to happen because the head looked very strangely at this one when we danced with the Black boys. I said, "Are you going to have young Black girls dance with the servicemen?" "No." I said, "Well, then we will continue to dance with them. I object strenuously to your using these boys to fight our battle with us and for us but not have girls for them to dance with," which they definitely preferred to us; most of us were married women. "And unless you are going to have them, we will continue to dance with them." The head of the Gray Lady said, "We are not going to permit that." I said, "Well, then I am resigning as a Gray Lady." I can remember Marion Rosen, who now has Alzheimer's – I shouldn't even bring that in – but she is still alive. She won't remember this, of course, but some of the women remember it. She was begging me not to say anything. I wouldn't pay attention to her. So anyway, I resigned, and a few others did, but not many. So, there it is. I still don't give much to the Red Cross.

PL: How did you or what prepared you to make that strong a step? Or an objection?

BS: Because I had such an objection to asking these young Black men to go out and take a chance on losing their lives or their limbs. That was all right. But not to have girls to dance with them was, I thought, absolutely unfair and wrong. I wasn't going to be any part of an organization that did that. I have taken stands on organizations like that. And that was a perfectly natural one.

PL: Was this the first time that you took a stand of this nature?

BS: No. No. But I can't remember what was. But this one really stood out. [laughter] It really stood out. It didn't solve the problem.

PL: Were there any Jewish values or otherwise, going into your own history, the way you were taught, or the way that you learned in school, that made you feel that this was an objection? I guess to rephrase that more simply [laughter] –

BS: I don't think people were doing that kind of thing in those days. We didn't speak up. Freedom needs exercise. I think Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise came after that.

PL: So, what is it, Bernice, that made you feel so strongly about this? What in your background or your history or the things that you were taught brought you to this moment where you objected to this experience, which lead you to many things that you've done in Civil Rights? Do you have any sense of the formation of those ideas in your own life?

BS: I think it was a natural objection, and my mother and father would have applauded. They would have thought it was abundantly unfair. Just like you learn from your mother. From your mother's attitudes about things. And David Stern, today – my son, David Stern, is doing all Planned Parenthood's advertising even though he is retired and living in Arizona. He does all their advertising.

PL: At what point –? Was it before Council that you got involved with Planned Parenthood?

BS: No. Planned Parenthood wasn't even in Seattle then.

PL: So, this is later, later on.

BS: Later.

PL: Well, what are other times that you felt like you spoke out?

BS: I can't remember anything that was particularly remarkable.

PL: For instance, I'm wondering how it is that this worked with National Council for Jewish Women. They were largely a community service organization.

BS: That's right. But they took very strong legislative stands even then, and they still are. It's wonderful.

PL: So, as president, how did you cultivate that side of NCJW Seattle Section?

BS: Well, that's when Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise came along.

PL: What is that?

BS: By that time, I am on the national board, and I'm a national officer. The youngest National officer they'd ever had.

PL: What year is this?

BS: 1949, I think. By that time, I'm thirty-something years old. But that's still the youngest national officer. I know the national president called me B.O., meaning baby officer. I said at that time, "Don't call me B.O. That's a terrible thing to call me." It means body odor. Do you remember that? You were too young to remember B.O. But she always called me B.O.

PL: How did you become an officer?

BS: By election. They needed somebody from the West Coast, and I was the best one they had to be in. I was on the National Board in 1940-something. Then the next time, I was on the National Board just for three years. I think we had three-year conventions at that time. So next time, I was put up for Assistant Recording Secretary. I did the work of the Recording Secretary because she couldn't take notes worth a damn, and I could.

PL: So how is it important to you to move from a local position to a national –?

BS: Oh, it's fun. Those women were marvelous. The women were simply wonderful, and I loved being with them. They were from all over the country. I saw women who were doing what I was doing in spades much better. I learned all kinds of things from them. I became friendly with the national – the top national officers.

PL: So, tell me a little bit about your education then as a leader through these?

BS: Oh, because I remember one time, I went to a two-week session in Greenwich, Connecticut, with women who were selected from across the country to get special training for leadership. That was as good as going back to the University. That was great. They had top people to teach us. They played games like I didn't know. I can't even remember the names of them. We played role-playing and stuff. I had never heard of role-playing in Seattle way back then. I learned about it there. They gave me a real education. It was good. It was good. I would like to go back and do it again today. I'm a little old.

PL: So, what were some of the activities that stick out in your mind that you got involved with and causes? I know that you were very involved with the thrift shop.

BS: Oh, yes. We had a thrift shop here. We got a thrift shop here. I don't know what year that was. That was after I was president. Long after I was president. And we had a thrift shop on First Avenue, and it was good. I had been involved in that. I learned how to run thrift shops. I learned a lot myself through talking with women from all across the country. At the same time, I was Chairman of Canadian American Relations. They had a Council in Canada as well as in our country. I worked with the women in Canada because I was one of the closest to it. Seattle, Vancouver – so close. I went up and went through Canada, helped them start thrift shops up there, which I did, and enjoyed it very much and enjoyed the Canadian women, but mostly, I enjoyed the top officers in our

country. I told the story of this the other night when we were talking about discrimination. Gladys Cahn of New Orleans, who was on the National Board of Urban Leagues so you can imagine what kind of a Southerner she was, came from the East, I believe, and married a man from New Orleans. Anyway, she was the national president, and she had been the national president when she and I were asked to go to Alabama. It was either Alabama or Arkansas. I think it was Arkansas for Council to do some work with the Council section there. We were called into the national office, and Kay [Katherine] Engel, who is the president and the executive director, gave us a big talking to because they said we were both terribly outspoken, and we were a little worried about sending us South because we weren't going to like what we saw, and we had to keep our mouths shut because we were there for the Council of Jewish Women not for the Civil Rights movement.

PL: What was the job you were supposedly going to do?

BS: To teach them what to do about leadership and their thrift shop, I guess whatever it was. Because I was going with Gladys, and Gladys was enough to give them leadership, but she didn't know as much about thrift shops as I did. Anyway, we were supposed to be quiet and not get upset about the Civil Rights situation. We weren't there for that purpose, and we should keep our mouths shut. And so, we did. We were very good. Very good. But it came time to leave wherever it was, I think Arkansas, and we got on the plane. Along comes a Black officer of from the United States Army, and he sits down in front of us. The stewardess came along and whispered in his ear, and he went to the back of the plane. Gladys and I both are so tense we can't stand it, and I said, "Gladys, how long do we have to behave ourselves? We're leaving Arkansas now." And she said, "We don't have to behave any longer. Let's do something." I said, "Okay, you do it. You're the senior." She was the past president of the Council. She called the stewardess, and we said to her, "Why did you ask that officer to leave and go to the back of the plane," and the girl said, "Because his seatbelt is broken." [laughter] And we

laughed at ourselves, of course. I haven't forgotten that story. That was right at the end of World War II.

PL: Did you remember when you went down to help out with the thrift shops seeing tensions?

BS: Yes, of course.

PL: Segregation and things of that nature?

BS: Yes. Certainly. And when you went South, you knew you were going to hate it. Usually, I would say something about it if there was such a thing. I remember being in the South with Edward Stern. A guy who was driving us around – a Pi Tau Pi was driving us around – honked at a Black person crossing the street, and the Black person had the right of way. I said, "He had the right of way. What are you honking at him about? You're wrong." Edward Stern was very annoyed at me. He said, "You weren't here for Civil Rights. You're not going to change this man. This was no way to do it. You could have talked to him quietly on the side afterward. You used very poor judgment." I remember that.

PL: So, at the end of World War II, how did you feel the NCJW started dealing with some of these issues that you're talking about?

BS: They did. That's how Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise came about. Our work with the National Council of Negro Women was very good. Was quite outstanding. The only outstanding woman I met from NCNJ, whatever it was, was Dorothy Height.

PL: Could you spell her last name?

BS: Height, H-E-I-G-H-T.

PL: Can you set the precedent and describe what this program was?

BS: Damned if I know. I never found out much about it. I found out a lot about Dorothy Height. I never was quite sure what they were about.

PL: Well, what's Speak Up Needs Freedom Exercise [sic]? That's what I want to know about.

BS: Oh, they joined us with that. We started that.

PL: You started that. Whose idea was that?

BS: Oh, it must have been Katherine Engel or Gladys Cahn, all our top leadership was top-flight in that.

PL: What was the impetus?

BS: Gladys Cahn living in New Orleans and being on the Urban League Board.

PL: So, this was a national program. What was the impetus behind it?

BS: Not Eugene McCarthy, that other McCarthy. Senator McCarthy. He was terrible. He was a terrible man. Just awful. And I think I would probably have it in my scrapbook. We were upset because the Council of Jewish Women was saying, "Shh, don't upset us, we're getting along swell in our community. We don't want to do this kind of thing. Make a big to-do about being Jews in favor of the Blacks." And that wasn't the view that we took nationally, and so we had a national meeting about it. I remember I spoke at that from the West. Not because I was anything special; I was from the West.

PL: Are you saying then that there was some tension then between the way that the Seattle Council wanted to experience this program and the way the National Council wanted to?

