Anne A. Jackson Transcript

[Note from Peter Jackson: Edited only for a bit of clarity and a few names.]

Judith Rosenbaum: This is an interview with Anne Jackson. I am sitting with her in her home in Brookline, Massachusetts. It is July 10, 2000, and the interview is being conducted by Judith Rosenbaum. So, maybe we can begin if you tell me briefly about your childhood.

Anne A. Jackson: About my early background?

JR: Yes.

AJ: My father was unusually Orthodox. At 4:30 in the morning, he had his tzitzis on, and he was at temple. We lived about two doors from a temple. A small one. My mother was the antithesis to my father. I don't know how they arranged marriages in Russia [or perhaps Belarus or even Ukraine; no one is sure], but my mother was flamboyant. She was attractive, and she was very vivacious and very open to anything that was new, and very charity-minded. She was a doer and a mover. In giving the interview, the early interview that I did, I stressed very strongly that I adored my father. I just felt that his sense of justice and his – for a man as religious as he was, to understand about intermarriage and to not impose difficulties but to try to understand the nature of what love was all about. And he was extremely responsive to a niece of mine who was marrying a Catholic, and he was becoming a Jew, but in the meantime, he wasn't. I had tremendous resentment as I matured later on in life against my father's lack of forcing me to learn Hebrew and fitting me into a world of understanding. I find that I was so deprived, so deprived, that when I entered Temple Israel, Temple Israel seemed overwhelming for me. I adored my father and respected him, but had a terrible feeling about – not at that time, but when I grew older and matured, very mature, because I was

a fly-by-night in terms of activity and being involved. I didn't care whether you were Black or Chinese; I was that kind. So that's a comment on my background. I had no Hebrew, and when we joined Temple Israel, my husband and I took a course in basic Hebrew, but I'd go to temple, and he'd push me along. He did a little better than I did. That part of my life is very, very lacking, and I feel, maybe it's my age, but I feel it was a tremendous deprivation.

JR: Why is it that your father didn't push you to be more educated? Was it because you were a girl? Or because he wasn't –?

AJ: I haven't been able to explain it, but I think it was because I was a girl. He didn't feel the need of it. I don't know what it was, but I never discussed it with him. He wasn't home long enough to discuss anything with me. He went to bed at nine o'clock or 8:30 because he was in shul at 4:30 in the morning. We were brought up – if you were locked out of the house, if my father was at home, only you couldn't get in. You wouldn't push the button. He was fanatical, fanatical. I think it's fanaticism, and I think we're seeing it now in Israel and so on.

JR: Right.

AJ: So, I learned not to appreciate some of the things that the Orthodox – and my brother was Mendel Fischer, who flew with Chaim Weitzmann in an open cockpit when were they flying to develop Palestine, and he was the head of the Jewish National Fund of America, so I had – it's sort of a dichotomy because in my family I had a brother who was so for Israel that he – we all would have moved there tomorrow, the day after, but it was impossible. He was very inspiring. But the young ones coming along in the family – he wasn't inspiring. They thought he was crazy. They'd say, "Russia, you talk about Russia? That ugly country? What's that got to offer us?"

JR: How many were you in your family?

AJ: Five. And my brother Mendel was second in age. And he was very, very – he was just born with Zionism in his blood.

JR: Were you all born here or in Russia?

AJ: Four of them were born in Russia. My brother Mendel came from Russia [Belarus]. There were three boys and two girls. I was the only one that was born here.

JR: Where and when were you born?

AJ: In 1909, in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

JR: That's where my grandmother was born as well.

AJ: Really? Now, was her family Rosenbaum?

JR: No. Actually, she was Teitelman at the time. Now she's Hyman.

AJ: We have relatives Teitelman.

JR: Oh.

AJ: I'm sure the Jews who came over from Russia were all sort of intermingled, you know.

JR: So you were the youngest?

AJ: Yeah, the youngest. And I was, as I looked back – my grandchildren are all doers. I have a very, very exciting family. I don’t know whether you know my son, Ira. Do you know, he's just been appointed at Harvard to the position of [Director of the Center for] Business and Government, and he's been with Bank of Boston for twelve years and very much my [inaudible]. But as I look back, I resent not having that block of education in Hebrew. I really do.

JR: Was your mother also very religious?

AJ: No.

JR: She was not. Was she –?

AJ: If something, I think, brought lobster into the house and my father was not there, she'd say, "Enjoy it. I'd like to taste it, too." And she was kosher. You know. She'd cook the soup, and it was on the stove all night, and it was under a little fire, and so on. Very traditional to conform to what she was used to doing, you know, from my father.

JR: Was she active in the community? “A doer,” as you call it?

AJ: Very, very active. She was a kind of person who spoke a broken English. They all spoke with a broken English. But she had a certain fire. I think I caught her fire. She got into Filene's Basement. She went into the basement, learned that after three markdowns that, she'd give this stuff to charity. Well, for a woman who really had a hard time traveling on the streetcar because of her broken English, she'd get to Filene's Basement, and she knew that Crawford Hollidge was the most gorgeous shop on Boylston – I guess it's Boylston Street. She knew to buy something in there for her first grandchild, and she had all of the qualities of Americanism, but she was restricted in terms of language. But she would get the third markdowns, and they got so that they knew her. She went in often enough to calibrate the calendar to the need. She brought it home. But what was very interesting about her – she never looked for organizational glories, but she took the stuff and divided it among whatever she knew about families, and she delivered it at, say, six o'clock in the morning, 5:30 in the morning. Enormously energetic. My father was just the opposite. My father went to bed every day of his life no later than nine o'clock or 8:30. So they really were not matched in any way. I kidded the other day. I said, "I don't know what my age really is because I don't think I was born out of my father." Because it just seemed improbable to me.

JR: What did your father do for a living?

AJ: They had shops with metals, and then they moved to racks depending on what the economy was, but he was quite successful in what he was doing. And he made money and lost money and so on.

JR: How would you characterize your family's class status as you were growing up?

AJ: How could –?

JR: How would you rate your family's class status? Were you working class? Were you middle class? How would you describe your family's class as you were growing up?

