# Nancy Kaufman Transcript

Judith Rosenbaum: Okay. It is Friday, July 14, 2023. I'm sitting here at the Jewish Women's Archive. This is Judith Rosenbaum interviewing Nancy Kaufman. Nancy, do I have your permission to record?

Nancy Kaufman: Yes, you do.

JR: Excellent. Okay. So Nancy, why don't you start us off by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your family during your childhood?

NK: I was born in 1951 in Brighton, Massachusetts, actually, at the Beth Israel Hospital. When I was a year old, I moved to Brookline, Coolidge Corner, in a two-family house with my grandparents upstairs and my older sister at the time. My brother was born about five and a half years later. So, I basically was in Brookline for my entire childhood. In 1956, I had a little brother born, and in 1958, my father dropped dead of a heart attack, leaving my mother a single parent with three children under age nine.

JR: Were your grandparents still upstairs?

NK: Thank God my grandparents were still upstairs. That was the saving grace. My mother, who was a traditional 1950s housewife who had trained as a dental hygienist but never planned to work, had to go to work full time, which she was not happy about. Our life was actually thrown into chaos. I developed a lot of resilience. I was a middle child. Interestingly enough, I realized years later, when I was leaving Boston, that it was the Jewish community that supported our family, but I wasn't conscious of it.

JR: How so?

NK: My mother had a social worker from Jewish Family Children's Service. My brother had a big brother from Jewish Big Brother. I had a scholarship to Camp Kingswood from the JCC [Jewish Community Center]. My mother had a scholarship to be part of something at the JCC; she was very active in organizational life. She had help from the Jewish Vocational Service. I mean, you name it, and the alphabet soup of the Jewish world and our family – I only knew that part. I didn't know anything about the other part. So that was really important. Family was really important. I had an aunt that lived two doors away. I had other relatives in Brookline. I belonged to Kehillath Israel [KI], where I went to Hebrew school. We didn't belong to the synagogue because we couldn't afford to belong to the synagogue. I remember every year when my mother would come for Yizkor during the High Holidays, my aunt would have to give her her seat in the sanctuary. I went to the children's – again, I was part of the children's congregation, part of the youth congregation. It was in the heyday of KI when all the biggies were there. It was a wonderful [inaudible] social life. But I remember always that feeling of this isn't fair. There's something wrong with this picture. This isn't fair. In those days, there were very few kids who had fathers who had died, let alone divorced. I mean, it just wasn't a thing. So, it felt different, and it was hard. It was very, very hard. I like to say of the three siblings, my sister was an overeater and depressed most of the time. I was an overachiever and just needed to try to get attention. My brother was fifteen months old when my father died, and he just was not – what can I say? He was sort of just out there. He’s now getting married tomorrow for a second time, so I'm very excited. Anyway, it developed, I think, an inner strength, almost like a streetwise inner strength of what it meant to be in a middle-class community, but not middle-class, and the notion that we need to fix this and the role of women. The fact that women – I mean, my mother had an incredible social life, and she had an enormous number of friends. She was out every night of the week and just kept herself busy a lot. I wonder where I got that from?

JR: Yes, right.

NK: But she was in pain. This was the love of her life. She was really in pain, got very, very depressed when I went away to college, and had a terrible time. What saved me for four years of high school is I was very, very active in B'nai B'rith Youth [Organization]. That was my first speech. That was my first election. That was my first trip to Israel. I met my husband. I met my best friend. BBYO was incredible. It was a real gift. Anyway, that was my early coming of age in Brookline, and I left at seventeen, never to really come back again because it was just too hard, metaphorically.

JR: How were you treated as a girl growing up? What were your family's expectations? Were you treated differently from your brother? What did you think was expected of you in terms of education, marriage, work, or Jewish identity?

NK: Interesting. Again, my mother was very distracted, so I was basically ignored, and I was a middle child. It was really like what I did I did on my own. I had extended family. I remember aunts and others said, “You can be anything you want. You will get an education. You need to get an education. You need to go to college. Don't worry about it. The money will be there.” Okay. I developed that. I internalized that I could do anything I wanted. It was sort of up to me. I think I was very assertive very young because it was like I was fighting for space in my family all the time because this attention was for the baby, for my sister, so it was always fighting for the – I was also very young. In those days, Brookline – progressive Brookline had this crazy thing where they decided that four-year-olds should go to kindergarten; it’s the opposite of what it is now. You took a little test – if you passed the test – so I went to kindergarten at four, which means now I'm a year younger than all my friends who graduated with me. But I was young, and I realized I didn't really catch up until high school/college. I was always scrambling to be able to be –

JR: Right, keep up.