BS: Well, I came home, and I met with some of my top officers who were liberals like me. We decided we were going to do something about it, but we couldn't all of a sudden announce that we were going to have a program called Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise. We had to get support. So, we had a series of meetings. I remember meeting in people's backyards or my patio or wherever and having – we had different people at each meeting and different speakers to talk to us about what we should do and what we could do because we knew that the radical right – I don't think we called them the radical right then, but they were the radical right. They were going to start something in Seattle about the books in the public library and so on.

PL: What is it that they were going to start?

BS: They were going to select books to get out of the public library because they didn't want those books around.

PL: Do you remember what books in particular they felt –

BS: Native Son. I can remember Native Son. I wasn't sure about the timing of that, though, so I'm a little bit hesitant to give you that timing. I don't remember whether it was Native Son or whether Native Son came before or after. Whatever it was, they wanted to get rid of books that had a civil rights impact. There have been a lot since, and I think of those – because I can't remember the other ones they wanted to get rid of. At any rate, we had a series of meetings, and we finally got a vote of the Board of the Seattle Section; it was well in the majority of our starting something and inviting the YW[CA] to join us. I went to Marty Camp Wilson. I was talking about her in conjunction with that program where she had the Rabbi and the minister.

PL: Was the Canwell Commission going on?

BS: The Canwell Commission was at the same time as McCarthy, yes. It was a local one.

PL: Right.

BS: A man whose wife was very active in the community – Sylvia Epstein was her name, and his name was Epstein, of course. He was the head of – her husband, who was a lawyer, was the head of the something at Neighborhood House. They started a campaign against him, and they got him too. It was awful.

PL: It was a communist campaign?

BS: No, it wasn't a communist campaign. It was an educational campaign, but no they wanted to get rid – yes, they said he was a communist.

PL: So, is that what the Canwell Commission was all about.

BS: Yes, that what's the Canwell Commission was, the local McCarthy group.

PL: Who was Canwell?

BS: Canwell was a State Senator I believe.

PL: I guess I'm trying to understand. There was both a National and a local McCarthy. [laughter]

BS: Yes.

PL: And I'm wanting to understand then what it is that is going on in the Jewish community between the relationships between Jews and Blacks that –

BS: Today?

PL: No. Then, at that time. What is the milieu of the work that you're doing? This Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise campaign. What is the milieu that it's happening in? In Seattle? Were there any Civil Rights protests? Were other people speaking out yet

at this time?

BS: Yes. A little bit. But not enough. Not enough. And Epstein lost his legal [position] that he had. Whatever he had. He lost his position legally. Sylvia Epstein, who was a marvelous woman, was very upset about it. And, of course, she was. It was awful, and people didn't speak up. People didn't speak up. They said, "Just leave us out. We didn't want the Black – we don't want to be caught in this. We were trying to get people to want to be caught in it. We were trying to get people to Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise, and we did.

PL: So, what was the forum that you created? You created forums for people to speak up?

BS: We didn't. We were going to fight against – to fight against the people who wanted to take the books out of the public library. That was what we were going to stop. There was nothing we could do about the Canwell Committee. Although we could have today if we were doing it today. We would have started earlier enough so we could stop the Canwell Committee.

PL: So, if I were to ask you what is – this was in 1952.

BS: Yes, a long time.

PL: If I were to ask you then after you voted and you got a unanimous majority on the Board of Council to do this program –

BS: It wasn't a unanimous vote. We got a good majority.

PL: Good majority.

BS: A good majority so we could tell the others to go home, and if they wanted to resign from Council, go right ahead.

PL: Did anyone?

BS: No.

PL: So, what did you do to implement this program or this?

BS: We said we were going to get the YWCA, and we were going to get the –

BS: If there was any Council of Negro Women around here, I think we had a terrible time finding anybody. We were going to get any women's group who could help us and could talk against the group. It wasn't the Canwell Committee who was going to take the books out of the public library. It was some Christian Right.

PL: Reactionaries or something?

BS: Whatever. Whatever they were. The reactionary group was going to take the books out, and we defeated them good.

PL: Did this make the papers?

BS: I think so.

PL: Do you remember making any public statements that were critical of—

BS: Personally?

PL: Any of these on behalf of NCJW? Did they issue any opinions under your leadership?

BS: They did nationally. I can't remember what we did locally. But they did not touch the library. And I think the library, of course, knew that we were the ones who stopped them.

PL: Why is this important to you?

BS: I think it is important today to us. I think it is very important to us. And for the most part, when I believe the Black community is right, I'm not sure how I stand on Robert's situation. If somebody were to come to me and say, "Mrs. Stern, even in spite of your age, do you want to say something?" I would say, "I want to know whether that man really had drugs if you know the story."

PL: You're talking about the recent event in Seattle.

BS: Yeah, and Roberts was shot.

PL: Was shot dead after fleeing supposedly, allegedly fleeing –

BS: Allegedly fleeing an officer.

PL: An officer.

BS: And he had the officer's arm caught in the car. The officer put his arm in the car, but he was trying to stop the driver – whatever. It's a little confused in my mind. That's what I would want to be darn sure about. I don't like the [inaudible] Police Department, what they're doing. I think they are taking advantage of the Black situation.

PL: Let me ask you about this.

BS: I would like to speak up. But I don't know to whom to speak.

PL: Well, as someone who has spoken up in many different forums, you've witnessed Seattle's growth over the twentieth century. How have you seen then Black relations, how have they been in Seattle in particular?

BS: Black [inaudible].

PL: Either Black-white, or Black-police relations.

BS: Or Black-Jew.

PL: Black-Jew. I'd love if you'd speak to that.

BS: I don't know what to think about the Black-Jew. I remember when I went to see – who is a minister who had the AME Church who just retired about last year. He and I have worked on things together. I went to see him about something that somebody told me to go to see him about. I said, "Reverend McKinney." I remembered his name, thank God, that day. [laughter] "Reverend McKinney, do you remember me? I'm Bernice Stern." He said, "No, I don't remember you. I used to have a friend named Bernice Stern, but she's not my friend anymore." I said, "Why not?" I don't remember what he answered, but we were very cool after that. We were going to do something for the AJC [American Jewish Committee] together. We were supposed to do something for the AJC together.

PL: Why do you think –?

BS: He was not –?

PL: Why do you think –?

BS: [inaudible] I don't know. I never did find out what I had done wrong. But apparently, I had done something wrong, and he was very mad at me. I still don't know what it is to this day, but I was not very pleased.

PL: Was this when you were a Councilwoman, or is this after you were a Councilwoman?

BS: After.

PL: Well, just to go back for a moment to this moment where you opposed the censorship of books in the Seattle Public Library. Do you remember the victory of that? And do you remember if that lead –?

BS: I remember they did not touch the books in the Seattle Public Library. The Library Board wrote us a letter. I don't know whether I have the letter or not.

PL: I'm wondering what other kind of things you did that you're particularly proud of with your years with NCJW? I just want to get this down. You were president of the local chapter for how –

BS: Section.

PL: Seattle Section. For how many years?

BS: Two years.

PL: Two years, then.

BS: Three years.

PL: Three years.

BS: I think three years.

PL: And you were the youngest president?

BS: No, I was the youngest – yes, I guess I was.

PL: And then you served as a National or a Western Regional?

BS: Oh, I got on the – I was on the Western Regional at the same time I was president of the Seattle Section. Then I got on the National Board that same year, I think 1946,

1949, somewhere in there. I don't know which it was. It was so long ago.

PL: And then you served as vice president? National vice-president?

BS: For twelve. I was the national vice-president, I think, for twelve years. Then I was due to become the national president. Everybody sort of expected me to be the national president. I went to them two years before that because, by that time, we had two more conventions, I think, and told them I was not going to be the national president, that Edward Stern was not well, and I couldn't leave home that much to enjoy being national president. I would love to be national president, but I couldn't do it. So, they got somebody – so I found Esther Landa of Salt Lake. Do you know who she is?

PL: Can you spell her name?

BS: L-A-N-D-A. L-A-N-D-A. I just talked to her last night because she just had a second knee operation, second knee replaced. She's fine, and she's older than I am. I will tell you the latest thing about her is that she came to Seattle about six or seven, eight, nine years ago at my request because I called her, and I said, "Esther, it looks to me like the Seattle section is going to fold. It's not going to hold up. It's falling apart, and I think you had better come." So, she came. I said to her, "We're going to a meeting at Ann Neider's house." I don't know whether you know Ann Neider. She was at that luncheon. I said, "I don't know that you can help, but I think it's all gone." Esther is so good. She can do most everything. She became president because I wasn't going to become president. She took over and became president. They needed one from the West. She was wonderful. She is a terrific lady.

PL: So, this is around – I guess I'm also wondering how it is that in a leadership role, you dealt with or made decisions about the formation of the State of Israel, whether or not that was part of the role that NCJW was playing in Seattle. Did that affect any of the work that you did?

BS: Not much, no. I was not very happy with Council getting so involved with Israel.

PL: How did it get involved with Israel? Are you talking nationally?

BS: Yes, it did.

PL: Why?