AJ: It's very hard. I really can't say. I think, as far as my mother was concerned, we were certainly middle-class because what she wanted, she got with force. But, from my father's standpoint, at one time, it was middle class, but then it was lower class because he lost a lot of money – I can't give you the economic background, but there were great changes. But I came from a household that – my mother was charity-minded. She delivered – she went out – she was very, very energetic. I think I was fortunate to inherit the same kind of vitality, but in my household, I never had crayons, and my mother didn't take me to the museum. She just didn't know about it. Her framework of reference was very limited. So, I can't fault that. But if she wanted something beautiful for somebody, she got it.

JR: What about education? What schools did you attend? And your siblings as well?

AJ: We went to local Chelsea schools. The Williams School. Then I was determined to live away from home. I felt that whatever was home was not what I wanted to be with. I really was material that could have gone on to the good colleges, but we didn't have the money, and I was determined whatever – really, my priority for education was to get away from home. So I went to Hyannis Teacher's College, and I was outstanding in

student teaching and did very, very well and was quite exceptional. I think I was one of the outstanding students there. And after that, after I got through with that, there were so many lapses, and I just – chronologically, I may not be giving you this right –

JR: That's fine.

AJ: – but I had the chutzpah to enroll in a course at Harvard in the evening class. They had a class with all men, all fellows that were going into teaching. I don't know. When I think back, see, all of my family now are involved with Harvard. My grandchildren and so on. I don't know how I was admitted, but I was. And, at the time, there was someone there for a couple of years, and it was – I have to think of his name – oh, God, he died, and he wrote Hawaii. Can you help me on that? He was a very famous writer.

JR: Michener? Was that his name?

AJ: Yes. James Michener. James Michener was there, and I was in a class. He called me one day, and he said – I was young when I got in there, and he said, "I don't want you to open your mouth in class because you are supporting the class in terms of your experiences, and these guys don't know a thing, and I want to hear what they don't know." So I conformed and – I don't know – I think that Michener had a crush on me. I came in with the white little hats and very different than now. He wanted me to meet his wife. I said, "I would be delighted to." He said, "I want you to come to dinner." I came to dinner, and the minute I sat down, and they said prayers, I knew that this woman was gay. So, it struck me – I could see where he thought I was a bright light in his life. He was so famous, I can't tell you, in terms of writing. He was there just for – I don't know if it was a year. Everything is hazy. But, he said, "Anne, I want you to come on as a … taking care of the summer workshop, the library, the summer workshop." I organized a library with children. I had taught them the Dewey Decimal System, and we had done the library for the Williams School, where I taught school. I was absolutely so revolutionary that even at that time, I felt – you have to know what's Russia, and you

have to know what's here in here, and I am jumping back to my years of teaching at the Williams School. I have to think. I was so enthralled with what was happening with Russia that I had a unit of work on Russia, and I never could draw a line, not a straight line. All of this was developed since I'm in the ’70s. I had the kids on bogus paper, which is rough, the coarsest paper you can buy, and I'd bought the paper on big sheets, like the size of this painting. I had the kids represent some of the objects in Russia that were interesting. And so the Catholic population – there was a large Catholic population in the Williams School – sort of banged around the idea that I might be a Communist.

JR: What was appealing to you about Russia?

AJ: I can't even tell you now. But I did that with many units of work. So it wasn't that this was just projected. I had had contact with people who were interested in writing, Howard Wilson, a doctor of something. He said he was so intrigued with my thinking of what you do with teaching that he incorporated some of what I said in a book that he wrote. I used to have all of the names of the books, but I – with so many years, it's just so dim. I worked for Michener during the summer school, and I ran the library at Harvard. I didn't have a degree, and when you got through a state school, you didn't have a degree. Through the years, I never found that that was a handicap. Today, of course, it would be a handicap. I went to Columbia, to the School of Education, and took courses. I jumped around all over the place. In the summer, I'd go to New York so I could do some dating and some other things. It wasn't too one-sided. I found that I accumulated probably a million points to get the degree, but I wasn't focused. The focus was not the piece of paper I was going to get to prove what I knew. Because I knew I knew it, and I didn't give a shit what anybody thought, and I never discussed it. While I was in New York at the Teacher's College, I met people, and I dated, and I had a gay time with it. But I was involved with other things, too. It was a great prestige to have worked for Michener because he was considered one of the greats, and I have so many letters that he wrote me because I was dating and I was on the verge of getting married. He said that he

hoped he could come to my wedding, and he sent me a wedding gift. Some of the letters – I was bright enough to have them framed on Cornhill, Cornhill something, where they know how to frame that the paper doesn't disintegrate. Some of my kids have letters that he wrote to me that were – that they could sell them for a lot of money, but that isn't why I gave them to them. I am jumping all over the place.

JR: That's fine. You mentioned you were getting married at this time. How did you meet your husband, and when did you get married?

AJ: So, I was dating someone in New York when I was going to Columbia, and when I got back, somebody said, “Are you keeping company?” I said, “Well, I don’t know whether I am or I'm not.” I was very fickle, very. And they said, “You don’t sit around thinking about him.” I said, “No.” So she said, “I'm seeing somebody in Dorchester who is bright, and I understand he went to Harvard, and he's very attractive.” I said, “Well, if you're visiting his brother, I'll go along with you.” I really wasn't – I was more today's woman than yesterday's woman.

JR: In what ways?

AJ: Well, in terms of dating. In terms of involvement. In terms of being courageous about making changes. I wasn't fearful. I wanted to go to Mexico, and I wasn't interested in art. I didn't know one thing about art. Not a thing. And my mother said I couldn't go, and I worked it out so that I did go. But coming back to the dating business, I went on a blind date, and I met my husband. The thing of the day was if you were dating, and you liked a girl, and you wanted to make time with her in the car, then you went to Providence for a cup of coffee.