NK:  – because I was a year younger.  I was literally a year younger, so that was hard.  It won't surprise you; I did fine at school, except for self-control.  I always got unsatisfactory in self-control because I would talk.

JR:  Talking too much.

NR:  You're not surprised. [laughter] That was it.  What was really important were a couple of really important role models in my life.  My grandparents were very American. They weren't like [inaudible] – my grandma was born in this country in 1897.  She went to symphony every Friday.  My grandfather was a doctor for the state of Massachusetts. He was the State House physician.  It's where I got my political interests.  What can I say?  They lived upstairs, we lived downstairs, and they were there if we needed them. My grandmother was just the most amazing, strong, caring, non-judgmental person you would ever meet.  She just never said anything bad about anyone.  I think I really internalized my grandmother.  I was crazy about her.  I'd like to be home sick from school because she would sit with me and watch TV.  Grandfather was very quiet.  He was a doctor.  He went to Tufts Medical in the '20s.  It was pretty unusual.

JR:  Did your mom go to college?

NK:  My mom went to Forsyth dental school.  My father was a pharmacist in Brighton, owned a store, and actually died on New Year's Day – he had been working on New Year's Day – in the house in front of us.  It's a little traumatic, to say the least.  I think I saw how my mother was treated more than how I was treated as a young girl, which I didn't like.  I really didn't like it.  My older sister decided she couldn't leave home; she would have to commute to Northeastern because she couldn't afford it.  I decided, "I'm out of there."  And whatever I had to do to get a scholarship, to get loans, to get work study, I was going away to school.  There was just no question that I was going away to school.  I actually went to New York to NYU [New York University] uptown for two years and then transferred to Brandeis.  I call it my arranged marriage because my boyfriend

then was at Brandeis. He was tired of commuting to New York. He came up with this cockamamie idea that I could get free tuition at Brandeis. It's a very long story that I won't go into. But he figured this out. He was a big activist against the Vietnam War. He was leading the student protests, so I figured, "Okay, fine." I told him I'd only transfer if I had women friends, and he'd have to introduce me to women friends, and I'd have to interview them before I came because I wasn't coming unless I had women friends. So, he did. A couple of my closest friends to this day – I went. I came up to Boston for the weekend. They were transfer students a year before me. I asked them if they'd be my friend. I decided that, okay, now I can come because I have women friends because I had to have women friends. I did that. I told him I didn't want to live with him. He had to find me an apartment. I lived separately. It was quite incredible. And then I don't even remember why or how we decided, other than my mother was really suffering from depression, I wasn't going home, I was twenty-one, he had a low draft number, he was going to be – he was a year ahead of me. He was going to go to Harvard and get a teaching degree and teach. We decided the week before I was graduating college that we'd get married at Brandeis in the chapel. So, at twenty-one, I got married. My friends, to this day, said, "We thought you were crazy." I said, "You didn't tell me that. Thanks a lot." I was married for thirty-five years, and I have no regrets. I needed to be reparented, and he parented me; he really did. He was a decent, good person. It could have been a lot worse. But we grew up in completely different directions. I mean, this was the early '70s. I mean, no one was getting married. People were doing all kinds of stuff. I really wanted to go to the Peace Corps, but that wasn't [inaudible].

JR: What did you study?

NK: At Brandeis, I studied English literature and, of course, education because I was always told, "You have to be a teacher, and you have to get a teaching degree" because that's what women did, is we became teachers. He was going to be a teacher. He was actually a great teacher. I did it for a year, and I knew I wasn't going to be a great

teacher.  And I said, “This isn't it.”  And then, just by luck, my second year out of school, I got a job in Newton – I don’t think it’s here anymore – the Newton-Wellesley-Weston Multi-Service Center was an adolescent counseling center, non-hierarchical [with] no director.  I was the administrative assistant but basically ran the place.  There was a graduate student from BC [Boston College] School of Social Work who was doing community organizing.  I went, “That's a thing?  You can actually get a degree in community organizing?”  He said, “Yeah, at BC.  It’s a great program.  You should apply.  You could apply for an NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health] grant and get a full boat.”  I went, “Ah.”  So, that's what I did.  I went to BC in social work and community organizing and just loved it.  It was my thing.  So, that was just lucky.  I was lucky.  So, my early career was community organizing, taking over buildings, protesting the war –

JR:  How did you get involved in anti-war activism?

