Naomi Rosenblatt Transcript

DR: Let's start with your childhood. I know you grew up in Israel, so talk a little bit about that.

NR: This is like a baptism: It's the first time that I'm talking in public and mentioning my age. I grew up when that was not done. I never knew how old my mother was, or how old my father was, and we never talked about money. That was considered impolite, and not subject for conversation, but at this point I'm either letting it out, or what's it all about? So, I was born in 1933 and my father, a historian by education and by temperament, was always pointing to the context of that particular day. He was always reminding me—tactlessly if I may add—even when I was very little, that I was born three weeks before Hitler came into power. This was in Haifa, the land of Israel, which was under the British at the time, and called Palestine. My father came from Glasgow, Scotland. The family arrived in England in the early 1800's from Holland. England had kicked out the Jews in the 12th Century after the Massacre of York, a ghastly memory, and when Cromwell came into power he opened up the gates and the Jews were allowed in. And my great- great- great-grandfather—the yiches in my family—was the chief Rabbi of London. The family was traditional, but the Glasgow Jewish community was small, even maybe a little provincial. My father graduated from the University of Edinburgh, and then went on to the University of Rome where he was studying the Classics, and he spoke four languages or more—Italian, German, Russian, Hebrew and obviously English. At the time he was studying there a group of Russian Jewish idealists, with their hair flying, were on their way to Palestine: chalutzim, pioneers. This was a new animal he had never come across before, the Eastern European rebels in many ways, and he decided, well, he'll go and see what's happening in Palestine, too, and it was under the British Mandate.

DR: Do you know the year?

NR: 1920.

DR: Was he married?

NR: No. He came to see what it was like. He came to Palestine and fell in love with the whole idea of Jewish history, its continuity, its relationship with that country. He always said--which I've never forgotten--that the Jews have, like a bird, a homing instinct back to the nest. That it was just so natural to settle there, even though it was a very small English speaking Jewish community then. He stayed on. Nobody else in his family came. He always loved Scotland by the way. It wasn't that he didn't like Scotland. But the idea of Israel, and Jewish history talked to him more. My mother was born in Western Canada, Manitoba, Winnipeg. My maternal grandfather left Russia when he was seventeen—Moses Abrahamson—you couldn't get a better name! I don't think he was married. He came and fell in love with England. Why? He was a poor immigrant boy, highly intelligent, but with no secular education of any kind. He would walk in the streets of London, lose his way, and ask a British policeman where was the East Side of London, Threadneedle Street, where the little Jewish population lived. And the British bobby, the policeman, would jump off the horse, and walk for a few blocks to show him. My grandfather was so touched, coming from Russia with a Tsarist tradition, where they would have kicked him rather than jump off a horse. Every few blocks he did the same thing to see what it felt like. So he fell for England. But he decided that with a name like Moses Abrahamson it was too cohesive a society for him to really feel that he could ever belong. At that time the English were doing two things. They gave people who wished homesteading in Western Canada: you got land, and if you worked it, it was yours. It was 50 below zero, so very tough. No central heating. And then in 1917 the British under the Balfour Declaration came out saying that they're in favor of helping the Jews reestablish their ancient homeland. My grandfather moved to Winnipeg.

His only son became a Rhodes Scholar--that's from a Yiddish-speaking family, not bad!

I’m so proud of it. He had a high level of intellect even without a secular education; he’d been in yeshivot, and a cheder, and he was elected to the board of education of Winnipeg. In fact the people of Winnipeg—all immigrants from Ireland, from Ukraine--they thought he was talking in Hebrew. His language was not great, his Yiddish and English—that’s how he campaigned. After the British came out with their declaration in 1917, he said, “I’m leaving.” And he asked the girls, there were three sisters by then. The wife, obviously, would go with him. Nobody ever asked her what she wanted. It didn’t occur to her. And the three girls, oh, yes, they would love to go. Not for great religious reasons, I don’t think they were even that Zionist, but it was the idea of going to a warm climate, the Mediterranean, and to go with their father. So they came to Palestine in 1920. Eventually my mother and father, belonging to the English-speaking community, got to know each other, married, and eventually begot me. We lived in Haifa.