JR: [laughter]

AJ: I don’t know if you ever heard that, but it was. So the big date was that we went to Providence, and my husband was very formal and very respectful, but I could – you just

had a feeling that something was different. I was seeing someone in New York that I thought – it was an unwritten engagement, but I felt differently about Phillip. I just felt that there was a specialness. I really couldn't stand his brother, and the brother was with a friend of mine who wasn't so friendly with me. But I came home, and I told my sister that I think I met the man I'm going to marry. He was a clerk in a law firm because he had just finished college, and he came home and told his partner that he thought he had met the woman he was going to marry. So, it was just one of those things. I don't know whether the molecules moved differently or not. We were very different kind of people. He was a lawyer and sort of structured. And he came back – he went to Harvard, and he got out. At that time, it's hard to talk about things because you're comparing it to today, and it's not today's world. I think he was making eighteen dollars a week in a law firm, and so I wasn't marrying into great luxury. His family, they were Jewish. His father and mother were Jewish, but if you saw his father, you would think he was an Englishman. He came from England, he was Jewish, and he was probably the most gallant man and the loveliest man. It was a joy to know him. And my mother-in-law was an up-and-coming woman and just terrific. But not kosher. The background was entirely different than my background, but I was crazy about his mother and crazy about his father, which helped the situation. And I got married, and I think – on Beacon Street, there was a place on the other side of the street. I was married there, and my father led the wedding, and everything was strictly kosher. At about a quarter of nine, he went home. He had to be at shul the next morning. He was probably the most religious person I've ever known in my life. I just adored him. And there is a lot of intermarriage in my family, and my niece – I had one sister; she died at forty-five of cancer, and she had two brilliant daughters, and one of them was keeping company at Northeastern with a boy who is Catholic. He's a writer [and professor]. He's written two books that are used very commonly in college. One is, oh God, I have them on the shelf, but I'm not going to bother with that. [Editor's Note: Anne Jackson is referring to Blaming the Victim by William Ryan.]

JR: That's fine.

AJ: But anyway, she was considering getting married to this fellow, and I went to my father, and I discussed it with him. I took my niece with me, and I thought he would have an influence. That was the first break into marriage. He said, “Meyn kind [my child], if you love that, that's the first consideration, but you have to be sure that you love him. And if he loves you enough, he will want to become Jewish, but it would be better for your life because you would have more in common, but he would have to go through all of the rigamarole of the conversion.” And he was willing. So she married him, but her name was Ryan. His name was Bill Ryan, and he was an only child. He said he just never could change his name because the fact that he adored his father and mother, and they were an integral part of his life. He couldn't hurt them to that degree to change his name. So, some years later, I'm jumping around, Rabbi Gittelsohn – I think that I adored – at Temple Israel gave a lecture every January, and the biggest crowd came for the first lecture in January because he enumerated the people that he felt made the greatest contribution in time and one of them was my niece, Phyllis Ryan. People were just shocked that he would be nominating a “Ryan,” and they had been members of the temple and went more regularly than I did. So there was a lot of mixture in my family.

JR: Were your siblings educated religiously?

AJ: My siblings?

JR: Yes.

AJ: Yes. All of them. They all went to Temple Israel. You mean my children?

JR: You were talking about how you did not get a good religious education growing up, and I was wondering if your other siblings did.

AJ: The boys.

JR: The boys.

AJ: There were three boys and two girls. So my sister came from Russia, so it was natural she knew Hebrew.

JR: Right.

AJ: So I was really the only one, but the boys were educated in Hebrew. And by the boys, I mean my brothers.

JR: Right. Right. When you had your own family, how did your family practice Jewishly?

AJ: I think my mother-in-law was – she had the boys go to – they were all bar mitzvahed. She had two boys, and my husband was Jewish-minded. He could have passed for whatever. I can't even think of my family. I'm thinking of my kids' families. All of the kids were bar mitzvahed.

JR: You had three boys.

AJ: I had three boys.

JR: Three boys.

AJ: Yeah. And they were all bar mitzvahed in Temple Israel. It was very traditional, and at that time, I could roll along with some of the letters and so on and so forth. And do you know Temple Israel at all?

JR: A little bit.

AJ: Because there is nobody more exciting than Rabbi – oh, the one who just was on recently.

JR: Rabbi Mehlman?

AJ: No. No. She's a woman, and her sister is a rabbi, too. I can't think of it, but it will come to me. And my kids went to postgraduate. And when the war was declared, when everything was in a state of upheaval in Israel, Ira was, of course, already married, and so on.

JR: Was this in '67, you're talking about?

AJ: Yes. He wanted to volunteer and be in the army in Israel, but he was turned down because of a bad back. But every one of my boys intermarried. And I think – I don't fault them. I just think it's a kind of bringing up and the kind of influences you have in the home, and maybe to my husband, it didn't matter. To me, it did matter. I was very Jewish-minded, very. But I had information – there was a lot to be understood about other countries and other nationalities and so on. And all of the kids – I don't know what it was – they may have – their circumstances were very, very exciting. The oldest boy is an architect, and he went – he got a fellowship to go to wherever it was abroad. He met a woman there. One day. He knew her one day, and she was working for Mother Teresa, and she was a graduate of college, and she was – I don't know what she was. To this day, I don't know whether she's Episcopalian or – I don't know what she is. I know she's not Jewish. But I really don't know. I really don't know what she is. But he met her, and he came back and – are you interested in the three boys –?

JR: Sure.

AJ: – and how they hooked up with a Christian? He came back, and I knew there were letters flowing back and forth, and he was looking forward to going to – after he got through, it was a correspondence. I could see that he was anxious to go back because she had a longer internship with Mother Teresa. He went back, and he knew – I think he knew he was in love with her. He folks were, I don't know what they are. They're Protestant, I think. They lived in a part of New Jersey where I don't think they ever met a Jew. She had a lot of what I had growing up, a lot of understanding and a breath for so

many things. They came back, and they broke the news to us that they were getting married – and to her family. They were thrilled to see my son because they expected she'd come back with somebody Black. I don't know why they were under that illusion. And her father went to MIT, my husband went to Harvard, and her mother had every kind of scholarship. They were a very – every one of the girls in that family – they had all girls and one boy – but all of them are extremely bright, extremely. And Peter married her, and they live in Connecticut. They have three children, and one is in the Peace Corps in Africa, working with kids and young children and families that have AIDS. And I just got a letter, about eight pages, and I wept my eyes out – just the maturity with which he's finding life in this experience. And it's a long one. It's two years and three months. And my older son, Peter, the one that was married to Catherine, they're leaving next month for a visit of two weeks in Africa with her. So that's all integrated.