NK: Through college.  My eighteenth birthday, I spent taking over a building protesting ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] on campus in New York.  I came to Brandeis, and they had the National Strike [Information] Center.  We closed down the school in 1970 after Kent State.  So, I was very, very involved in that.  I was not involved in Jewish life on campus at all at Brandeis, even though it was very in my core because of all my BBYO and early KI experience.  I had an amazing Jewish education at Hebrew school.  I was very lucky.  I wanted to go to Hebrew College – interesting [that] we’d be here – but we couldn't afford it.  I really wanted to go to the “Hebrew High School” at Hebrew College – Prozdor – but I couldn’t.  So, I did BBYO, and that’s where I – I mean, I was the Jewish heritage chair, and then I was vice president of the region.  I met the women.  It was incredible.  It actually was an incredible experience.  In 1967, no one in my family had ever been to Israel.  I wanted to go to Israel.  BBYO had a leadership training program in the summer in Israel for eight weeks.  I said to my mom, “I want to go to Israel.”  She said, “How do you think you're going to do that?”  I said, “Well, it's a thousand dollars for the summer for eight weeks, and you can get a five-hundred-dollar

scholarship.  So, will you call Uncle David" – her brother who had money – "and ask him if he would match it if I get the scholarship?"  It's my first fundraising experience.

JR:  Well done. [laughter]

NK:  She said, "No, but you can call him."  I said, "Okay."  So I called him, and I explained the situation.  I said, "If I can get a five hundred dollar scholarship, will you match it?"  And he said, "Yes, if you'll go around to synagogues and speak about your experience."  I said, "Okay, no problem."  So, I'm sixteen years old.  It's June of 1967, and the war breaks out.  I'm glued to the TV for six days.  I'm like, "I am going to Israel.  I am going to Israel.  I am going to Israel."  People were calling my mother – "You're not going to let her go.  There's a war.  You're not going to let her go."  So I made a deal with my mother that if the war ended and the State Department said it was okay to travel to Israel, I could go.  And I went.  It was three weeks after the Six-Day War.  It was an amazing time to be there.  It was incredible.  I went for eight weeks.  It was a leadership training – Leadership Kallah.  It was really an incredible experience and very formative in my life.  Ironically, I didn't go back for twenty-four years because life intervened.  But it planted a very deep seed.  I probably would have made aliyah if it wasn't that I was married and ended up getting married and blah, blah, blah.  But it was an incredible, wonderful, meaningful experience.  I didn't come from a Zionist family.

JR:  What do you remember as the highlights?

NK:  Oh, my God.  I remember being on a moshav for a week and picking oranges.  I remember meeting with new newcomers to Israel to have made aliyah.  It was at a time when no one had money.  It wasn't like it is now.  I was really, really struck that the bus driver and the garbage collector and the maintenance people – everyone was Jewish.  That was amazing.  I was unbelievably struck at walking to the Kotel before there was a *mechitza* – there was no *mechitza* in 1967 – and walking through the Jaffa gate by the most horrible slums I'd ever seen, and wondering why was that, what was Jordan doing

there, and why did they do that? And then coming out to this gorgeous – the Kotel. It was really very dramatic. It was a different time. I remember cities were burning. Our cities were burning in the United States that summer. In Israel, if the planes flew overhead, everyone stopped. Everyone came out of their stores. Everyone shared. There was this incredible nationalism. It was just very overwhelming. I really felt a sense of pioneering. It was an amazing time. I keep trying to remember it now.

JR: Yeah, I'm sure it feels far away. [laughter] So, you got this degree in social work and community organizing. You worked at the place in Newton. How did you then transition into politics?