DR: What did your father do?

NR: At first he worked on, I guess you’d call it PR today, for the Rothschild Foundation. It was called PICA. The French Rothschilds bought land, and settled people. Rosh Pina up in the Galilee was theirs, and the first wine cellars, in Zichron Yaacov, were the Rothschilds’. He worked in that foundation. Then he became an art critic. That was really his first love. He wrote for the Jerusalem Post.

DR: He was an intellectual.

NR: Oh, completely! My two parents, we never discussed money! They feasted on ideas. Argued about it, laughed about it.

DR: What do you remember of life during the Mandate Period?

NR: I remember two periods, and I can cut it with a knife like a cake. The first was the beginning of the Second World War, that’s 1941-42. Our house was full of British officers who were stationed then in Haifa. They’d come at five o’clock, nobody’s staying for

dinner because you were rationed. My mother would sit, this great hostess with her gingersnaps and tea, and the house was full of these Central Casting looking individuals, these officers, and they always helped clear the table; their manners were terrific and formal but great.

We loved the British, I mean they were fighting the Germans. Had they not fought the Germans in the African theater--with Rommel they were coming up through Egypt up to Palestine--they would have gobbled us up because we were a Jewish community. So we were very close, my parents spoke English, and this was English. It was very comfortable. Endless cups of tea. Great conversation. And they were brave because they were going off to war. So you always had that, that war is like a Greek chorus. It gives everything a sense of intensity. One of them who came along to the house said good-bye, and I remember running to the bedroom and crying. He was going off to the battles in Italy. Then he was killed. There was always that in the background. I was very young. I didn't really know what was going on with the Haganah that was slowly getting organized very quietly, but we were still with the British. When the Second World War was over Jewish immigration was being stopped from coming in to the country. The remnant of Jewry from Europe, these wretched immigrants, and I say wretched with love and compassion, so traumatized from their losses, so different than us, the born Israelis. We never knew anything like that. They were coming in, and I remember after '46 the relationship with the British stopped. No more people came into our house. Every so often there were these illegal ships coming into the Haifa Port. In the middle of the night they would be smuggled in and the Haganah and the younger group, the Palmach, distributed them all over the kibbutzim so the next day when the British would come to see where are these "illegal" immigrants you couldn't recognize them. So you had these stories all the time.

DR: Did you have a sense of living through a moment of history, or were you too young to appreciate that?

NR: The school that I went to, Reali, really shaped me in many ways. My family too. I was always aware, without being chauvinistic, that I was unique as a Sabra, no question about it. When I walked down the street to my school I was aware of the blue sky, I was aware of the blue Mediterranean, I felt as free as could be! So strong; I felt unique, not arrogant—people don't understand that about the Israelis—It's not a matter of arrogance, it's a matter of self-confidence that emerges out of a series of overcoming huge difficulties and prevailing, and that we were always so small in number. I felt that. We had a badge on our school uniform, a sentence out of the prophet Micah, but underneath it my mother had to sew a yellow badge so we could identify with what the Jews in Europe had to wear. But whereas for them it was to humiliate, for us it was tremendous self-confidence. I couldn't believe that I was so fortunate, not because I was great, but that I was part of this generation. My secret, in a way, and I've only begun to connect the dots, was that I could identify more easily with the Biblical characters, the David's, the Abigail's, the Sarah's, the Jacob's, than with European history in the last 2000 years of Diaspora, basic on and off persecution.

DR: At this age, you were already identifying with the Biblical heroes.

NR: Yes, but unselfconsciously. My family wasn't observant at all. The connection was always with the Biblical text. This was our history; that's why we're in this land. Otherwise, we could have gone off to Uganda, which was suggested to us, with no problems, lots of water, eventually oil. The language was mine, the land was mine, the characters were mine. I identified with Rebecca and her problems, and with David. I always had a soft spot for him. I would have run off with him. I'm putting this is exaggerated terms.