JR: So it sounds like your activism has certainly trailed down to your children and grandchildren.

AJ: Yeah, it has. I don't consider it a penalty because people have told me the thing I've done wrong in my life, seriously wrong, is that I didn't start a book because I have the kind of family that people say, “Well, Anne, you should have had a tape; you should have had it recorded. You should have written a book.” I do enjoy writing, but I am very handicapped with arthritis. It's very, very bad. And I have lots of problems now with my eyes. And I am going to be ninety – I think it's ninety-two or ninety-one in September. So, you know.

JR: Ninety-one, I would think, since you were born in 1909.

AJ: I don't even count the years. The second one, I'm giving you – I can't give you their life history.

JR: Right. No, that's fine.

AJ: If I told you that my son brought this girl for us to meet, and she was blonde and heavy make-up, and I just can't stand looking at a girl like that, I thought I'd die walking down the steps. We had a big house on [Griggs Road], and the dog came down, and I thought the dog would pick me up. I would collapse. And what he did, knowing so much about me, my oldest son really understood me. He put a mask on her, but it was a very clever mask. He has it to this day. They wouldn't part with it. I thought that this is what she looked like. She is just the loveliest-looking person, but he thought he'd shock me.

JR: That's funny.

AJ: I was shocked enough. You know, she came from Mother Teresa. You know? It just didn't seem – and then she traveled from there. She spent a long time in India after her internship there, and she's a remarkable person. She's the head of – she's the first ever Pratt run for school committee, and then this last year, she ran for being the head of the Board of Education. There were a lot of people in there that didn't know what the hell they were doing. And she was determined to run. And she has a full-time job, and she got her master's at Yale while having children. I can't tell you. If she was born of my – of me – I couldn't love her more. She's just a remarkable woman, and she had – her first child was born – they said he was – they tested him at Yale. Her home is right near Yale, practically.

JR: That's where I'm from, actually. From New Haven.

AJ: Oh. You're from New Haven? Really?

JR: Yes.

AJ: Well, her daughter swims at Yale. She's, I think, thirteen years old. I'll tell you about her. Catherine has three kids. One couldn't talk until he was about two-and-a-half, and they took him into Yale for testing, and they said that he was over-developed, one part of his brain, and he was autistic, and he was something else. So many things. So many

years. And she spent every day with that child, and he just graduated [with] his master's at Columbia for architecture. As a little boy, he'd come to visit me in Brookline, and he'd go around and look at the stores and sketch buildings, you know. He is just a beautiful, beautiful young man, and now he's dating somebody who comes from Russia.

JR: Interesting.

AJ: I have no idea as to her religion or what I met her – she's a charming girl who speaks six languages and is interested in going into international law. She's waiting to hear. She was on a waitlist at Yale, but it's very hard to make Yale.

JR: Yes. It is very hard to get into Yale.

AJ: She doesn't think that she's given up other colleges because she's still waiting. I don't know what the result is. And are you interested in each one's background? Because maybe it's pertinent.

JR: Let's step back for a minute and see if we have time at the end to talk more about the details of your children.

AJ: Yeah.

JR: Let's step back for a moment and talk a little bit more about your Jewish life. I was wondering if you feel like your relationship to Judaism has changed over time and, if so, how?

AJ: Listen, if you saw my kids, two of them are very successful, but I'm so independent. I've got to make it on my own. There isn't a thing that comes in from Vash Yad, you know, the place where you see the dead – the museum in Israel.

JR: Yad Vashem?

AJ: Wherever I get a Hebrew or wherever I get a Jewish – and I can tell you that the problems now with Iran are just dreadful. I just sent a contribution to the World Jewish Congress, and there were three things you were sending to one part of the world or another. And I am so Jewish-oriented that – whatever the children are, they are very Jewish. Very Jewish. The older one, Peter, the one that's married to the woman who is in education, she's more empathetic. He feels that some of these monuments are nonsense, and he's an architect. They're just over-doing, and it happened, and we've got to educate kids so that they know what it's all about. And I've been very active in Facing History in Ourselves. And I never get involved in something that I don't tell my children about. We have good communication.

JR: Do you think there are particular Jewish values of yours that they have continued to live out?

AJ: Very strong. Very, very strong.

JR: Great.

AJ: I wouldn't give a shit if all the world turned the other way, but I'm bonded to things Jewish. I have my brother Mendel's blood in me. You know? And I've been to Israel once, but we were treated – I went with my brother and sister-in-law – but we were treated as Mendel Fisher's guests, and there is a grove named after him and his wife was a sculptor, and the ceramic center is named after him. In Sicilia, they have the big art place – it's fascinating, they changed the art and so on. I never was interested in art. The Center is named after him, the Mendel Fisher's Student Center. And it is named after him. So I had landmarks there, and my mother wanted to be buried in Israel, but it just didn't happen is all. My mother may not have conformed to Judaism, but she was sure Jewish.

JR: So, let's talk a little bit now about your involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

AJ: In what?

JR: In the Civil Rights Movement. I was interested in hearing about your family's politics and how you got involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

AJ: Well, my niece, the one that married the Catholic who turned Jewish, was involved in the Civil Rights Movement. She knew Martin Luther King, and she marched – she had MS [multiple sclerosis], and she was so crippled, but she marched right beside Martin Luther King, and I got a lot from her. A lot from her and her husband was a writer, so the stuff he wrote had a lot to do with it. And for Passover, her Catholic husband, who wrote a – I must find it. I must look that up. I have so much stuff. It's impossible to find anything. I couldn't use a file because of my hands. But he wrote a Haggadah for our service at Passover time, in which he mentioned every kind of worthwhile consideration. I think he even had gays in there. And, of course, he had the Blacks and the inequalities that we've had in this country. So I caught a lot from them, but I got interested in movements. I went to the Unitarian – to Mendelssohn's Church on Arlington Street. Do you know anything about that? That's where –

JR: I've seen it, but I don't know much about it.