BS: Well, everybody was getting involved with Israel. It was the thing to do. But I wanted Council to retain its role in this country. I was not very happy with what they did. But they did, and they've done it well. They're in a really good niche, I think. In the educational niche in Israel. Thank goodness they're there. I mean, not instead of some other role.

PL: In a previous interview, you talked about the abrogation of the White Paper and a stance that you and the Seattle Section had taken on that. Do you remember what I am talking about? Let me pause this for a moment. [Recording paused.] I understand that in 1962 you were at a luncheon with Eleanor Roosevelt. Do you remember that?

BS: I remember meeting Eleanor.

PL: When was that?

BS: About that time.

PL: Under what circumstances did you meet her?

BS: I think I was on a plane with her. I think I was on a plane. But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I was at a luncheon.

PL: And what do you remember about meeting her?

BS: It was a great thrill. I thought she was great.

PL: Do you remember what she looked like?

BS: Not very pretty. Not very pretty. Beauty was all inside.

PL: Was she a role model of yours or other women that you knew?

BS: Oh, everybody loved Eleanor Roosevelt, except her husband.

PL: Why do you say that? [laughter]

BS: Because he didn't, did he? He was a terrible husband. Like most presidents are. Don't you agree? [laughter]

PL: What is it about her that made her such a role model to so many women?

BS: Because she exercised leadership. Marvelously. And because she didn't let her mother-in-law or her looks stand in her way.

PL: Is there anything about her life that you tried to apply to your own?

BS: I don't think I would have the arrogance to think that I could apply it to my own.

PL: I think that I am going to stop here for today, and we'll pick up with it the next time. I want to sort through so many things that we have still yet to talk about. So, thank you for the first part of the interview.

[Recording paused.]

PL: This is the continuing oral history interview of Bernice Stern. Today's date is July 31, 2001. We are in the home of – so, you were saying then that the Democratic Party then asked you to run?

BS: To run for District Committee member. I said, “That is ridiculous. I’ll never get elected, and so on and so forth.” But David Stern got very excited. David, my son, the advertising man who does all my stuff. He got very excited about it. He made me a poster about yea big. He said he measured it, and it was too big to put in a wastebasket. He wanted me to go around to my neighbors in the district, go on the rainiest, most miserable night I could find, and leave this thing. They would try to put it in the wastebasket, and they couldn’t get it in. You can’t get it in most wastebaskets. He said they’d remember you, and they’ll remember that she wanted to be a District Committee member. And I did. It just so happened – I found out afterward –that a very important guy in the Democratic Party had been the District Committeeman and was going to run again. I didn’t know. They didn’t tell me that, of course, when they asked me to run. [laughter] I guess maybe they didn’t know, I’m not sure. But I beat him easily because I did what David said. They remembered me, and they couldn’t get it in the wastebasket. I still have those posters.

PL: What was the experience of campaigning like?

BS: Oh, that was nothing. I just did what David told me to do. That was nothing. And I won over this very important Democrat because most of the people around here weren’t Democrats. They weren’t Democrats anyway. They didn’t give a damn who was District Committee.

PL: What District was this for?

BS: Magnolia. Where I live now. And there weren’t any Democrats around here except me and the raccoons. Then they came to me, and I became the District Committeeman, and they came and said, “Will you run for the County Council?” They’re going to have a new County Council. I read up on what the County Council was going to be. I had known a little bit about it but not much. And they had had three County Commissioners, one of whom was John Spellman, who was going to run for County Executive. One was

John O'Brien, who was a basketball star here and a very funny guy, but not a very brainy guy. But a very funny guy. And the third one, I can't remember who he was. He was from somewhere in the county. They were going to have nine County Councilmen from various Districts that they counted off would have so many thousand people in each District that would even them up. And if I ran, I would be from Magnolia, Queen Anne, Greenwood, and Ballard. I said that was silly too. I could never win. They said, "Yes, you could." Anyway, David had the campaign all ready before I decided I was going to run. "We want one woman on the nine-man County Council" [was my logo].

PL: So, let me just understand something. You said it was a new County Council. So, the County Council of this nature didn't exist prior?

BS: No, it did not. They had three County Commissioners who ran the whole thing. Which was true about most places. Now most of them have the commissioner system with a County Executive and Commissioners. And so, finally, Edward Stern said yes, go but run as Bernice Stern, not Mrs. Edward Stern. You are Bernice Stern. I said, "Will you give me some money?" He said, "Yes, I'll loan you some money." And if you win, you pay me back. [laughter]

PL: How much money are we talking about here?

BS: Well, I was going to pay for my campaign, and as I recall, I had to pay him back nine thousand dollars. The salary for a year was only eighteen thousand dollars. Now it's something like eighty-five thousand dollars for those commissioners. I don't know why it is, but that's what happened. But anyway, David ran the whole campaign and any subsequent campaigns on the County Council. I had a wonderful time doing what I wanted. Edward Stern had a miserable time explaining why his wife did this or did that because he wouldn't have done it. But anyway. I enjoyed it thoroughly, and that's how I became a politician instead of a volunteer and loved every bit of it. Bob Dunn and I – I mentioned his name before. Bob Dunn was here for my birthday party the other night.

He's an old man now; it's a terrible thing.

PL: Who was he at that point to you?

BS: He was the handsomest man in Seattle and has a lovely wife whom he liked very much. There was nothing going on between us, but we were best friends, and he was darling man. A Republican, but we got along just swell. And John Spellman was a Republican, the County Executive who I liked very much. He reminded me of Edward Stern. I said, "You both listen to me with rapt inattention." And he always quoted me as saying that about him.

PL: What kind of platform did you run on? Did you run on a platform that distinguished yourself from the other candidate? What were you advocating for?

BS: Oh, it wasn't difficult for me to distinguish myself from the other candidate whom I thought was going to beat the heck out of me because he was a well-known attorney, a Republican. The reason I beat him is a judge here – a Judge at that time called David and said, "I want to tell you something that I want your mother to know, but I can't call her and tell her. I want you to know that Ashley" – I can't remember his first name, something Ashley – "was an attorney [and] sought membership in the Democratic Party after he got his name on the ticket for this race. He is not a Republican; he's a Democrat." He said, "You ought to know it, and your mother ought to know it. Your mother ought to charge him with it." So, David talked me into charging him with this. I had a copy of his membership card. David got that, of course. I charged him with being a Democrat in Republican clothing. Like a sheep in wolf's clothing? That's what he was, and that helped me a lot. I beat him good. And I ran on things I believed in. I studied a lot while I was running too. I became, as I say – "The Streetwalker of Ballard," I called myself [laughter] because I had a friend who lived in Ballard, and she took me all over Ballard to meet everybody there because nobody would have known me in Ballard from Magnolia. Ballard is – the fishermen came from fishing people; that's a fishing village. It

started as a fishing village. It isn't anymore. But I met everybody in Ballard. I said I was the middle-aged "Streetwalker of Ballard." And met everybody there. I worked very hard and enjoyed it. My headquarters was this house. I wasn't going to rent a headquarters. I lived right here. I served lunch to all the people who came and worked, who helped – very good help.

PL: Who helped you on your campaign?

BS: David. David really did the whole thing. A lot of people helped me on my campaign. Lots of good Democrats from this area. There were some Democrats, but they had to come out; they didn't live in Magnolia. But they were very good.

PL: So, when you got onto the King County Council, you were the first woman and the first Jewish woman?

BS: Of course. I was the first woman, the only woman.

PL: So, how did you take up the role of King County Councilwoman? What were your first commissions? What did you do?

BS: I served cookies in my office at four o'clock in the afternoon. Everybody came for cookies in my office. There is a picture. I was looking at a picture of me serving cookies on the first bus. The first Metro bus I served cookies on. [laughter] It's down there somewhere.

PL: Were you involved in getting that Metro bus?

BS: Oh, yes. I was on the Metro Council. I mean, all the Councilmen were on the Metro Council.

PL: Can you talk a little bit about the creation of that public transportation system in Seattle? If you were on that Council?

BS: If I remember anything. It was a good Council. The leadership of the city and the county. We knew that it had to be done, and we did it. Why they aren't doing it now, I'll be damned if I know. I can't get over the failure. The thing is they put too darn many things on the ballot, and they nobody voted for them because they didn't want to pay higher taxes. We've got to do something about getting money for transportation. I talked to Helen Sommers yesterday. My friend, Helen Sommers – do you know who she is? She's the best legislator we have. She's a Democrat. She's been in the State Legislature for too many years. When I talked to her yesterday, I said, "I have a new book about the seven women senators." And I said, "I'll give it to you when I am through reading it." But it made me so mad when I saw it because she would be a better president than Bush. That's not difficult. She would have been a marvelous president. She's considered by our legislators to be the top legislator in our state. She was at my birthday party, and she got up and made a little speech, which I didn't want anybody to do. She upset my sons to no end because they promised me that they wouldn't do that. But she did a little speech. I said that was fine. She was doing a speech around here, and I wanted her to do a speech in Olympia that would get the transportation system off a dime. We can't do it. With the vote of the people, we are going to vote for it again. The darn fools. Or vote against it that's what they'll do.

PL: Going back to your service, you served on the King County Commission and became chair at some point?

BS: Yeah. Well, everybody did. That was not so remarkable.