DR: What do you remember about the War of Independence?

NR: I must have been 15. What's so interesting about our upbringing, which is so different from what you see in the countries surrounding Israel, is that the word "revenge"

never entered the vocabulary. “Hatred” per se, never had entered the vocabulary. My upbringing was Haganah, and then Palmach. Those were my heroes. We were being prepared in our school. We used to stand for hours in the schoolyard with a uniform on. When the State was declared, I remember our principal, Dr. Biram, stood in front of us, we were sweating, for more than an hour listening, and he said there were going to be—that’s how we were always brought up—it was never emphasis on victory, nitzachon, it was overcoming, prevailing. Those were the verbs. It’s very important to remember that. And he said, “This is going to take more than 100 years before everything settles down. There have to be difficulties, you can’t create something new, and it’s not without the difficulties.” And, of course, the endless sacrifices, the sacrifices. And that will go on. As we stand like this (arms behind back) in our starched uniforms, sweat underneath my armpits, and the responsibility’s on your shoulders. You’re responsible for this, and for the Jewish people. We were always brought up with that sense of responsibility and what I realize today is the more he heaved it on us, the broader our shoulders became. It gave you a sense that you were bigger than just little Naomi Harris living opposite the Persian Gardens in Haifa.

DR: Do you still carry that feeling today?

NR: It was put into my DNA. Now that doesn’t mean that I’ve done anything about it, that I’ve lived up to it, or fulfilled it. No. But that was there, no question about it. We studied the Bible because that was our history. Nobody asked me if I believed in God, and nobody asked me about Kashrut.

DR: Do you think there’s an Israeli personality?

NR: Yes, just as there’s a Jewish personality. Obviously part of the Israeli personality is Jewish personality. But there is a uniqueness about it because of the history.

You asked me about the War of Independence. My mother’s sister, Canadian, also by

sheer coincidence happened to marry a Scottish Jew. They had an only son, Danny. Charming, handsome, Palmach. He was seven years older than me. When the War of Independence was starting he asked the Palmach can he now go to England to study marine biology. And they said no, we need you here. That was that. So he joined the Palmach. As the state was being declared, his mother said to him, “Danny, Daddy was just offered a high position in England because of his British nationality. He wants to leave.” Danny’s last words were, “Tell Daddy that if he ever leaves this country, I will never talk to him again.” Those were his last words. He joined a Palmach kibbutz. They were really heroes. The war broke, and he was the head of security in this tiny little kibbutz overlooking the Lake of Galilee, the Kinneret. We had no arms then, nothing, when the Arabs all attacked. People always forget that. And a truck went by of the Palmach looking for volunteers to go down to the Jordan Valley. Danny took six boys with him. His last words were, “Don’t worry, I’ll bring them all back.” He was the only one who was brought back, dead. He was buried overlooking the Lake of Galilee. So the Israeli is different. The ultimate pressure that maybe you might give your life for what you believe in. How many of us have to give our own life for what we believe in? We’re never tested to such a degree.

DR: You grew up during this very tumultuous and significant time in Israeli and in Jewish history, and then you have lived the rest of your adult life in the States.

NR: Peter (husband) came to Israel in 1949. He was 15 and had just lost his mother. He came as a visitor. His father didn’t know what to do with him, he was difficult, he was taciturn, cranky. He had just lost his mother. People didn’t go to therapy in those days, not that that always makes such a difference. We were introduced because his aunt said, Look, there’s a little girl down the street, Nomi Harris, she talks English. From the minute we met, that was the beginning. I brought him into my youth movement, which, by the

way, is another very important element in what shaped me. He was with me in my group and we went down to a kibbutz every summer, to work on the land. It really was like that. Peter grew up in New York, went to Riverdale Country School for Boys. At that time the family lived in the Plaza Hotel. So going to this little new kibbutz up in the Galilee, it was all new, but he was so tactful. He never, never mentioned that he was living on any other standard of living. It didn't occur to me even. I was always aware of that uniqueness, or being "chosen" in Biblical terms, but heavy with responsibility. There was never arrogance tied to it, because the price is always so heavy.