AJ: – people who didn't want to go to Vietnam could just sleep there on the floor. But they were accommodated. And Mendelssohn was a Christian but a very, very dynamic, wonderful, wonderful human being. I would go with my supervisor from where I was teaching. I would go to some of the sermons, you know, there. I just got around. I was like my mother. There wasn't anything that I wanted to miss. I was – in Jewish, you say kochleffel [literally, a cooking spoon; figuratively, a troublemaker, one who stirs things up] – I got into anything that was, I thought, had a semblance of humanity, and that's really

how I got into it. And when they were going on the March –

JR: The March to Selma –

AJ: – to – yeah. I already had two young children, and my husband was a conservative guy and very – you know, appreciated but not adored. Not adored. But we went to Dorchester, and they were lining up for the buses – nobody got on that bus. I'm giving you stuff that if you ever had resource – that nobody went in with a bag just for themselves. Whatever they carried, they had something for somebody else. Which, to me, was an eye-opener. And when we got to the station, my husband turned to the children, and he said, “Mother and I decided that we should tell you the truth [about] where she's going,” and he explained that I was going on a short trip, but the trip, they predicted that the bridge going to Washington, D.C. was going to be bombed. So he said, “Mother could possibly be killed.” Now that's an awful lot to lay on the kids. I don't remember how old they were. They were young. They were young.

JR: So this was the March on Washington in '63? [Editor’s Note: A bit confusing here since Peter was a junior in college, Eric was about to be a college freshman, and Ira was in high school.]

AJ: Yeah. Of course, they broke down terribly, and they held onto me. I said, “Children, I have to go. This is very important in my life.” And when I got on the bus, I didn't have a sense of regret about my kids being left behind. But I had such value for myself that I had the brains to be identified with this because I wanted to be identified. I wanted to speak out. I wanted the feeling that my voice would be heard amongst thousands. Well, the people on the bus were every color and every kind, and the camaraderie and the consideration was just beautiful. And when I got there, of course, I saw my niece and her husband. She could hardly walk, and it seemed to me I met many, many, many people I knew. I was convinced, from that day on, that you can't sit and say you're against something. You have to be willing to take part in the activity.

JR: Yes.

AJ: You have to want to be counted. And so I did that, and then there were so many movements that I went on that I couldn't even list them to you, you know? What else can I tell you?

JR: Was your husband supportive of your involvement?

AJ: Oh, very. Very. One parent had to be around. My kids lived in an environment of sucking up a lot of things. But the older one – see, I lived through the war. Should I move on? There were so many movements. I try to think of what to tell you about. But I can't recount. Yeah. It was shocking to me how people thought it was such a big deal.

JR: Civil Rights?

AJ: I have articles with my picture in the Globe. I was shocked that people thought that was a big deal to care about other people. [Recording paused.] Did you have breakfast?

JR: I did have breakfast.

AJ: Honest and truly, I have so much. Would you have some fruit?

JR: I'm fine for now, actually. Thanks.

AJ: Because I have to cut short. I have a very big day. My grandson is back from all of his traveling and everything, and I'm meeting him. Look, there is so much now that I'm involved with my grandchildren, who are on vacation. But I was very active in Jewish things. I can't enumerate them as vividly, but I joined – I was a president of American – not World Jewish – the American Jewish Congress. I was the first president, the first president of American Jewish Congress, I was nursing a child at the time, and I was teaching school. So, I didn't just get attracted to this movement.

JR: Right. It was part of –

AJ: I was involved all the time, but there is multiple involvements, and I always felt that when you take a job, you should be conscientious. It isn't name-dropping that I was thinking about. It was being involved. Imagine nursing, and I taught Grade six, but I had to come down to kindergarten because I had kids that I was bringing up, and I had to be home more of the time. For a babysitter, I had a kid who was a high school kid. Today you would be lynched for having that kind of help for babies. After this case we had.

JR: Do you identify as a Jew in the various kinds of movements that you were involved in?

AJ: Yes.

JR: Or was your Jewish work sort of separate?

AJ: No. No. I was involved in movements that were identified with Jewish things.

JR: But even in the movements that you were involved in that weren't specifically Jewish movements, like Civil Rights and things like that, did you bring to it a sense of identifying yourself as a Jew involved in those movements?

AJ: I was very proud. Listen, you look at me; you'd think I was Jewish.

JR: What were the greatest challenges for you in your activist work?

AJ: What were the greatest challenges? It’s so hard to pick up and tell you now. Greatest challenge was bringing up my children, really. You know? And giving them a value system, and, in spite of it, they all intermarried. They got all of the footing that good Jewish families give their kids, and my number one boy is not traditional at all. Now, he had two of his kids go through [religious education]. He wanted the younger one – there is no place where they can take her for Hebrew. But the one that's in Africa went through

a school that was given, at Yale [Hillel], at the facility. I don't know whether they did the teaching there. But he had to travel tremendous distance to take his son to get Hebrew, and in testing, they felt that it would be bad for him to be moving into a language other than just speaking English because he had tremendous problems talking. It's only because he had a mother such as he has that he's come out the way he has. And I really feel – she's in health work, and I've been begging her to get into education work because she is just – I can't tell you.

JR: What do you think was most rewarding for you about your various forms of activism?

AJ: My what?

JR: The activist work that you were doing? What was most rewarding about it?

AJ: I can't say what's most. Most is everything.

JR: Well, a few of the things that were meaningful?

AJ: The other night, I thought of two activities I was in – and now I don't remember them – that were not dominant. Now I find that I am terribly interested in anything with the Holocaust. Really very interested. My son [Ira] is the vice president of the Boston Holocaust Museum, and I am very – I went to the sessions, and I thought I'd be able to teach, but I'm too old. I couldn't even get a commitment that I would be at every class, but I think that courses like Facing History in Ourselves should be mandatory in every single school in the United States. That's what I think. And I don't make that kind of statement lightly. And I think at Facing History, they know I feel that way. I can't tell you – I know all of the key people, the woman who started it – it started in Brookline schools – and Margot. There were very special people in that organization.

JR: How do you think your community activism has affected others?