PL: You really took up transportation during your tenure there.

BS: Yes.

PL: Can you establish what the milieu was in Seattle? We had no public transportation. What were the arguments and the tensions and the discussions around?

BS: The people didn't want to spend the money. They didn't want to have it cost them more money. And there were people around like that guy, [Eyman]. What's his name?

PL: Tim Eyman.

BS: Tim Eyman. He's there again. He's there for more of that kind of thing. It's terrible because we've got to spend money; we cannot do that. I said, of course, what we could do – you wouldn't like that – was to tell everybody from out-of-town they can come to Seattle to live. We'd be delighted to have them, but they can't drive a car in Seattle. Theirs or anybody else's.

PL: You also served on commissions around the development of Seattle and preserving its farmlands. Can you talk about that a little bit?

BS: Yes, sure. My friend, Bob Dunn, who was here the other night and I was talking about him. He's about six feet four. He was dressed as a string bean. I was dressed as a pumpkin. We went walking from the King County Courthouse up to the Public Market every day at lunch for two or three weeks before the vote was taken on the farmland and met everybody we could and told them who we were and that they must vote for saving the farmland. We thought we saved it. You know, we did. We think we got an awful lot of votes dressed like that walking up the street. And the farmland passed.

PL: What was that victory?

BS: A tremendous victory. It was a tremendous victory. I can't give you the number of votes, but it was a tremendous victory. It will be somewhere in the scrapbooks.

PL: What was the real issue at hand?

BS: Whether the land in King County should be developed, which developers wanted to do because it was good land. Or whether it should be retained as farmland. We wanted

it retained as farmlands. We described why and how and how much it was going to cost, and it was going cost money. The developers were going to be very angry. But we wanted people to vote for saving the farmlands, and they did. Just recently, there was a twentieth anniversary of saving the farmlands. I went to a gathering of the people who did it. They saved a lot of farmlands.

PL: Where were those farmlands?

BS: Snoqualmie, Marysville, all around here. But it was King County farmland. It had to be King County. We couldn't save anybody else's farmland. It was a wonderful thing to do. Wonderful. I keep saying, why doesn't somebody have the gumption to say, let's all get together and save transportation too and do the transportation like that. But nobody seems to do it, and I'm too old.

PL: As somebody who moved from volunteer leadership positions to lobbying to political work, what did you have to do to wheel and deal? To get in on the issue?

BS: Serve cookies at four o'clock.

PL: I'm going to change tapes, and I'll continue from there with a new topic.

BS: Yeah, new topic.

[Recording paused.]

PL: We're continuing with the oral history interview of Bernice Stern, and this is mini-disk tape number three. So, I'm wondering what are some of the other platforms or sweetest victories that you had during your service for the King County Council. What sticks out in your mind? Or defeats, for that matter.

BS: Well, it was a very bad defeat. I was about to be Chairman of the Council, and all the men had agreed that I could be the Chairman of the Council. And along came a guy

named Mike Lowry, who replaced somebody who had gotten off the County Council.

PL: Who eventually became Senator.

BS: And the Governor.

PL: And the Governor.

BS: I never voted for him for anything. And after [recording paused] after he came – and he came in brand fresh – he came into my office and told me that he wanted to be the chairman. And I said, "I'm going to be the chairman; it's my turn." He said, "Well, you'd better watch out because I'm in your way." I said, "Well then, you'd better watch out." I've never liked him since. I've never supported him for anything since. Very soon thereafter, there was an article in the paper – it's probably in one of the scrapbooks downstairs, but I don't know which one – said, "Mrs. Stern Takes [a Leadership] Course." I can't remember what they called it. It was some kind of a course to express yourself. To take care of yourself. I took a course. They gave a course for women in King County, and I took it. There was an article in the paper, "Bernice Stern Takes Course." Everybody thought that was very funny that I would have to take a course in expressing myself, but I did, and it helped.

PL: Why did you take the course?

BS: Because I was so [angry] that I had sat there and let that nothing Mike Lowry beat me. He said, "You can be vice-chairman, and you can be chairman next time." I said, "You can go back in your office and don't come back in here again."

PL: How does politics like that work?

BS: Miserably, but it's not really as tough as the politics in the Council of Jewish Women.

PL: Can you elaborate?

BS: Well, I elaborate because when I look at Robin Boehler, I cry, because she took a terrible beating. She wanted to be on – she wanted to be elected to a national board, and she got pushed off. I'm too far gone to have my name mean as much as it used to. I couldn't do anything about it. I don't know exactly what the details were, but she got beaten, and it was a terrible shame. She is handling it like a hero. She is wonderful. I feel terrible about it. That almost happened to me and a woman named Pearl Willen, who was president of the Council of Jewish Women. They wanted to knock us off the slate because we didn't agree with something the Council was doing.

PL: Do you remember what that was?

BS: Yes, it was turning its attention from projects in the United States to projects in Israel.

PL: Right. We talked about that briefly. So, I am curious if you can put your finger on any special talents that you possess that made you a success in politics.

BS: I was the only woman on the King [laughs] – on a nine-man County Council. That was one. And serving cookies and knowing how to handle men.

PL: How did you know how to handle them?

BS: I had a lot of experience with Edward Stern and John Spellman and all kinds of other men in my life for many years. Not that I was such a femme fatale, but I knew how to handle what I got, just like you probably know how to handle what you get.

PL: Would you have called yourself a feminist back then? Or an outspoken woman?

BS: I acted like a feminist although it wasn't the thing to be feminist. I did not admire Betty Friedan, and I did not admire, who was the one with the one who is so homely, but

who was so smart?

PL: Bella Abzug?

BS: No, another one.

PL: I'll keep my mouth shut.

BS: No, it wasn't Bella Abzug, although she didn't appeal to me either. Most of those women didn't appeal to me.

PL: Why not?

BS: They were crude. Crude. I remember taking Edward Stern to dinner where the speaker was – who was the speaker, the top one? Better, more important than Betty Friedan. Top feminist. She said some things in her speech that I was embarrassed to have Edward Stern hear her say. I really thought she was very crude. Very crude. I didn't like that. But on the other hand, let me see – what I was going to tell you about her? I'm losing my train of thought now.

PL: I think you are talking about how, as a woman, what you had to do and what talents you had.

BS: Oh, yes. I was going to tell you about something they were talking about at the luncheon the other day. Dick Odabashian gives a luncheon every summer when he comes up here for the tennis tournament [at] the tennis club. He's a marvelous tennis player. He's almost as old as I am. Not quite. But he gives a luncheon for all of the people from the Transportation Commission that he loved when he was on it – when I got there. I had known him before because he and I were both appointed by Governor Dan Evans to something Dan Evans did that was pretty marvelous called Washington Futures or something like that, where he invited one hundred and twenty-five people from the

State of Washington when he was Governor to meet a number of times and talk about the futures for the State of Washington. So Dick has these people, including past Governor Al Rossellini who was there and who was over ninety and simply marvelous, and a few other people he has that he favored, and he has this every summer. Duane Berentson, who was head of the department for the staff, talked again about whenever he sees me, he talks about the fact that I pulled one that was very important for transportation and still is, and that is that some ladies came to see me at my office, some young women, and they were very upset and wondered whether I could do anything for them because they had heard that I could do things for women. They said they couldn't get home to feed their children dinner at night because the bus service was so terrible, particularly out south by South Center by the freeway off South Center and that whole area between Federal Way and Seattle. They could not manage to get home to make dinner because they couldn't handle it. They couldn't drive it, and the buses were too slow, and so on and so forth. Could I do anything about it? I said, "No, but you can do something about it." I said, "Next Monday is a meeting, and I'm the only woman on the King County Council; the rest are men. I'm picking out the ones with the best legs who will come to see me, and you are to wear short dresses, and you are to come and tell the men about your problem. Not going to come to tell me. You're coming to tell them, and you're to wear …". I said, "You four look to me like you've got great legs under those dresses and wear short dresses. And can any of you cry?" Yes, they could cry a little bit. I said, "I want a few tears when you tell these men about how you can't get home to cook dinner for your families and that we need a separate road for people who are in a hurry and who have more than one in the car." And that's the HOV lanes. They came and told the men like that. See, it's so easy to get the money for it. It was amazing. I didn't have to say anything at all. The girls with the pretty legs and the tears told them about it. And that was all. And Berentson was telling about it again. Everybody has heard the story so many times. They were there some of them. That was a great victory. The great defeat was Mike Lowry.

PL: Yeah. Looking back at your directing these women to essentially use their feminine wiles?

BS: Yes, of course.

PL: What do you think about that?

BS: I think that's the way to go. Of course.

PL: Would it be today the same way to go about it?

BS: Anybody with any sense would use today's way of using your feminine wiles. And these girls – these were young, pretty women who wanted to come home and cook dinner for their family, and they couldn't do it. We have better HOV lanes in that area than we have anywhere in King County. But we don't have enough of them, and they don't police it enough to be sure that nobody can be in there with one in a car. And, of course, there are different things that can be done. But nobody has quite put their fingers on it yet, Helen Sommers says from the Legislature.

PL: What was your relationship with other types of transportation systems? I know there was some controversy about the ferry system during your tenure.