NK: So, I had an amazing experience in my field placements. My first year placement was at Mass Mental Health Center when I was able to get my mother the help that she wasn't able to get anywhere else. I thank Marty Pildis to this day. In my second year, I was part of a team that was invited by the city of Malden to come in and do a needs assessment because the mayor of Malden, who had been there for sixteen years, wanted to throw out the Community Action Agency because there was an opt-out provision in the OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] legislation that said if a mayor didn't like what was going on – he was a Democratic mayor, he was liberal, but they were campaigning against them and organizing against them. So they brought in Boston College to do a study of what the services were. He promised to replace all the services that were being funded by the federal government through OEO with a Community Development Block Grant. So, he wasn't going to cut anything, except they had the Head Start program and all these amazing programs. So, he kicked them out. They went from Malden to Somerville. They left the city. We were given this job, and it was a real job of doing a needs assessment for, like, Okay, how are we going to do this? So, very long story short, I had a summer field placement. In the fall, we recommended – the mayor then lost the election. So, I saw the power of politics and the power of organizing around politics. The guy who came in knew nothing. Literally, on December 31, when

our contract was running out, we got the outgoing mayor to sign a contract to hire two of us to implement the plan. We had come up with a plan for what they should do, which never would have happened had he been the mayor, and I was hired. Then, one of the things we recommended in that plan was an Office of Human Services Planning. I was hired as the deputy director for my job – my first job out of graduate school. It's unbelievable to be able to implement this plan that I had written. It was an incredible, incredible experience. But gnawing at me was that it was wrong that the Community Action Agency wasn't there anymore because the OEO legislation required maximum feasible participation of the poor, so there had been a board that was one-third low-income, one-third municipal, one-third business, and we didn't have that anymore. We had a mayor's advisory committee. It was very political. My boss was my first Me-Too experience, an Italian pol who wanted to tell me and push me around and plenty of other things. I navigated a very tough situation over a period of about eighteen months and finally went to my professors at BC and said, "Something's really wrong here. We really should have a community action agency because, in perpetuity, who knows who the mayor will be, and it's not going to be the same." So they suggested that I go to OEO and ask for a planning grant to see about getting a new community action agency for Malden, Medford, and Everett, which made much more sense than Malden and Somerville, which didn't go together. I basically did that. They said, "Okay, we'll give you a planning grant. And if you can get the city councils of Malden, Medford, and Everett to agree to a new community action agency," which was a little iffy because this mayor had been kicked out, "we'll fund it." It was the first new community action agency in ten years that they had funded in the country. I said, "Okay, great. A challenge. I'll do it." I did it. It was an amazing experience. And they funded it. Then, we had to hire an executive director. I was twenty-eight. I was staffing the search committee to hire the new executive director. My boss, who liked me a lot, like, too much –

JR: This is the same guy?

NK:  Yeah, same guy.  I convinced them – finally, after interviewing all these people, I said, “You know, Ed, I could be the executive director, and then you'd have someone you trusted,” knowing full well that all I wanted to do was get away from him.  He said, “Oh, yeah.”  He’s thinking, “Oh, I could control her.  That would be good.  She'd be my person.”  I let him think that I'd be his person, and I was hired at twenty-eight to be the first executive director of the Tri-City Community Action Agency.  Happy to say it still exists.  I had to find office space and hire staff.  It was really an amazing experience.  Develop a board.  Did I really know what I was doing?  I’m not sure, but I did it.  It was a wonderful experience.  I did it for three years.  And then, Reagan was elected.  I was pregnant, and I was having a child in January.  He was coming in [inaudible] – he was going to cut the smithereens out of all this stuff.  I had written the personnel policies, and I'd written in eight months maternity leave, so I had a break.  But this is when – as a woman, as I say, on the cusp – because this was 1980-1981.  Most of my friends at that time were therapists working part-time, stopping work.  It was a very confusing time, and I had this baby.  I’m like, “What do I do?”

JR:  Where were you living at this point?

NK:  I was living – we had bought a house in Beverly, Massachusetts, because my husband became principal of the elementary school in Essex, Massachusetts.  And he was very supportive.  He had somewhat of a flexible job.  But I realized that I couldn't go back and do it the way I had done it and be out at meetings every night of the week, which you have to be.  So it was a real torturous time.  I remember not knowing where to go, what to do, or who to talk to.  It must have been a classic postpartum depression; I didn't realize it then.  I had this crisis of, “I can't do this.  I have to leave this.”  I had a very good number two, deputy director.  I consulted for a few months, then I left, and it was a just wrenching experience because I loved it.  I loved it.  I loved everything I was doing.