AJ: I don't think – my closest friend, who died many years ago, was the antithesis to me. Everything that I was interested in, she wasn't. And she was not into community – oh, I was in Town Meeting for twenty-five years in this town. I spoke up, and I was very active, and my husband was in Town Meeting. My son was in Town Meeting. The three of us, as a family, were in Town Meeting, and Ira was worked for me. He worked for the first Black mayor in New Jersey, and that's a story in itself. But there is so much history in our family that's rewarding and interesting, and that's why people say, “You could have passed on what you did with your children. There would have been a benefit to other children.” Well, sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't, but it worked out well, and I am fortunate, and I can't predict what tomorrow will bring. But that's it.

JR: Do you think that your community activism changed –? What kind of effect did it have on you as a person, do you think?

AJ: Well, it's sort of tantalizing as you grow older because I'm used to being on the jump, and I'm so connected with people that when people call, I don't remember names. I am an old lady, whether I want to admit it or not. I don't know whether you know the name of – what's her name? – oh, God – [Putnoi]. Do you know the name [Putnoi]? She is a very active woman. She has a lot to do with art. Her husband is an ophthalmologist, and I was on a research project having to do with children's eyes, so I kept my job – I taught at the Jewish Community Center in Brighton. It was on Harvard Street at the time. That's many, many years ago. And then I went up to the – the different facility that they had, and I was – I was director of that school, and I don't know whether you know the name Justin Wyman – they are famous names. His father owned the gorgeous hotel facing Green Park, the gardens – the Ritz Carlton. He’s a benefactor at Temple Israel and set up the museum there. He wanted to start a school for me, a private school, and I got an offer from the Health Department in Brookline to take on a project with the federal government that had to do with eyes and where you would check children before their eyes have developed, which is age five and a half. I would not leave the Jewish

Community Center job because I've never – I'd never leave children in the middle of the year because I was so vibrant, and I took them to the library, and they could pick out the books. I did wild things with kids. I took them out of the setting of the school, and I wrote a long paper for a Harvard study, moving the school outside of the walls of the school. And I know I sound like an egomaniac –

JR: No. It sounds like you just lived a very full life.

AJ: I took children from the ghetto in Chelsea, Massachusetts, and they had a magic carpet for $2.50 to go to New York. I decided they couldn't add, they couldn't subtract – I had the project around their saving pennies. I know what not having means. I took a group of kids with my supervisor, who was a Christian Scientist and the most beautiful woman of my life, more so than my mother or anybody, and we went to New York with these kids, and they went with the understanding that whatever they would write, they would bring back to the kids who couldn't afford to get $2.50 and kids who said, “How can I go when my mother has never been outside of Chelsea?” I can't tell you the values that I tried to give kids – and we went, and Benjamin Fine, anybody who knows the New York Times at that time – you're too young to know it, but I meet people your age that know. Benjamin Fine was the head of the educational department at the Times and he met us at the – I get goosebumps when I talk about it. He met us when we got off the plane. The kids left tips. They left a few pennies in the bowl of the spoon. Look, if I ever wrote it up, it wouldn't sound believable. They went to different places. We had a map of very systematic – my supervisor was a genius. And I learned much from her. Much. When they came back, the values that they brought to the children that didn't go were unbelievable. They wrote papers, and they – the kids said they felt as if they had been there. Of course, today, you'd have cameras and everything else. That was one of the greatest highlights of my life. That class. And the kids – it was called Terman Class. "Terman" was fast learners. And sixth grade – and I could never tell you the values. I heard from one of the students, and he was gay – I have lost track of him. He's moved

out of Brookline. And he got into – I got on a streetcar one day, and I was talking to someone, and this fellow looks up at me, and he says, “Miss Fisher” – that was my maiden name. “Miss Fisher,” and he grabs and hugs me, and it was a boy I had – fifth row, first seat, and he had the best handwriting, and he always did the writing. I knew at that time what my supervisor didn't understand that there were gay people because I was young. So I was in the throes of so many things, I couldn't help knowing it.

JR: Right.

AJ: And he got into the Navy. He had a tough time there. He told me later on that at one point, when he got into high school, he tried to commit suicide with a bottle of iodine. Jack Hirsch. I'll never forget it. I've lost track of him. We used to have Chinese food together every couple of months. I'd treat him, and the next week he'd treat. The next time, he'd treat me.

JR: Were you in touch with a lot of your students?

AJ: What?

JR: Were you in continuing touch with many of your students?

AJ: I have every letter from them, every year that they left me. And I had (Zena?), a Polish girl that was going to plan to be a doctor. Kids can't follow up, but occasionally there was a – I have the letters. I have them on exhibition at Temple Israel. There was a young man that seemed to follow where I was going, and he was in Town Meeting, eventually. And he had his Ph.D., and he wrote on one of the letters, "Even though I was highly educated, I found that the most stimulating part of my life was being with Anne Jackson in the sixth grade. It put me on the road." So, and I had – they had an exhibition of some of the letters I had, and that was one of them. I showed a letter that he wrote when he was in sixth grade and a letter that he wrote in recent years after he got his doctorate, and so on. I don't know – so many – and talented moments. But the

things that mean most to me, truthfully – I read about the hardship in Africa and the hardship here, but what tears my heart most is Israel and what's happening, and I could swear to God, it's in my bones that we're going to be at war. My granddaughter in Africa feels that she may not ever get out of Africa because she feels the momentum of war. It's very interesting.

JR: No. It sounds like we're at a big turning point. Whew.

AJ: So, my life has been so connected and so filling and so wonderful. And the only big, big disappointment was the kids didn't marry Jewish girls. But every one of the girls – the girls – the number one that I told you is head of the Board of Education. The number two is just a marvelous woman. And the number three is Ira's wife, and she does work with Robert Cooley's class, and she was – the students voted her the most giving teacher they had. So she'll be reappointed, I'm sure, this year. She's vice president, national vice president of Facing History in Ourselves. And they're all Christians.

JR: It's nice that you share so many values clearly, even though they're from a different background, that they're involved in similar kinds of projects.