BS: There is controversy about the ferry system anyway, and I was hearing yesterday, I think, or something in the last few days, there has been an announcement – we're not going to have any newer ferries. We don't have enough ferries. We tried to have people-only ferries – people-only, not cars. They haven't solved the problem. I don't know what we can do.

PL: What were the controversies that you worked on?

BS: I was Chairman of the Ferry Committee for nine of my eleven years on that transportation thing. It was miserable. It was miserable. We have one of the largest

ferry systems in the world, but it's not big enough to handle our problem because we've got so much water and so few ferries and so many people who want to use them. It costs a fortune to build those ferries and run them. The people who run them are not so great. Not so great. They have dumb accidents sometimes. But I don't know what they're going to do about it, and neither does Helen.

PL: What were some of the other –? I'm looking at this list of committees that you served on, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. I'm wondering if any of these – I know you served on the Women's Committee for Civil Rights, for example. I understand that in 1960 – is it '61 or '62 you were invited to the White House.

BS: That's right.,

PL: Can you talk about that experience? What was going on? What did JFK –?

BS: JFK wanted more women to do more things about Civil Rights than we were doing. He was quite correct about that. He invited people from – women from every state. There were four women from the State of Washington. One of them I never did see. I think she was at the White House, but I never saw her afterward. She came from Spokane, probably. But I met several women who were excellent. So, we came back from that marvelous experience of being at the White House and JFK and Bobby – I guess Lyndon Johnson must have been around too. It was a terrific experience to be there. We came home, and we decided we would have a Washington Women's Civil Rights organization.

PL: This is still when you're working for Council?

BS: Oh, I've always worked for Council.

PL: But this is before your days in politics in office?

BS: Yes. Yes. And that was in 19—because John Kennedy was there. He died in 1962, was it ’62 or ’63?

PL: I believe he actually died in ’65? Nope, earlier than that. But this was in August of ’63 that you formed the Women’s Civil Rights Committee.

BS: He died – I think it was November of 1963. I have it in my scrapbook, of course. I can’t remember yesterday. But anyway, there was a funny story about that. The first thing that happened after we got back with our new organization, we were going to have this new, wonderful organization of Washington Women for Civil Rights. There was a parade. We were going to have a parade for Civil Rights. And that wasn’t – it was everybody was going to have a parade. We were going to be a part of it, and who, of course, was going to parade for them? I said, I don’t parade anywhere except to [I.] Magnin [departed Seattle clothing store]. I parade to Magnins. I don’t go parading. I had to because nobody else could go. So I could go. Edward Stern drove me down to the YWCA. The YMCA was where we were going to meet, and the women made a sign for me to carry. He had the sign in the car, and I got the sign out. I get out of the car, and he starts laughing, and he couldn’t stop laughing. I said, “What in the hell are you laughing about? What’s so funny about this?” He said, “Have you read the sign that you’re carrying? It says, ‘Washington Women.’ It doesn’t say ‘Washington Women for Civil Rights’” because they couldn’t get it on the sign. So, it said, “Wash. Women for Civil Rights.” And that’s what you’re parading for: wash women for civil rights. And that was funny. But we paraded. I remember being very impressed and being very touched by the fact that down – it must have been on the big hills that came down from First Hill. All the hospitals and the churches and everything were sending people, and they all came down the hills and met us on Fourth Avenue by the Y. By the YMCA. So, they would march with us. It was a very impressive parade. It was wonderful. We marched to the square there. Our square by Nordstrom’s was Frederick’s [Frederick and Nelson’s department store], and we had a big meeting there, and that’s where we had this parade.

That's where the "Wash. Women for Civil Rights." Everybody loved that sign.

PL: So, when you worked in the King County Council for Women's Committee for Civil Rights, what kind of work did you do on that Commission?

BS: Damned if I know. We must have had a lot of meetings. We really did things together. It was very good. And out of that came the fighting for Speak Up Freedom Needs Exercise, and the YW was doing it with us and the Council of Negro Women. I think it was the National Council of Negro Women – was a woman named Dorothy Height. Did you know about her?

PL: You mentioned her.

BS: She was great.

PL: Were there any other committees, either planning or urban development or transportation or citizen's committees, Head Start, or anything that you would like to talk about that were significant to the time that you served on the King County Council? Or the players that were involved in those organizations and committees?

BS: Well, I was head of Head Start when they began it in King County. Because I was a King County Councilwoman. And I loved that. And still do. Still think Head Start is marvelous.

PL: How did you get involved, and who came to sell it to the King County Council?

BS: I sold it to the King County Council.

PL: Where did learn about it? How did you learn about it?

BS: I learned about it through – there was a Children's Commission, and I was on that Commission, and one of the women who was on the commission was a woman,

Dorothea Checkley, who was here the other night for my birthday, who was a swell woman, and she was YWCA, I think. That's how she came into it. But you found out about things like this. People came to see you because you were a King County Councilman and said, "Would you help us get Head Start going? We need money from the County. We need support from the County." And that's how I got involved in that. I got involved in an awful lot of things. I got involved. I can't remember when I got involved in something [inaudible] that I thought was going to be marvelous, and it was terrible. Bussing for kids.

PL: Can you –?

BS: I was on the Committee that brought that bussing into Seattle.

PL: When was this?

BS: Well, it had to be. It had to be either. It had to be with the schools. The schools called me and said we want you to be a part of this committee. We think you can help with it.

PL: What was the purpose of the bussing?

BS: Try to find ways to integrate the schools. They were so segregated. They were terrible. But we brought this bussing thing in and proved to be not good. I always felt terrible because I thought it was going to be great.

PL: Why wasn't it successful?

BS: Because they took kids away from their own homes. Too far away from their homes. They brought the kids from the Black community into the white community and vice versa.

PL: I think, if I'm correct from having looked at the archives and listening to some of your previous interviews ¬– correct me if I'm wrong, what you're talking about it – it was 1959. The Republican State Legislature introduced the Fair Employment Act or the Fair Employment Practice. You started a campaign, and you worked with Rabbi Levine – am I correct, or am I off-base here? – for voluntary bussing. And this was in the late '50s.

BS: But then later, it came to the school committee to see what we could do about it, and they made it not just voluntary. It went on until now. It's now they're getting rid of it. And thank goodness they're getting rid of it because it didn't create equal education for people, and it just made long bus trips for little kids. It was dumb. There were a lot of bright people on the committee who did it [laughter], including me.

PL: Well, it sounds like this was your second foray into doing, into wanting to integrate the schools.

BS: Of course.

PL: The first time was during the heart of the Civil Rights era in the late 1950s. Can you go back and describe what the need for it was in the late 1950s when you first got involved with it?

BS: Because the schools were so segregated, and the Black community was all in one area. Now you read that what used to be the Black community is now a white community.

PL: What community or what area of Seattle is that?

BS: Leschi, Madison, Marion ¬– all that. What we used to call "The Black Town." Really. I didn't call it "The Black Town," but I mean, people did call it a Black town. Now it's very hard for Blacks to get housing there because it's all taken. It's now a white town. It's very amazing to read about it and read in the papers, and they take a count.

PL: Well, what's interesting is that it sounds like when you first tried to work on the bussing issue, you were working within and without the Jewish community. You were working with Rabbi Levine at Temple de Hirsch. What was that relationship?

BS: Well, because he was my Rabbi. And I was very fond of him, and he was fond of me. [inaudible]

PL: I'm going to pause this. What's the name of Rabbi Levine books? Profiles in Service Stories of People Who Helped People. Tell me about this book.

BS: Well, he wrote that book. And you look under 'S,' and you'll see Stroum, and you'll see Stern.

PL: What did he write about you?

BS: Now, I haven't looked at it in a long time. But he had a lot of real good people here. Lot of good people.

PL: So together, you were advocating for the integration of schools?

BS: Of course. Rabbi Levine was a good one. I was so happy with what I had done about that, and the other bright people the school system called into a committee about what we'll do about integrating the schools. Our answer was bussing the kids to different places so they can be with everybody and get a fine education.

PL: And so how many years later was it that you realized that this was bust? This didn't work.

BS: It didn't work. It didn't work. I didn't realize it for a while. I thought maybe they weren't doing it right. But it wasn't. You can't take kids away from their neighborhood and have them go an hour on this bus when they are little kids to some white school somewhere.

PL: I remember you telling a story in a videotape interview of other situations where the expected outcome of something you thought was a great success was disappointing. That you had fought for something. I think it was the dredging of the lakes or the cleaning up of the water, and¬ –

BS: [laughter] Oh, I probably did talk about that because that was probably close to that time. That was something we did to get – there was a growth in the lakes, and the boats couldn't get through. It was terrible. It was taking the clarity and the merit out of our lakes and ruining it. So, we went about trying to clean it up. We cleaned it up, and something else grew. It was worse. That was another one. [laughter] That was another dim victory.

PL: So, what are some of the rewards and lessons that you learned during your tenure as a Councilwoman? What did you learn about Seattle that you didn't know from someone who grew up here? Or what did it consolidate about your ideas about Seattle?