DR: Do you feel you have two homes?

NR: That's such a good question. I've never even allowed myself to put it that way. I always say leaving Israel is like leaving a teenager that hasn't really finished growing up. You always feel responsible, you always want to know, and I love it, it's part of me. It's who I am, that's the basis. On the other hand, I was brought up by a Canadian mother, who was a great nationalist when it came to Israel, no question about it, no ambivalence of any kind. Nobody would cross our doorstep if they were too critical. But she also recited Emma Lazarus' poem, "Bring me your tired…" So there's a love for this country. No, there is a deep love for this country, and I always say if, God forbid, America were attacked, my children would have to go to war. I'm not talking about Afghanistan, or Iraq, or whatever, but if this land were attacked. Am I worried about the Jewish community in this country? You bet! I think it's very different. If you would ask me, Nomi, what's your purpose now at this point in life? It is the concept of identity. How do you forge a Jewish identity in a highly seductive society, and secular? No matter what they call it, it's so seductive. In a country where choice is turned into an idol, you can choose to be a Shinto, or whatever. I think for a minority that's less than 2% of the population so much is left to the individual parent to decide what identity they want to transmit and how will they do it. The last thing I'll say on this is growing up in Washington, watching the presidents, each president is part of the country, but each president has his own rules, so Kennedy

had his Irish mafia, and Carter had his southern people, and Johnson the Texans. Yes he had a lot of Jewish brains all around him to help, and also Roosevelt. But when Roosevelt went to relax on his boat, he had the good old boys from boarding school. So we must have a womb. And we must give our children their own identity, Jewish, but you have to do so much about it. You can't just sit back the way you can in Israel. That is the big, big advantage of growing up there. My mother never had to worry whom I would marry.

DR: When you came here, did you ever feel like an outsider or a minority? Was getting acculturated difficult?

NR: It's interesting, and everybody can only talk about their own case. Peter was then going into his junior year at Yale, where a lot of the people were like Bush's father, very much part of a cohesive group, and I liked them very much. I got along with them better than I did with my Jews who were at Yale at that time. The WASP was very similar to me. He had his identity, I had my identity. I went to a very good school in Israel, so I wasn't impressed by the academic standard of Yale. I felt that I could contribute to them. That's part of Israeli self-confidence, which I'm afraid I'm losing maybe. But again, never arrogance. The time it struck me that I had to make a decision, that I needed to belong, especially coming from a communal sense of life in Israel, which is unbeatable, unbeatable, was during Christmas. That really hit me below the belt. There they were walking around singing the carols, which are out of this world, they're so beautiful. They tear your heart apart they're so full of longing. I hear them talking about King of Israel? I didn't know what they were talking about. I thought it was my Israel, and my king! Like David, the Jewish folk song—my David, my Israel. And then I said to Peter, I have to belong to something. What do I belong to? I'm not them, and I don't want to be them. The last thing on that is we went to a party at somebody from the Our Crowd group, the Lehman's, a magnificent townhouse: Renoirs, Matisses on the walls, and a huge, magnificent Christmas tree. Mrs. Lehman greets us at the door, "Merry, Merry

Christmas!" I was wondering to myself, "What is she so merry about? The birth of that very interesting Jewish boy in Bethlehem has given us 2000 years of such misery and you're celebrating his birth!" And then, what was Christmas to most of the Jews of New York? I went to the second floor of the Plaza, I looked at Bergdorf-Goodman, and there were hundreds of women standing the day after Christmas to give back their gifts. Anyway, the Bible is my access to my identity.

DR: Let's talk a little bit about your career. I think of you as having dual interests in careers, one as a psychotherapist, the other is as a Bible scholar. Which came first?