AJ: Very. And they're very much – Catherine hasn't been involved in things Jewish because she lives next to Yale. You know Yale, New Haven. And there hasn't been a shul that they could take their kids to temple. They wanted the boy to be bar mitzvahed, but it was – you had to go to an Orthodox way off – it just couldn't be.

JR: Were you involved in the women's movement at all?

AJ: No. No. I joined the women's movement in terms of joining the first museum. I was already in painting. The first museum in Washington, D.C., run by women, and I paid, I think, membership for one year and two years. I got into a real argument with a group of men talking about art, and they said, "But Anne, how can you say that women –? How can you say that this is special because it's by women? How can you separate them

from men? You don't think that way." And you know what? I dropped out. I didn't retain my membership, and they tell me that they've had some wonderful exhibits there, and I haven't even been able to go to the museum, the Holocaust Museum. I am just traveling. And before, my husband and I never had money. But we took loans and paid them back, but we traveled all the time.

JR: Did you ever feel in your work in various communities that there were special challenges about the kind of work you were doing as a woman?

AJ: Well, I always felt – I felt that I could write a prescription for the way the government goes into the life of people. I felt that, to begin with, before they do anything, they ought to go into the family, into the family structure, and help people realize how you shop, how you can keep your house clean – you don't have to have money. In other words, I had visions of what could be done by the government, but the art department – I am a Democrat, and I've given to the Gore campaign, and like I give to charity. I think that one of the greatest men of our times will come down as Bill Clinton. I don't give a damn about his sex life and his filth and all that. He was damaged by a family. It was a damaging family. But, he is, in my mind, nobody handles people like he does, and this conference, now with Israel. If there isn't a hope with him there, then forget it. We'll be at war in no time.

JR: Yeah.

AJ: In the paper this morning and the television, it's very dismal.

JR: It's very negative. Yeah.

AJ: Yeah. Yeah. And Jerusalem is the thing that's going – and also, do you know who else? I can't stand these fanatical Jews. I have one next door to me. He got his – where did Clinton go to school after he finished college and he got all of his knowledge?

JR: At Oxford.

AJ: Oxford. My next-door neighbor who goes to work with his yarmulke and went to Oxford, he's the biggest bigot, and I wanted them to do a tape for this program that you're working for because I felt – I did tell what's her name, your boss?

JR: [Gail Reimer.]

AJ: Yes, Gail – I just think she's tremendous. I said to Gail, “You're one-sided, though, Gail. Can I criticize you? If you're getting all of this tape stuff from people like me and similar, you need to get them from a different kind of Jewish orientation. You have to go to the Orthodox.” And these people go to a temple – they adopted not a Jewish child that was in need of a family. But they adopted a Korean. And the girl was bat mitzvahed recently, and they didn't invite me to the bat mitzvah, and I'm their next-door neighbor, and I've been very friendly to them, as much as I could be. She said the reason she didn't ask me is she knew I could never sit through five hours of Hebrew.

JR: Oof.

AJ: So I asked her – I told her the value of her being on a tape. She's an attorney. Very, very well-educated. She could buy and sell me. And she said she'd think about it. She discussed it with her husband, I'm sure, and he didn't want her to do it.

JR: Interesting.

AJ: Yeah. My next-door neighbor. The least neighborly of anybody here. But I do think that has to take a – they have to make their path moveable. They do.

JR: Yes. It's a big obstacle.

AJ: And Gail was there when I had presented a picture of my life in art by Debbie Portnoy, and it sold, I think, for $10,000. And a woman – I'll show you a picture –

JR: Sure.

AJ: I have it right on the desk – you don't have to get up. I'll get it. Of course, this weather hasn't helped me today.

JR: Yeah.

AJ: I'm walking like a real cripple. Lecture afterwards. I never sit through anything with me that I choose to do. And they were so impressed. They came from – one came from this place and that one and Connecticut, and they were enthralled, and this was – Debbie Portnoy was exhibiting in Florida, and she sold this piece. My son was interested; he said, “How can I buy a piece that's a huge piece that sells for $10,000 when I have two brothers? How could we share it?”

JR: It's beautiful.

AJ: There was some good thinking on their part. But she did sell it, and I thought – she's having a second baby, and I haven't had a chance to really call her and to bother with it because I just don't have the time. The woman didn't want any of it changed. Can you imagine buying something about a human being that you don't know? There are people that have no investment –

JR: Yeah.

AJ: Yeah. But anyway, this exhibit – she sold the piece, and she said the woman wants to talk to me from Florida. Well, the kind of woman that she sounds like wouldn't have any imprint on me. I don't even care if I ever meet her or talk to her. But that's it. I did that picture of Israel, and my teacher was – oh, he's a guy of the world – and when I put the shtreimels in the background, it was with the implication, of course, that the Jews, that that Wall belonged to us. Definitely, and he thought it was a wonderful interpretation, and you couldn't do figures. I used sand and oil on that, and so on and so forth. And I

did one other one that I had read about, this terrible train going through a southern state where they had all these nuclear things on it so that if it ever blew up, it would – and I couldn't sleep all night long. So I went to art class. I'm political. This one was on China. After the riot, I couldn't paint. I'd get so moved and – just tears aren't anything. It's what you do. So I represented it in painting, and then I did one with wheels of dead bodies, of skeletons, and my grandson was so – I have one grandson who insisted on being bar mitzvahed. It was a bar mitzvah that should have been taped and shown in every school that had mixed marriages because it was such an intelligently done thing. I think that's enough for today, isn't it?

JR: Can I ask you one more question?

AJ: Yeah.

JR: Who were your role models, either as you were growing up or now or throughout your life?

AJ: Strongly, when I went into education when I got my first job, the woman that I – this was a Christian Scientist. She lived on a street near the Christian Science Monitor and – Alice Barker – my husband and I loved her. She turned one hundred years old in California. She was in a wonderful nursing home, and we flew out to her birthday. I think she had the greatest impact on my life. In the first place, she was a Christian Scientist. They think differently. And her emphasis was on curing things, and she – if you sent a child to the office, I lived through the days when they had straps. If you were sent to the office, you were strapped. If I sent someone down – if I sent them down to the office – or anybody, she'd say, “Oh, I'm so glad to see you. I have so much work I don't know how to get it done. I needed somebody smart like you,” and she'd get them involved in fixing the books or dusting the books. She'd have them – before you knew it, she was like this woman who wrote this famous book that's making millions – she would get them involved, and she'd make them feel adequate. She would make them feel they were

important to her. Not that he was going to be strapped, and she'd say, "You just go back and behave yourself." And those kids were never a problem after her, after the experience of her. And see, that was a very rich encounter. More important than my mother in my life. Much more. Much more. Just because it's your mother, it's not the greatest. She was fantastic. And what's his name? The guy that wrote the books?