BS: Well, I guess I learned that every good intention doesn't make a good project. That was one thing. I learned to try to listen to people instead of talking like I'm talking at you so long. I can learn more from listening to you. I learned though, that it takes people of good intentions – I cannot believe a city like ours doesn't have a better transportation system. Portland has it. Portland does a much better job on that than we have ever done and on a number of other things. They had a good Jewish mayor named Neil Goldschmidt, who was marvelous. One of the other stories in my life – I got to know Neil Goldschmidt because I was invited by President Carter to make recommendations for the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Who should be on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals? And he would listen to our recommendations. He would like to have me on a committee, and I said, "How come you asked me? I'm not a lawyer." And Edward Stern, who was a lawyer, said, "He wants some non-lawyers then, Bernice. I guess that's what he wants." A very bright, young lawyer called Edward Stern – and said to him, "I read in the paper

that your wife is going to be on a committee to recommend candidates for the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals." He said, "How come? Why are you letting her do that?" And Edward Stern said, "I wouldn't dare try to stop her from doing anything that she wants to do." He said, "I've been married to her for a long time, and I don't tell her what she can do and what she can't do." And he said, "If you want to tell her about it, you'd better call her, not me." And he said, "I advise you that you're not going to have a very happy ear listening to her." He said, "I don't agree with you either. I think it would be all right to have women as bright as Bernice on that committee, and you will have some lawyers there. There is going to be a lawyer from Portland who is the head of the committee." And the meetings were held in Portland. I got to sit next to Neal Goldschmidt, who was the Mayor of Portland. I thought he was a swell guy. Subsequently, I gave a couple of parties for him when he was running for something here in Seattle to get him money. But he was a swell guy. I liked him tremendously and can take the credit for getting Betty Fletcher. Have you heard of Betty Fletcher? She's been on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals for ten, twelve, fifteen years – ever since the meetings in Portland. And a wonderful young, Black lawyer whose name alludes me right now. Those were my two candidates. I said to Neil Goldschmidt, "I want to make a deal with you. I want you to help me with my candidates. Have you got some candidates I can help you with?" He was very helpful getting my candidates. Wonderful. They've been great members of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. That was a good one. I loved that.

PL: Have there been other times when men or other people underestimated you because you were a woman in your job as a King County Councilwoman?

BS: Oh, sure, there have been times. Lots of times. When I was put in my place, so to speak. And it wasn't easy.

PL: Who would put you in your place? Talking verbally, or they'd shove you off on a committee of insignificance?

BS: Yes. That kind of thing. You know that kind of thing. And it's probably happened to you too, in your life, hasn't it?

PL: We all have those opportunities. [laughter]

BS: Opportunities?

PL: To get back.

BS: Not to get mad, to get even. That's what I told Mike Lowry I was going to do. I wasn't going to get mad; I was going to get even, and I have.

PL: But it takes something, Bernice, to be savvy enough to deal with that.

BS: Well, you have to get yourself into a position where your position is savvy enough.

PL: So, how did you do it?

BS: Oh, I got on the King County [Council]. I was the one woman on a nine-man County Council and was the one woman on the seven-man Transportation Commission. That helped a lot.

PL: Did you have to adjust anything about who you were or your social interactions, or the way that you presented yourself physically, or the way you dressed, or anything external that you had to do to make sure that you got onto those commissions? Or were a success? They say women will go out, and they'll wear a power suit to get a good job.

BS: Oh, I think that's today. That isn't when I was around. When I was around, you were just getting started. I did feel very keenly about my responsibility to help other women. Younger women get where I was. I got very angry on a couple of instances when women in my position didn't do it.

PL: Can you tell me more about that?

BS: Well, I wouldn't like that to be – this is not for publication because I understand she is a very ill woman today. She was in a very high position. I called her to support a young woman who wanted to be on the ¬– a judge from some place in King County, I can't remember what. I called this woman and said, "I am calling to get your help for …". Her name was Brucker. Brucker was the name of the girl who wanted to be a judge. She said, "Why do you want her?" And I said, "Well, in the first place, I understand she is highly qualified. I don't know her myself, but I've investigated, and she's highly qualified. And in the second place, we only have twenty-one judges, and there's room for twenty-one more." Or whatever it was. I don't remember the numbers. "We need more judges. We need more women judges. More qualified woman judges, and that's why I'm calling you." She said, "Well, I don't quite understand why I should do anything about it." And I said, "Well, if you can't understand it, I don't have anything to say to you," and I hung up. I was furious. I was furious at her. [laughter] Because she was in a very fine position to help. Today, she is not well at all. And she has Alzheimer's, I've been told.

PL: What other ways did you work specifically for women's issues while on the Council?

BS: Whenever they came up. Whenever it came up. Whenever they came up.

PL: Was there anything in Seattle in particular that called for your help? Any issues during that time? And we're talking about 1969 to 1979, and that's the Women's Lib era. I was just wondering what kind of issues you were dealing with.

BS: I involved myself in them. But there was an awful lot about the Women's Lib business I didn't like. I did not care for, as I said, Betty Friedan. And who was that other one who was so homely and so crude? I can't remember her name. I think I got –

PL: It's just going to pop a little later in the interview.

BS: I think I've forgotten her name intentionally. Isn't that terrible?

PL: Well, at what point did you decide that either you had had enough or needed to stop? You had mentioned that your husband was ill.

BS: He died in 1980, and then Spellman said I could have any job I wanted. I took the Transportation Commission because I could stay in Seattle. I didn't have to move to Olympia.

PL: So, you resigned, or you didn't go up for election again in what year?

BS: 1979.

PL: Why did you decide to stop?

BS: Because Edward Stern was very ill by that time. He had cancer. And he was very ill. He was home for four months after that and died at home. I fought with doctors in the meantime. I had to fight them to get him out of the hospital because he didn't want to be in the hospital, and he shouldn't have been, and that was terrible. They didn't have hospices then. They have hospices now, and I think they are wonderful. They are very important. In the meantime, I became a grandmother, and now I'm a great-grandmother of three and four coming up. Number four is coming up in October.

PL: What is it like being a grandmother?

BS: Love being a grandmother. Being a great-grandmother for me is very difficult because I have to keep reminding myself, I'm not the grandmother; I'm the great-grandmother, and they call me G.G. Stern in the family. That means great-grandmother.

PL: What is the difference between those two? Being a grandmother versus being a great-grandmother?

BS: Well, you have to keep your distance a little bit. You have to let the grandmothers take on the little ones. That's fine. I didn't have my great-grandchildren at my birthday. They're too young.

PL: What did you like to do with your grandchildren and then your –? Well, your great grandchildren sound like they're very young. What have you done as a grandmother? What have you enjoyed doing with your grandchildren?

BS: Oh, my greatest joy was traveling with – Edward Stern, and I took our five grandchildren we had at that time. We took our grandchildren on trips. That was a marvelous experience and great for them because they got to know their grandfather. When they got on a trip with him, they got to know him. He took them on a cruise across – where did we take them? We cruised to Alaska. We took them in – 1976 was the year of the bicentennial, wasn't it? Do you remember that? Because you're just about the age of my grandchildren, aren't you? How old are you?

PL: Thirty-four.

BS: Yeah. Yeah. My granddaughters are thirty-seven and forty. And my grandson, who is thirty-five – they are all in your age range. We took them to the Bicentennial, and I worked for a whole year on that trip because we did it. We flew. What is making noise in there?

PL: So, you went to the Bicentennial, and what happened?

BS: We brought five kids and a Japanese girl who was my maid at the time. [She] was working for me at the time [and] living with me. She came along to take care – to help me take care of all those kids. Then we went to Washington D.C. and spent a week. And Scoop Jackson took us to lunch at the Senate. Took us to see the Senate in action. Then we went to Philadelphia on the Fourth of July. I guess it must have been the Fourth of July, yes. And Marion Anderson sang, which was the most impressive part of

the whole trip to me. Because I was incensed about Marion Anderson not being welcomed somewhere because she was Black. So, I had always wanted to meet Marion Anderson, which I did.

PL: Were you friendly with Scoop Jackson?

BS: Very.

PL: What was your relationship, and how did you get to know each other?

BS: Because his best friend and best man at his wedding was my friend Stanley Golub.

PL: How does he spell his last name?

BS: G-O-L-U-B. He passed away, and his wife is my friend today. They live out here in Magnolia. And so, I met Scoop a long time ago and went to work at his office when he was running. He didn't need me. I said without me, he would have gotten only ninety-seven percent of the vote. He got ninety-eight because I was there. He was a very remarkable senator. I did not agree with him on a lot of things. But he was a remarkable senator. He was much more conservative than I. But he was a great man. He was wonderful to my family when we took them on this trip.

PL: He was also very popular within the Jewish community for a Republican Senator.

BS: Yes. Yes, he was.

PL: Was that a phenomenon that you can talk about?

BS: Yes, because he was that kind of a guy. He was a wonderful man.

PL: Were there any issues that he dealt with or made him ingratiated to the Jewish community?

BS: Yes, he was very responsive. Extremely sympathetic with Jewish interests. His wife was a very fine woman. She was here the other night for my party. She is a very nice woman. A very nice woman. Anyway, she was great, and so was Scoop. So, my husband voted for Scoop Jackson every time. My husband voted for Magnuson every time. He and Magnuson were of an age.