NR: Because I'm a therapist, I always have to go back and back and back. When I left Israel, I had nothing with me, because we didn't buy things at that time. But one of the things I took with me was my Bible, even though I didn't open it. But it was mine. As I look back, now friends of mine remind me that in New York, where we lived for ten years, I began talking about it. But I don't remember sufficiently if I did have a group around the table or not. And then I taught while Peter was at Yale; I was sent then to New Haven State Teachers' College. I began teaching Bible and Hebrew in a little synagogue in Waterbury, Connecticut. So obviously it was there all the time, although I had not institutionalized it as yet. Then when I came to Washington and Peter joined the government, and my mother always brainwashed me to get a profession where I can support myself in case of…always. She was a lawyer when she left Canada. I went to Catholic University to get my degree.

There is no question in my mind that the study of the Bible and the approach in which we were taught it with its emphasis on the humanity of the individuals, not being good, not bad, brought me to therapy. And that's when I started, and I loved my psychotherapy practice.

DR: So the two meshed together.

NR: Yes, it was human nature being discussed from different aspects.

DR: Do you think psychotherapy is a Jewish endeavor?

NR: Yes. One of my gods with a small “g” is Freud. Jews don’t understand him, but he was a Jew. The fact that he didn’t transmit it to the next generation is the part that upsets me. He had no question, or ambivalence about who he was. He rebelled, he was a scientist. Anything you’d give him, he’d be questioning. But his father studied the Bible in Hebrew, his mother came from a long line. The Biblical tradition of hundreds of years of constantly interpreting and interpreting and peeling the onion, is what prepared Freud for psychoanalysis. And he took the Biblical point of view about human nature, the id, and so forth, and then refined it through laws, and your conscience and God, and it became psychoanalysis. That was his genius.

DR: In your books you’ve written about the Biblical heroes as being really very human and flawed people. In a modern age when we’re looking all around us for people to inspire us and lead us, why do you think people still come back to the Bible?

NR: Right, these are so profound, your questions. They’re very good, and I don’t want to answer superficially. I first would say the Bible approaches us, the reader of the Biblical narrative, as adults. Right from the start, they’re not deities. So we’re already drawn into the text with respect. We hear about David’s lust, and we hear about poor Sarah’s jealousy of that Hagar, and on and on. However, at the end, they prevail. Even without telling you that. David remains King, God doesn’t take him off the throne. Sarah’s children are eventually the ones who continue the Jewish tradition. It’s not against Hagar. She marries her son off to an Egyptian girl, and eventually they found the oil. Jewish women are so upset about Hagar. You could read my book, I feel very differently about it! Sarah in the end prevails, and Hagar prevails. Because Jewish continuity is so important, the fact that those first four mothers, our founding mothers prevailed, is why you and I are here today. That’s their victory. What were the ingredients they put in that got us to

continue? Even though we argue about Rebecca's choice, and was Rachel too jealous of her sister? Despite their feet of clay, they overcame, and they prevailed.

DR: Do you think this has a parallel in modern Israeli history as well?

NR: What do you mean?

DR: When you spoke about what you were taught as a schoolgirl, not to give up, and accept this burden…

NR: That's all Biblical, right. It's Biblical in origin. Look, I worry about my Jews in this country so much. I mean our kids go to universities with a whole Moslem contingent today that has a strong Moslem identity. There's passion there. Our kids don't have that passion unless they're very religious to protect their identity. Without passion a tiny group cannot survive. That doesn't mean you're better, it has nothing to do with being better or worse. What did David do? His whole life he was protecting the borders. When I taught on the Hill to the group of Senators, I used to say to them, we're learning now about David. Nothing has changed: we're still busy protecting the borders.

DR: I'd like to talk about your Hill study class. This is something you're kind of famous for, leading a weekly Bible study class on the Hill. How did that come about?

NR: First of all, we kept it secret. I'm a therapist. So everything I do, nobody knew who was there. We had Republicans and Democrats.

DR: Were they all Jewish?