JR: Michener.

AJ: Michener. He wanted me to write for the Harvard – they have a magazine. “Do an article.” And I was getting married, and I didn't have the time. I did half the article, and I never got it to him, but he made me feel – he wrote letters all over the place for people to hire me, and I was interviewed in Brookline – coming from Chelsea to Brookline, the scum is in Chelsea. And when I got to Brookline, Eldridge, I'll never forget – I even know his name – Eldridge was asked by Michener – Michener wrote letters. It takes something for a busy man that writes books to do this for a student. He wrote to Brookline – I'm telling you things I never had on my tape. I forgot about them. I have to think because I'm slow. He wrote around, and the guy that came to visit me, Eldridge, from the Brookline schools, to hire me, and Alice Barker was ready to die. My supervisor. That she might lose me. But I came before her need for me, and she was very excited for me. And when he came, the kids – I had taken them to the Walton Shoe Factory. Did you ever hear of it?

JR: No.

AJ: Walton. They were famous for making shoes, and the factory was right in back of the Williams School. Anyone that was brought up in Chelsea would know. And they came back, and they said it was terrible the way that people were treated that were working there. They had values. At that age, getting values firsthand. So, I thought it was the most – it deserved to be taped. There were no tapes in those days. And he said he wouldn't have me if I was the last teacher in the world.

JR: So you stayed teaching in Chelsea for a long time?

AJ: Oh yeah. Yeah. I never moved out of the Chelsea area. I was interviewed in another school, but my kids were going to that school, so I didn't want to go there. You say, “Were you active?” I was so active. Even at Town Meeting, I was such a damn fighter about certain things. After my husband died, I met one of the men who was in Town Meeting and probably the most outstanding person in Brookline. Everybody knew him. His name was Ben. He called me, and he wanted to see me, and it was a greater love affair than my husband had for me in that this man had been married and had one child and had taken another one in for adoption, but he was brilliant. He was a criminologist. He taught at BC [Boston College], and he went through Harvard. Every time Harvard sends him a letter for a donation, he practically tells them in crude, filthy language, “Shit in your pants.” He can break down the system. For instance, he didn't live through this stage. He died several years ago. The stage at Harvard – I was seething. All my kids were at Harvard. They can't give these employees ten dollars an hour that clean toilets. You know, where is the system? And they took in two billion dollars. I don't remember figures, but some things – I do remember. And Ben was – he left $50,000 for trees in the poorest section of Brookline, and he didn't care about – he was just absolutely the most nearly wonderful person I've ever met. He spoke six languages. Went to Europe every year of his life and married a woman originally who had polio. So you can tell – and I did this painting, and it would take too long to explain it, but he always regretted that he didn't meet me when he was graduating from Harvard because I was – I was more his type than the woman he lived with. And this happens all of the time.

JR: Sure.

AJ: And you go to a party, and you meet a couple, and you feel an affinity for somebody that you know you would have scaled off better with. Are you married?

JR: I am.

AJ: You are. Good.

JR: Newly married.

AJ: Oh, you are?

JR: A little less than a year.

AJ: It's a challenge. What does your husband do?

JR: He's a medical student.

AJ: He's in a tough field.

JR: He is. He is. He's working hard.

AJ: That's a tough field. And talking about medical, they did a film of me with my arthritis, and it won the American Medical Association best film for education, and it's traveling through Europe.

JR: How interesting.

AJ: And I have a copy of all of it, and they filmed me with all of my pictures and how I move and what I do in spite of my handicap and so on. So, I know something about the medical. And something recently with medical. Oh, yeah. I – the fellow that came to film me came from England, and he interviewed me, and then he brought in a team that they had waiting in Boston for medical coverage. He was so impressed with me, and I fell in love with him, an Irishman, and he lives in London. I have a stack of mail, and I had some news about my eyes and the day that I came home from the doctor, quite sad, I found a letter, and he was doing a film on eyes. Just the problem I had. This is the way my life is. And if you don't know enough people or you're not intertwined, and you're not

moving, then, you know –

JR: What do you think gives you the – motivates you to be such a doer?

AJ: I don't know. Energy. My mother's energy. I feel propelled by her remarkable energy. Yeah. She had – she had a vitality for life, and if she were married to a different kind of man, she would have been incredible. I find that that kind of thing sort of goes down, and I don't want to quibble the canary, but my kids are energetic, and their children are energetic. They are very privileged. A couple of the families are privileged, but you can be privileged, but if they travel, they want – they're flying from – they're so dangerous they want to try everything, and they want to do everything, and I think even though all of them spend little time because maybe they're so involved, that they have tremendous rapport with me when they're with me. And now, tomorrow, I have a date with [Ira]; that's my youngest son, the one that's teaching at Harvard, and he's in hiding because he's writing a book on the money factors of this world and what they owe society. You know, he's a lot like me. He has been with a Black mayor, he's been with Kevin White, and he's been with Mike Dukakis. He was the commissioner of revenue. He wanted people to pay off their taxes so that they came and they stayed – it started at midnight, and they could come – he had a line all the way around the block, and he was feeding them doughnuts and coffee. There is so much to tell that I really miss my – I missed something very important in not getting it taped and all that. And someone said, “Go back.” Well, it's very hard to go back, and I don't have that kind of energy, really. Yeah. I do, but I don't acknowledge not having energy, but I don't.

JR: Right. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to tell me about?

AJ: You know what time is it? Temple is at twelve o'clock, and I have ten thousand things to do.

JR: Okay.

AJ: No, even if I didn't cover it, I'm not covering it today.

JR: All right.

AJ: All right.

JR: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]