PL: Did your husband and you vote for different presidents?

BS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was never angrier with him than I was when he got me not to vote for Stevenson. I was crazy about Adlai Stevenson. But Edward Stern talked me out of it on account of – he said if I would vote for Eisenhower, my boys wouldn't go to war. Well, they wouldn't have gone to war anyway. But he talked me out of it, and I was so upset with him because I wanted to vote for Stevenson.

PL: Well, oftentimes couples who have different – one's a Democrat, one's a Republican – their position shift within their own parties. Did you talk a lot about politics in the household?

BS: Oh, did we ever. We argued about it a lot and talked about it a lot. Edward admitted – he said in our many years of marriage – because we were married forty-five years before he died. In our many years of marriage, he had become a much more liberal Republican, and I had become a much less wild Democrat. That was as far as we would get. Sometimes we voted together. But lots of times, we didn't. After that Stevenson episode, he was scared to death of me. I was furious. Just furious.

PL: To back up a little bit – because we never talked about how it was that you and Edward negotiated things like child-rearing and what were your different roles in rearing your children.

BS: Oh, he was a fine father. He was a very strict father but a fine father. And his sons always – as they grew older, they were very defensive of him. Because when I'd say you

don’t have to be so strict, they’d say, “Yes, he does.” [laughter] They were very defensive, and they were very fond of him.

PL: So, he was the disciplinarian?

BS: He was the disciplinarian.

PL: And you were?

BS: Softhearted. And I still am.

PL: With our grandchildren?

BS: Yes, pretty much so.

PL: So, what did it mean to think of yourself as a permissive or flexible parent? In what way did that manifest itself?

BS: Well, I could afford to be a flexible parent because I had Edward Stern to be the right kind of a parent. He was a great father.

PL: What did you and your children do together? What were the things that your family liked to do?

BS: Well, I was talking about our trips together. They loved our trips together. So, after we did the Bicentennial the following year, Edward and I went on a trip, and they were very upset with us because we didn’t invite them. Very upset. I said that is not every year thing. But the following year, we took them on a cruise to Alaska. Was that? Yeah, we took them on a cruise to Alaska. They loved that. They had a wonderful time on that cruise to Alaska. Yeah, we took them on a cruise to Alaska. They loved that. They had a wonderful time on that cruise to Alaska. Then, we were going to take them all for Grandpa’s seventy-fifth birthday. I think we were going to take them all. But he was too

sick, and he couldn't go. We stayed home, and we sent them all on a trip through the Panama Canal. They haven't gotten over it yet because they remember it very well. They wanted to come home from the trip. They knew he wasn't going to make it. They wanted to come from the trip. And they called and said they had made arrangements to come home that they were going to let them off the ship and let them come home. And Grandpa said, "If you come home, I'm not going to be here. But if you stay away, I'll be here when you get home." And he did. He struggled to stay alive. They came home in the afternoon. I don't know why I am so emotional about this. Ridiculous. Twenty-one years later. My kids say it's so unlike you. But he stayed alive until they got home, and he died that afternoon. He kept his word.

PL: A lot of strength.

BS: Yes, he had a lot of strength. A lot of strength he was a strong and darling man. Lovely man.

PL: So how did you make do after his death? What did you do?

BS: I went to work. Ten days after his death. I opened an office in the Smith Tower down there, that little Smith Tower, and to get for old people, for seniors – [to] find housing for seniors in King County was a big problem.

PL: Were you hired by someone, or did you go into business for yourself?

BS: I was hired by King County to use a grant that they got, and John Spellman had called me about it, and I was going to do it, but Edward was too sick, so I couldn't. I said I have to wait. I can't go now. I can't be away from him now. We fixed up my bedroom. I've got a hospital bedroom, and I fought with the doctors so I could get him home because I didn't want him in that hospital. Seeing all kinds of cancer patients. So, he came home. So then, ten days afterward, I opened up the Office for Housing for Seniors. There is another story, but it's getting very late, and you've listened for a long time.

Would you like something, would you like some cookies or –?

PL: We still have about – we have about thirty minutes on this tape, Bernice, and I'd be happy to hear your story.

BS: There are so many long stories.

PL: Go for it.

BS: About two days after I opened the office, I got a call: "This is Sister Francesca calling." And I said, "Well, how do you do, Francesca? Why are you calling me?" "Because I read in the paper that you are opening an Office for Housing for Seniors." I said, "That's right, I am. But for seniors in King County." And she said, "Well, we run an apartment house right across from what now is the Arena over there. You know, part of the Seattle Center." She said, "We have an elderly woman living on the third floor of the apartment house we run." She said, "My partner is also a sister, a Catholic sister, and we run this apartment house, and we have this woman on the third floor, and she is blind. She is a very bright woman, but she is blind. They are raising the rent in this apartment house. We don't have anything to do with it. Just manage it. They are raising the rent, and she can't afford to heat and eat and pay the raised rent. We would like to have you help us find some place for her to live." I said, "I would be glad to, but I don't find housing in the city. It has to be housing out in the County, and she is in the city now. We'll have to see what we can do about it." But I said, "I know an awful lot of people in this city, and maybe I can do something about it. I'll stop on my way home. I'm at the Smith Tower. I'll stop on my way home and meet you and see this lady." Okay. So, I did. They took me trudging up the three flights of stairs to her apartment, and of course, that was a long time ago. I met the lady, and she said, "Why are you bringing Bernice Stern to meet me? She's a Democrat, and I'm a Republican, and we won't get along at all." I said, "Well, I've been married for forty-five years to a man who is a Republican, and we got along very well. And I don't see any reason why I can't get along with you." So anyway, the

two sisters who were dressed just like I am – they didn't wear habits and don't now. They left me with her. She was the brightest woman. She knew more about politics than I could ever know. And she was a remarkable woman but very hostile about certain things. She didn't like Jews. I told her I was Jewish because she couldn't see I was Jewish. [laughter] I told her I was Jewish. So on and so forth. But we got along very well on other subjects. She was so well educated. Excellent woman. She was one of the three public accountants in Minnesota before she came out here – wherever she lived before she came out here. At any rate, when it came time to go, she said, "Will you come back and see me, Mrs. Stern?" I said, "I'm not Mrs. Stern. I'm Bernice. My mother-in-law was Mrs. Stern." And I said, "I want to know your first name." She said, "You don't know me well enough to call me by my first name." So, I said, "Well, then, I don't know you well enough to come and see you again." So, she very begrudgingly said I could call her by her first name, and she would call me Bernice, very begrudgingly. So, I left. I said, "I would like to come back and read to you." I said, "I've read to the blind, and I used to do Braille – a lot of it – when I was young and had good eyes. And I taught Braille." You may have read that in some of my stuff. But I said, "I'd like to come back and read to you and talk to you more about politics and what I am doing in politics." She would like that if I would do that. So, I started doing that. I said I would also like to know – you never go out except once a week to have your hair fixed. Why are you having your hair fixed if you're not going someplace?" "Because" she said, "it makes me feel better." I said, "Okay. That's a good reason." So, I said, "I want you to go someplace. I want to take you and these sisters downstairs to dinner. There is a new restaurant here, and we're going to go to dinner. Do you like that? Would you go?" She said yes, she would. So, we began having dinners once a month on Edward Stern. I said, Edward Stern is taking us to dinner. I'm not taking us to dinner. We went to dinner. And this woman died about three or four years after that, and she left a will. She didn't have any money. But she left a will, and she left $1,300.00 to me and $1,300.00 to each of the sisters. I put my $1,300.00 in an envelope and said this is to continue taking us out to dinner because the

two sisters were very sad. They were very upset because she died. But more upset because then I wouldn't come to see them anymore. I said, "Yes, I will." I'm still going to see them. Only one is at St. Vincent's Hospital. They are both older than I am, but that's pretty old. So, I see them still. They are wonderful women. They are very much a part of my life. Very much.

PL: This is a time when you started getting to know these women and working on the Housing Commission, but I am curious, Bernice, how it is that you dealt with the loss of your husband. Did you not, or were you taught not to? Was that something because your mother died when you were so young, and your parents both had untimely deaths? What was it about you that made you deal with your own husband's passing in this way? In an active, charge back into the next thing kind of way?

BS: I needed to be busy. I couldn't sit around here and have people come and call on me. I couldn't stand it. I missed him. But I've missed him more through this illness. I've been much more emotional about it.

PL: To your own illness?

BS: Through this illness. It's the dumbest thing. My kids can't understand me. They said, "You don't fuss about father. You didn't fuss about father for twenty-one years, and now you are beginning to fuss about father." I said, "I think I need him."

PL: You mention when you met with Robin, and she did the pre-interview with you – you said that you didn't want to – you did want to talk about the illness that you've recently – what you've been going through. I'm wondering if you can talk about what it is that you were diagnosed with and how you've managed.

BS: I've managed because my sons have been absolutely marvelous. I'll cry again. That's enough for one day.

PL: What were you diagnosed with, and how did you find out?