JR:  And you had built it.

NK:  I had built it.  And it was really hard.  I went to a therapist, who said, after six months, “Well, maybe Nancy, you have to go back to work full time.”  I went, "Oh my God.  How can you say that?”  And then she told me, “Well, maybe you should go on medication.”  I said, “Oh my God, my mother was on medication.  I'm not going …”.  So, what did I do?  As my friend's kid said at her sixtieth birthday, “Nancy invented Facebook.”  Because here I was, thirty-one years old, very isolated; it was in the burbs.  I really didn’t know anyone because I’d been working full-time.  I belonged to a synagogue, but there weren’t a lot of young families.  I advertised in the *Beverly Times* local newspaper – “Professional working mom seeking others.  Please respond.”  I had a P.O. box.  I called a meeting at my house, and six or seven people showed up, most of whom were not really – they were running [inaudible].  But one of my dearest friends to this day was a therapist; her husband was a doctor.  She had had a baby about six months before me, and I was like, “Oh, my God.  I have a human.”

JR:  Was it like a consciousness-raising group?  Or a social group?

NK:  No, I just did it – I did it to be able to meet people.  There wasn't a new moms group.  But I felt weird.  I'm in Beverly, Massachusetts.  At that time, it was very blue-collar.  Not to put down blue-collar, but it wasn't like –

JR:  It wasn’t you.

NK:  It wasn’t me.  I met Myra.  She remembers – she said, “I used to change Sandra’s diapers in the back of my Volvo.”  It wasn’t that I wasn’t doing anything, by the way.  I was teaching at BU School of Social Work “Macro Problem Solving.”  I became the acting director of the Massachusetts Human Services Coalition.  It wasn't like doing nothing.  I felt like I was doing nothing.

JR:  It was different from working full-time.

NK: That's right. I was just miserable. I was really unhappy. To your question about how did I get involved politically, I got involved in the [Michael] Dukakis coming back after he had lost Ed King because he forgot who his base was. He was a conservative Democrat – Ed King was. I said, “Okay, I'm going to get involved in the political – what's better? I’m in a community. I'll meet people.” I got involved with the Democratic City Committee. I got involved in going door to door. I did real grassroots stuff and got very involved in the campaign. Got involved in social policy stuff because I was [inaudible] –

JR: You were volunteering at that point.

NK: It was volunteer. I was volunteering, but met some great people because that's how you meet people. Then, two years after my daughter was born, he gets elected, and I got hired as deputy director of the Governor's Office of Human Service Planning. I’m back in business, and I was fine. It was like, all of a sudden, the veil lifted. I mean, it was very telling. It was very telling. It’s who I was. Right? I was trying to be someone I wasn't, and I just couldn't do it. I had an amazing run of eight years working for Dukakis, first in the governor's office and then as assistant secretary of Health and Human Services. And then, I got a fellowship to the Kennedy School for a year for the mid-career program – full salary, full tuition, full stipend.

JR: Amazing.

NK: And then I had to go back and give a year, so I went back to the Welfare Department as deputy commissioner because I wanted to be near where services were delivered. Mike Dukakis wasn't going to Washington, and I wasn't going to Washington. I figured I needed a job. What was I going to do? I'd worked for a nonprofit. I'd worked for local government. I’d worked for state government. I never worked for the Jews. And someone told me – life is a series of serendipitous things that happen for all of us. Actually at a Yom HaShoah service at the State House – I was very close to Kitty Dukakis; she was my first lay leader. She was chair of the Governor’s Advisory

Committee on the Homeless. [She's] Jewish. We spent hours talking about –

JR: I didn't know Kitty Dukakis was Jewish.

NK: Absolutely.

JR: Interesting. How did I not know that?

NK: She was Harry Ellis Dickson's daughter. Harry was [with the] Boston Symphony. We would spend hours talking about "Where are the Jews?" because I was doing homelessness and I was the staff director. How come the churches are opening up the church basements for feeding programs and homeless programs? Where are the Jews? So, she and I became this soft shoe, going around to synagogues, talking to synagogue people. "What's going on?" And we put together the Governor's Advisory Committee on the Homeless. She was co-chair with Bishop Harrington of Worcester. I said, "We've got to have Jewish representation." So I called this thing called the JCRC [Jewish Community Relations Council] because she knew the chair of it, some Hadassah woman she knew. And I said, "We need representation of the Jews." But I became very – at that time, in state government, not so now –

JR: This is the late '80s?