NR: No, Jews are always the minority in everything. Mormons, Catholics, but I taught my Jewish Bible, I don't make any bones about it, with an Israeli background, certainly, knowing those places, and the language. Arlen Specter, just now retired, was with Peter a few years older in law school. When he won his first election we all had dinner together,

and I said to him, Arlen, the Hill is full of these Bible classes, most of them Evangelical, nobody even knows about it. In England, the Parliament isn't filled with people studying the Bible, or France. It's just in this country it's so important. And we're the ones who began the tradition of study and interpretation. That's why we're such good psychotherapists, constantly interpreting and reinterpreting. So he turns to me out of the blue, and he said, Nomi, why don't you start? There kicks in the Israeli upbringing. I can hear my mother saying, Nomi, what came on you? I said well, of course, I'll do whatever I'm asked to do.

I said to him, Arlen, I don't know one Senator from another. They really don't mean that much to me. He said to me, Don't worry. I'll get the Senators, you do the teaching. So the next week with my Bible, like Elmer Gantry, I went into the elevator of the Senate and started. We usually had ten, and some of the spouses started coming. It went on until with the security it makes it too difficult.

DR: Were there particular Torah stories, or Bible stories that they were most responsive to or interested in?

NR: Two things. First of all the ethics, and to show them how democracy and its seeds come from our Bible, and that the founding fathers of this country understood it and used it in their vision for the new America, the New World. That was my agenda. I wanted to push something. I wanted to show that. For example, this is a little example, David lusting for Bathsheba. It was a time when Billy Clinton was busy with one of our girls, Monica. One of our discussions, and we brought it to a high level, it wasn't about the giggling or anything, was: to what degree do you judge a leader by how he conducts his very personal life? Is there a crossover?

I asked my father that about Dayan, the general with the black patch, who was a rather popular ladies' man, and he said, No, you can't judge a person by so-forth and so-on, just

as he would say you can't judge Henry VIII because of what he did with his wives, he was great for England. So we came to Billy Clinton, and we discussed the connection, or lack of it, between private life and governance. That was a great discussion. And then, again, the Ten Commandments, how basic! You can't strip them away any more because they're down to the basics. The non-Jewish Senators were taken by this freedom to question and interpret without being allowed to take out one word of the Biblical narrative, or add a word. Otherwise it would be Reader's Digest.

DR: Do you feel people come to the Bible and interpret it as a reflection of themselves?

NR: I think it also depends on the teacher. I think a good teacher is able to give two messages: one, with a Jewish teacher, that this is a holy book that you love and revere in its entirety, and the freedom again, only we are given that "difficulty", if you would, to interpret and reinterpret and reinterpret, and make it our own. By interpreting and interpreting and getting involved in these people's lives as the Bible exposes, they become yours. You identify with Rebecca. What should you do with one child who's difficult and one child who's responsible?

DR: Is there a Bible character that you particularly identify with?

NR: There are two. I identify with Rebecca's loneliness, I assume, of leaving everybody in her part of the world and joining a family with that strong mother-in-law, Sarah, in the background, although she's dead by then, and a husband who's much older and the difficulties. I identify with her on that loneliness which I had to deal with.

The woman that I highly respect because I like her self-confidence, that doesn't mean always arrogance, and intelligence when she deals with David, is Abigail when he's about to destroy her family. I think that's Chapter 25 in Samuel I. She's a great woman, and that's why President Adams' wife, Abigail, is just like her. They knew their Bible better than most of us, our Bible. The way she handles David who's about to murder her

husband and the whole hacienda on which she lives, her savviness, her tact, her diplomacy, and in the end, she prevails. He acknowledges that she has saved him from spilling blood. And that's one of the pedagogical lessons on his way to becoming our greatest king. But full of feet of clay.

DR: What do you want your students to learn from your Torah study classes?

NR: If they are Jews—99 percent are Jews—I feel they leave my classes, using a cliché now, six feet tall, because they suddenly connect to a history that they never knew of. It's their history! I mean we are so lucky to have this ancient document. There is no other people in the world that has it. And we have archaeology today. I mean it's unusual. We are unique. Difficult? Pains in the neck? Stiff-necked? For sure. But this is ours. So they go away with a very strong sense of their Jewish identity, free to keep any level of observance they want. The second thing is the spiritual message, that there are things bigger than ourselves and I hope that I convey a transcendent sense of what we're doing.