BS: Hydrocephalus, and I never had heard of it. Have you heard of hydrocephalus? Some people say they have. Now I've heard of hydrocephalus. I've heard about it in a lot of little, tiny babies. Babies born with big heads, abnormally big heads. But I've never heard of it in elderly women. But now I have. Now that I have it, I've heard about it. I've had two or three friends who have had it. I was in Palm Springs. My kids have been talking to me about how something was wrong with me because of the way I walked. I walked with a shuffling gait. There are three particular symptoms. See, we got a little Navy boat out here. See it? [Referring to ship seen from living room window] There are three symptoms of Hydrocephalus. One is a peculiar gait, a peculiar way of walking. Second one is incontinence. But I'm going to the bathroom. I can't say that. Isn't that awful? And third is loss of memory which you have any way at my age. So, I don't know whether my loss of memory is that or age. Anyway, those are the three biggest symptoms.

PL: Had you recognized any of those in yourself?

BS: I was very angry at my sons. Because they were making fun of me about the way I walked. They said there was something wrong, and I should have a test and find out what it is. He's coming to see what that Navy ship is [Referring to ship seen from living room window]. Anyway, they'd been telling me that there was something wrong with my walk for a long time, and I've said I'm going to stick around until you're eighty-two so I can make fun of you. Because that's not nice. It's my age. And not anything else. But they said it was something else. [telephone rings]

PL: So, you were saying something about a doctor in Palm Springs.

BS: A doctor in Palm Springs said something was wrong with me. He took a test of some kind. I went to have a test because my – the doctor who was treating me down

there said you ought to have this MRI. Is it MR? [telephone rings] Oh, the doctor in Palm Springs wanted to take a test and took an MRI, and he came back and said I have Hydrocephalus. Water on the brain.

PL: Was there any swelling?

BS: No. I don't think so. I didn't know what it was. So, my two sons came. David and Socco came. David came to Seattle to find the doctor down here who could operate because I'm not going to – the doctor said there are two things you do. One, you wait until it gets you, and then you die. You could have about one year for it to get worse. The other one is you have a shunt put in. It stops the water from being on your brain. So, I said, "Well, I don't want to have an operation, really, but if we can get somebody good who can do an operation fast, I'll do it." Because if he was going to wait for weeks or it's going to go on for months, I don't want to do it. Okay, David would find one. David came here. David's sister-in-law, Margaret Stern's sister, is married to Truman Katz. Truman Katz is the head of the Children's Hospital. David got in touch with Truman right away [and] came to Seattle to meet whoever Truman said would be good and fast. And he found a doctor, Dr. Winn, who is head of the Harborview Hospital in the neurological department [and] at the University of Washington. He's very nice, and he sent me flowers on my birthday. I thought that was darling. Doctors don't usually do that. So, David found the doctor, and Socco and his wife came to Palm Springs to be with me and brought me home. Because I said I wasn't going to have anything done in Palm Springs. All kinds of doctors down there, and they have all kinds of rich Jewish people, and they [the doctors] don't care for them much, I don't think, because they don't give them any attention. I wanted to come to Seattle if I was going to have any operation and be right here. So that's how it happened. He did an awfully good operation right here. He's one of the three best neurological surgeons in the United States. I've heard that since.

PL: How has your recovery been, and how are you feeling now?

BS: I feel fine. And my recovery has been a cinch. Just a cinch. Easy.

PL: Are there any – I don't know – distinct beliefs or practices that you have about illness or recovery that really kind of set in during this time that you believe that this is what one should do?

BS: One should be cared for. One should have the very best care. [telephone rings.]

PL: So maybe to rephrase that question, I guess I'm wondering what your attitudes are as you age and as you've been aging for a while. [laughter]

BS: As I age, I just want to stay well.

PL: Yes. So, what have been your attitudes around health practices? Have you looked at alternative medicine? Or have you gone for –?

BS: No. I don't look at medicine. I just keep going. And being very grateful that I'm so well.

PL: So, what advice would you give to women who are entering their seventies and eighties now about staying well?

BS: Stay well, and the Golden Age stinks. I just hate the Golden Age. It sucks.

PL: Why?

BS: Because I don't like being so old. I don't mind being old if I'm well, but I just hate this business of being old.

PL: What comes with that business of being old?

BS: Not being as involved as I used to be and remembering that I'm the great-grandmother, not the grandmother and keeping busy.

PL: So, what do you do to keep busy?

BS: Well, I'm tutoring mostly. Ever since I got off the – when I got off the Transportation Commission, I became a tutor. I heard about tutoring and decided that was the way to go. Because that's one thing that you can do when you're old, and they love to have grandmothers tutor and grandfathers. I'm a good reader. I'm good with little kids, I think. That's why I tutor at Beacon Hill School. I've stopped because they told my nurse – I had two nurses when I was going to go back, and both nurses said, "You're not ready to go back. You can't go back and tutor little kids." But you can. I will go as fast as I can. I tutor when I'm in Palm Springs. I go over to Cathedral City, which is near Palm Springs, and there is a school there where they love to have – where I have been tutoring for twelve years and here for twelve years.

PL: What has been the role of your women's networks and friends as you get older? Do they play any significant role in terms of –? Some women have walking groups, or they talk about –

BS: I play Bridge. A lot of Bridge. I'm a good Bridge player. Not great, but good.

PL: When did you start playing Bridge?

BS: I started playing Bridge when I was fifteen. But I didn't play as much when I was so active in the community because I couldn't. But now all my age group plays Bridge, and I have several good games here and several good games in Palm Springs.

PL: What other kinds of leisure activities do you –?

BS: I played tennis. I told you that, didn't I?

PL: I can't remember.

BS: I played tennis constantly when I was in Palm Springs. I stopped about a year ago, a year ago this last season, because, as I say, I could still hit the ball, but I couldn't get to it. And, of course, now I know that it wasn't just my age; it was Hydrocephalus because I couldn't walk fast enough to get to it. Couldn't run. So, I don't play. I would never start again at eighty-five. Now I couldn't run because I'm old.

PL: I understand that you also were a bowler.

BS: I was a good bowler. Not as good as Edward. Edward was a fine bowler. But I was a good bowler. I liked it very much. Now I couldn't – I have a bowling ball downstairs that I can't pick up.

PL: I'm just wondering –

BS: And I don't like that. You see, I hate – and I just hate it when I couldn't drive. I really bitched about that. That was awful.

PL: When did you stop driving?

BS: Because I couldn't drive after – the doctors wouldn't let me drive after my operation. Now I can drive. I can drive. My doctor found a doctor who knew me and who said that he would see me. He saw me. He found a woman to give me a test at the University of Washington. She says I can drive. And so I can drive. But I don't drive at night. That's fine with me. I don't care about driving at night. I don't go east of the lake unless Socco Jr. says it's all right.

PL: As someone who has witnessed not only a good part of the twentieth century but particularly Seattle's twentieth century –

BS: Yes.

PL: Could you maybe think of yourself as a historian of Seattle? I don't know if it has to do with particular issues, whether it's transportation or the recent events around WTO. But I'm wondering what –?

BS: Well, I'm not going to vote for Mayor Schell for dog catcher, and I'm so mad at him that he has the arrogance to think that people are going to vote for him. Do you think Seattle would be dumb enough to vote for him again? It just upsets me to no end.

PL: Well, I guess what I was wondering and including this, how have you seen Seattle –? You've witnessed Seattle grow tremendously. So maybe to conclude this interview, you could talk about how you have witnessed changes in yourself in Seattle.

BS: Let's talk about Seattle. I've talked about myself enough. I told you much more than you needed to know for any kind of interview. But, Seattle, I love. I think Seattle is a swell city. I don't think we're doing well now. I think we are doing poorly. Very upset about it. Very upset about the transportation, the traffic is terrible, and we aren't finding the answers to it. The legislature is not finding the answers to it. I'm very concerned about it. I don't like our leadership. I think it's terrible. Just terrible. I'm not happy with the leadership in the Legislature. I'm not happy with the leadership in Seattle. It's awful. I'm not happy with the people who are running for mayor. I'll find one. Greg Nickels – he's my choice right now. Because he's done a pretty good job. He can't be as bad as what we have now.

PL: As a former King County Councilwoman who has been out of the scene for a little while –

BS: To say the least.

PL: – what kind of power or clout do you have? Do you still have people's ears? Can you tell them what you think?

BS: No. I can tell them what I think. [laughter] But I don't think it has a lot of –she's a very old woman. To anybody young, I'm a very old woman. And I am. It's true. It's true. But I really am looking for leadership in this community. We need it badly. I haven't seen any rising leadership that's great. Now I can see you being a rising leader.

PL: Well, first of all, let me just say thank you. [laughter]

BS: Well, you're such a good listener.

PL: Well, since you're such a great mentor, perhaps during our break, you can help me cultivate my own leadership as you have done yours. You're an incredible model, Bernice, and I really want to thank you for the opportunity to interview you. Do you have any last words or things that you'd like to say? Or do you have a motto or a philosophy that you'd like to share to end this interview?

BS: Shut up, Bernice. [laughter] Shut up. You're an old lady, and you've said it all. [laughter]

PL: Thank you so much.

BS: Well, I enjoyed you very much. Now, what can I do for you?

[END OF INTERVIEW]