NK: No, this is 1983. At that time, state government was an Irish bastion in Massachusetts with very few Jews either in the legislature or in the highly-placed government – I grew up in Brookline. I was involved in BBYO. I graduated from Brandeis. I never really felt different. I felt this responsibility as a senior Jewish person. So, very aware. She, too, actually – Kitty got very in touch with her Jewish roots for the same reason, I think, and was very – we used to do an annual Yom Hashoah at the state house, and she wanted to do the Armenian and the Jewish. At the last one, after I got back from the Kennedy School, someone came up to me and said, "Nancy, that guy over there is retiring. You should apply for the job." "What's the job?" Executive Director of

the Jewish Community Relations Council." I went, "Okay. What do they do?" I remembered that they had appointed someone. So the only person I knew was Barry Schrag, who was head of the Federation. Why did I know Barry? Because when I was highly placed as assistant secretary [of] Social And Mental Health Services, I was overseeing DMH – Department of Mental Health, mental retardation, social services, and he came from Cleveland and wanted to set up group homes for the mentally ill and mentally retarded. That was his big thing. And someone had told them there was this highly placed Jewish woman, so he came and took me to lunch and said, "Will you help us?" I went, "Yeah. But is it only going to be for the Jews?" "No, no. They're going to be homes. They'll be for everyone." That started this interesting conversation that I had with Barry Shrag, the head of the Federation, to the point when we were doing a governor's special message on mental illness and asking for a multi-million-dollar bond authorization – because we're closing down the institutions; we're doing group homes. I call Barry and say, "We need support." He said, "Come talk to my board." So, he invites me to talk to the board of the Federation, Combined Jewish Philanthropies [CJP] – oh, that's [inaudible]. Then I realized that's the organization that funded all the programs that helped me.

JR: Right. Interesting.

NK: I walk into the boardroom. It was in their old building. I look around the room, and I know half the people in the room because they're all democratic activists. But they're not like – they take their kippahs off when they go to do their democratic work. I was like, "Wait a minute, there is a lot of power in this room. If they would only show up as Jews to their elected members, they could have a lot of power and influence." It was just this epiphany I had, like, "Whoa, what would it be to organize the Jewish community?" This is before there were these statewide – before there was anything. There weren't lobbyists. The only people who would be on my doorstep would be ADL [Anti-Defamation League] when it was a hate crime issue or the American Jewish Congress when it was separation

of church and state. That's when I saw the Jews. If it was daycare, social welfare, child welfare, I never saw the Jews. To the point, Jewish Family Service, at that time, didn't even take third-party payments. It was a different time. [inaudible] money. So I said, when this came up, “I’m going to call Barry Schrag. What’s this job?” He’s the only one I know to call. I call Barry Schrag, and you know Barry Schrag. He goes, “Mmm.” This is a direct quote. “Let me close my door.” Comes back to the phone, and he says, “I don't know if they'd ever hire you. But if they would, that would be a really good thing.” He said, “I can get you an interview. But that's it," because it was a separate agency and funded by the Federation, but not part of the Federation.

JR: Why didn't he think they would hire you?

NK: Well, because I was a liberal Democrat with no Jewish communal experience. In those days, that was a –

JR: Right. That’s where people came from.

NK: I hadn't been to Israel in twenty-four years. It was like, “Really?” But I can read, which is what I said in my interviews. It's a long story. I'm not going to go into the whole long story of how he said, “You got to go meet with the chairman of the Federation board,” who was Ed Sidman. I knew Leventhal-Sidman because my mother lived on the campus of the Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center before she died at the housing. So I said, “Oh, that must be an important person.” Otherwise, I wouldn’t have known a thing. “So, you got to go meet with him. Michael Bonin is chairing the search committee, and we can get you an interview.” I still had eight months left in the administration. I wasn't looking for jobs. I was like, “Whatever, whatever. I don't really know what they do.” He says, “I'll come take you to lunch tomorrow, and I'll tell you what they do.” I said, “Okay.” So, Barry walks into my office at the Welfare Department with a stack of policy propositions from NCRAC, the National Community Relations Advisory Council. I'm flipping through these policies on housing and homelessness and minimum