DR: Are you ever surprised in the interest people show in wanting to participate in learning about the Torah?

NR: No, I'm upset when they don't show interest. I'm upset that they don't show interest, and I go to anywhere that I can to spread the word. That's my calling, that's my warpath.

DR: You've written two wonderful books, Wrestling With Angels, about the characters…

NR: The first four generations of Genesis, and then After the Apple, that's chronicling the lives of seventeen women, an interpretation of the modern woman, but always based on the discipline, that's the narrative. That's where the rub comes in.

DR: Do you think that being a woman affects how you see these stories?

NR: No question about it, no question about it. The fact that the rabbis had the gall, or the chutzpah, and I say this with love for them, the gall to tell Sarah that she shouldn't have kicked Hagar out after she was carrying on with her husband right next door! Any woman worth her salt would want to protect her marriage, whatever the price is. Or being angry with Rachel that she was punished by God because she didn't wait long enough to become fertile, that where was her faith? The same thing with Rebecca, was her choice correct? Should she have had more faith, and let God intervene? I get very upset because I totally identify with the women.

That doesn't mean that I don't feel compassion for Jacob, who didn't know how to deal with Rachel and her pain, or Abraham, who didn't know how to deal with Sarah's jealousy, even though she's the one who suggested to bring in a concubine. With Abigail? If anybody's got a child who wants to be a cinematographer, the story of Abigail and David and how she handles him in that speech, there's no soliloquy in Shakespeare that's more brilliant than Abigail's speech to David and all of us should study it, the role of diplomacy and tact.

DR: She was an early feminist.

NR: Abigail? Yes, without having to have a label. I'm not angry at the men. You have to judge every generation by the context of their period.

DR: Do you consider yourself a feminist?

NR: I don't have labels. I was in the Navy, in the Israeli Navy. I always felt equal to the men around me, but that was my mother. My mother, had she lived in England, may have been a suffragette. On the other hand, my mother always talked about the difficulty that men have in the case of her generation, of proving themselves, the competitive world that they're thrown in on. Ultimately, she would say, we make children, we have something that nobody can take away from us. The male doesn't have that. She was

always very compassionate about their issues. I was never brought up to compete with men. I was what I was to the best of my ability.

DR: I think you were very progressive in that way, having a career and…

NR: But that was Israeli, my upbringing again, that was my school.

DR: Did you find it difficult to combine work and family?

NR: Yes, you're always guilty, always. It goes with the territory, there's nothing we can do about it. Peter was in Vietnam then, when he worked in the White House. I don't think he was conflicted, as much as any time I am with a patient any time the children are still at home after school.

DR: What advice would you give to a young Jewish woman?

NR: Now I sound sort of cliché-ridden. Before anything, or doing, learn your history. Learn your history. You've got role models in the Bible. You can agree with them or not, but they're yours. They're your personal property. They're your grandmothers. OK, we move away from that. I would say that women should remember their lives are sequential. We are unique. The male doesn't have the choices that we do. Get a very good education, find a direction that you can be passionate about. Anything, zoology, painting, running a business, anything. Find a direction. Today we get married much later. Maybe that's good, although you've got the biological clock. There's no free lunch, as they say in Washington. The idea is to balance everything. That in itself is a life-long quest, which in a way is challenging. At this age, (talking about myself for a change), I've got grandchildren in another city. I've got a marriage here. My husband is still very involved, and so forth. I'm dying to be with those grandchildren. Do I leave him, and go off to the grandchildren? And what about my work? Women are always conflicted, but I think the goal is that you can have it all if you acknowledge the opposite: that life is a balance, that having it all is arriving at the peace of knowing that this is what life is about.