wage, and I went, “How come? I’ve been here” –

JR: Right. You should have known [inaudible] –

NK: “Why don’t I know any of this?” He said, “That’s the problem. That's the problem. No one knows it.” I said, “I don't get it. I mean, this could be very helpful.” And he said, “That's why we need you to do this job.” That really is what happened. I went for the first interview after going through the paces. I, again, walked into fourteen members of the search committee, half of whom I knew. They were really struggling, and one of them says to me – one of the past chairs of JCRC – “How are you going to do this job? You haven't been to Israel in twenty-four years.” I said, “You know, I love Israel. I loved it when I went, and I'd be glad to go back next week if you want to send me.” Then someone else said, “Do you know federal policy?” I said, “Well, I can read.” It was one of those great interviews when you just didn't care. So, I got hired. It was insane.

JR: Presumably, there had not been a head of the JCRC in Boston who was a woman before.

NK: Never been. I was the first one.

JR: Had there been at other JCRCs?

NK: Very few. There was a handful, but very few. Yeah, I was the first woman. Around the table, the CJP agency execs, I was the only woman, I think, for almost ten years. It was an interesting thing. The wonderful thing about it, I have to say – there were a lot of wonderful things about it. First of all, I felt I had integrated my political community organizing and Jewish identities, and now they were one. It was wonderful for me because I'd been active in our local synagogue. I had an active Jewish life, but I wasn't Jewishly active. At that time, JCRC was like two and a half people. But I had this vision of wanting to organize a Jewish community to make a difference in the world. I mean, it was so ripe for organizing. It was like an organizer’s dream come true, really. I mean,

that's what the Jewish community is, but no one had done it. The Federation had decided that it would hire someone to do government relations work. And then Barry, in his wisdom, decided, “Well, she's coming in from government. I'll hand it over to the JCRC.” So I took that on. And then I really had this vision of how do we build a Jewish community that's committed to social justice? He and I made a deal; he would be Torah, and I would be justice. He basically said we can't have Torah without justice. I was happy to say we can't have justice [inaudible] Torah. By the way, I should say that my daughter happened to be in a Jewish Day School on the North Shore, which I think sealed the deal. So, here’s this liberal Democrat whose kid went to day school. That was all Barry – because that was his big thing, Jewish education. We did this soft shoe thing. It’s Torah and justice, Torah and justice, Torah and Justice. I would basically stalk him. Every time Barry gave a speech, if he didn't mention justice – in those days, it was all voicemail – I would leave him a voicemail. He went to St. Louis once. My colleague said, “You keep saying that you got such support for justice, but Barry Schrag came and spoke to our Federation board and didn’t say anything. I’d leave Barry a voicemail, and I'd say, “Barry, is it possible that you went to St. Louis and didn't say anything about social justice?” I’m telling you, it was hysterical.

JR: Was that part of what either NCRAC or JCRC in other places – was that the language they were using at that point in terms of social justice?

NK: No. No, they weren’t.

JR: So, you were kind of infusing that in.

NK: We were really ahead of the curve. NCRAC certainly was doing social policy. It was always liberal democratic stuff, but it wasn't this idea that the core of who we are as Jews is social justice. David Saperstein was probably the only one at the RAC who was really articulating it – and Leibel Fein, of course, who became a real mentor around that and helped a lot for me to hone this. I mean, I had a notion – for me, it was I grew up in