It’s not supposed to be a plateau where you can just sort of fall asleep and be relaxed. No. Life is not a plateau, and if you can arrive at the peace that you as a woman have a certain uniqueness because, if you wish to have children, that it’s sequential, start education, start a career, or at least a direction. You might have to take time off for children. I think they need you. Today, if I may add one more propaganda to my Bible with Sarah, she’s such a great example, we are beyond menopause longer than we’ve ever ever been in history--20, 30 years. So if you have some foundation that you can come back to, some people are upset about the empty nest. If you’ve neglected your marital relationship, and you’re alone when the children leave, then what is there? Have you completely destroyed that intimacy that you can enrich or devote more time to? It’s not going to suddenly fall from the sky like manna. There always has to be a level of awareness.

When you read Sarah, she starts being part of a new calling, a new religion, when—it’s the Bible, I mean just read what’s in there—she’s beyond childbearing age. They don’t use that miserable word, menopause. It’s more poetic, “after childbearing age”. She and Abraham start a whole new religion. There is nothing like that in any other faith where a middle-aged woman takes on a calling. And that’s an example for us: prepare for when they leave the nest.

DR: In an earlier conversation that we had, you said something that I wrote down because I found it very meaningful. You said that “to be Jewish is to be resilient in the face of injustice”. Do you want to elaborate on that?

NR: Right, yes. I feel that very deeply. Again, going back to Genesis. When you read Adam and Eve, one of the first lessons is that the first line of defense is to scapegoat somebody else. Adam accuses her, she accuses him, etc. When we bring it now to Jewish history, I think we’re a metaphor to all of that. We’re a tiny minority wherever we are. So now politically, when other countries are upset about their poverty, about

whatever, who's the scapegoat? We. And we're put together with America, which is a joke. America—huge and rich, and we're six million in Israel. Everything we have was done through character. There is injustice, there's constant injustice. We've just come out of the Second World War. We lost six million individuals. When you're a member of such a tiny group you are always subjected somewhere along the line to being scapegoated for somebody else's problems, resentment, jealousy. I traveled with my husband in Europe last summer, and I suddenly looked at him and I said, "You know, there's no country in Europe where we haven't been exiled from: Holland, in the Second World War, Anna Frank." So, what am I going to do? Become bitter about the world? No. We've got Israel today, thank God. We're not just a group of minorities meandering around the world at the mercy of any dictator or of any change of mood as we see in England today. You cannot become bitter. Instead, go back to who you are, appreciate it, respect it, be proud of it. Now I feel like I'm talking too many clichés, but right, being Jewish is living with the ability to live with injustice and yet hold on to your ideals.

DR: I know you're working on a personal memoir. What are you reflecting on as you do that?

NR: It's built around the kernel, an authentic diary, an historical document that I kept, day by day, from 1947, the year before the state, into '52, into my marriage in America. I look back, and it's a story of a generation who planted the seeds for what Israel is today, and for us in the Diaspora to gain strength from, to help, to be critical. This whole rich relationship, that goes back to Biblical times. We haven't invented this bond between Israel and the Diaspora Jewry. It's a combination of pride, joy, and aching pain. I can't describe it any other way. That's the combination: tremendous joy, what's more joyous than sitting in a crowded café in Tel Aviv? It's so full of vitality. But the price is, has been, for anything that you love, you must pay a price. But also grateful. I'm not answering you exactly. That's the diary of those years. I'm writing now a long introduction of the years previous to that, my particular upbringing and what was going on in the country. It's not

so much about me, it's only important because it gives you a tapestry of something else. I'm doing an afterward, and I'm quoting Gluckl of Hamlin. It's a wonderful diary of a German Jewish woman in the 17th century where she also says, "You must have a rudder in life. You must have your compass. Go back to the Torah." She was very Orthodox, which I am not. I'd give anything, I'd give a few years of my life to talk with her. Study it, because that's the rudder, that's the rope you hang on to when life is stormy. Or, today, if you're a Zuckerberg, and you're so bloody rich, what are your obligations, whomever you marry, to the generations that brought you to the point where you are today? Genes, curiosity, analytical. He is very much a product of a particular group, if he knows it or not. I think that American Jews, yes, have an obligation, obviously to the country where we live, no question about it. But always to our own background, that's Israel and to our heritage, or we're nothing. If you love everybody in the end you love nobody.

[END OF INTERVIEW]