Coolidge Corner, I hung out in Mattapan where the nice Jewish boys were. I come back four years later, again, metaphorically, after college, and all the people in Mattapan are gone. All the Jews are gone. They've all left. I'm going, "Wait a minute. What happened here?" That's when *The Death of an American Jewish Community* book came out. And I'm going, "There's something really wrong because there's no relationship anymore between the largely suburban Jewish community and our inner city roots." Everyone's left. All the institutions – Hebrew College, Mishkan Tefila, and you name it – had all left. They were gone. Were just gone. That was very troubling to me. I was really intent on bridging that gap, which wasn't simple. I knew that synagogues partnering with JCRC could be a gateway for that. And that was before the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization. It was really – we just saw an opportunity, and with the support I was getting – I mean, Barry loved the idea that, again, when it was all about – I knew about social justice. I had an eighth-grade Jewish education. I didn't have the language that I wanted to have. So, I did Me'ah. I did every "lunch and learn" at the CJP building because I cared about it; I didn't just have the opportunity. He didn't know anything about social justice, but he knew that it was a gateway for a lot of people, particularly in Boston, who care about the Jewish future [and] Jewish continuity. So, I wrote papers on social justice as a gateway to Jewish continuity during the whole [inaudible]. And one of the great things was that 1991 was the Jewish population survey. Do you remember? And they said one out of every two Jews is marrying out, and there was this conference at Brandeis, and there was a fishbowl. And all the men were on the panel – Steve Cohen and the whole gang who did the National Jewish Population [Survey] study. I'm sitting there. I'm fairly new in the Jewish Community, so I'm kind of an unknown. They're having this conversation, and the conversation is how are we going to keep our children Jewish? We're going to send them to summer camp. We're going to send them to Israel. They kept going on. I finally raised my hand – that goes back to my childhood; I wasn't ever shy – and I went, "This reminds me of a conversation we used to have in state government with Mike Dukakis about teenage

pregnancy prevention." They all look at me. "I remember a meeting with Mike Dukakis with Kitty Dukakis. We were trying to get money in the budget for teenage pregnancy prevention, and Michael Dukakis turned to us and said, 'Why do we need to have teenage pregnancy prevention? They should just say no.' And Kitty said, 'But Michael, they're not going to say no. So we have to do something to educate them.' This conversation reminds me of that conversation because maybe we should be talking about how we welcome the fifty percent of people who are marrying the fifty percent of Jews. Isn't that a great opportunity?" It was before interfaith families. It was before anything. They looked at me like I had three heads. And I said, "Seems to me that's a real opportunity." And it was. What better opportunity than social justice as a gateway to that?

JR: What were the obstacles that you faced in trying to bring in the social justice piece?

NK: Some of the donors, the more right-leaning donors, didn't like it when we did Justice for Janitors. But we were insulated because we were a separate 501(c)(3). I had my own board. To his credit, in those days, in the early days before the mosque awful situation, Barry was extremely – first of all, he's very popular. He would say, "No, no, no, no. This is really important." The more he supported it, the more important it was. It became in the DNA. In the first strategic plan CJP did, I basically wrote that section on social justice. Some of his major donors – I wrote a paper in 2000, I want to say – it was after I'd been there ten years – about examples of donors who came in because of social justice, [such as] the Swartz family, which became a huge donor – Timberland – started at social justice. They could care less about it until Jeff became Orthodox. Judy Swartz was on my JCRC, representing Hadassah; I made her promise that if they – Barry didn't know who they were. They were in New Hampshire. They lived on the North Shore. He had no idea. I was meeting with her because she was – this is actually a great story. She was on my thing. She really cared about social justice. I kept talking to her. I remember in 1995, it was CJP's 100th anniversary. They had had a seminar at Harvard

Law School. David Saperstein spoke. I remember I had said to Barry Schrag, “You need to talk to the owners of Timberland.” And he went – I said, “Sidney and Judy Swartz.” He said, “No, no. You mean Herman and Judy Swartz?” I said, “No, no, I mean Sidney and Judy Swartz. That's who's running it now." It was before Jeff was running it. I'm sitting there at Harvard Law School, and I see them come into the back of the room and sit down. No one goes over to them. No one talks to them. No one knows who they are. I go over to my – I didn't even bother with Barry. I went with a friend who was vice president at the time of development at CJP. I said, “Do me a favor. This is who I've been telling you about. You should go talk to them.” I mean, it's a true story. And then, when he finally courted them, and they were going to give a major gift, I made her promise that a big piece would be for social justice, and she endowed [inaudible] teen social justice program. So, there were these examples. There were others, too, that showed – and honestly, Judith, I tried to tell my colleagues across the country this was an opportunity. No one quite got it. I can't quite explain what happened. There were people – when we did the Return to Passion Conference, which we did, I went around to every philanthropist I know and said, “Do you care about giving Jewishly to non-Jewish causes?” So, the Arnold Hiatts of the world and the Sam Gersons – these people who were giving to – I’d go to all the dinners and see all the people who are giving to non-Jewish programs, but not through a Jewish lens, so no one knew it was Jewish money.

JR: Interesting. Right, yeah.

NK: We started saying, “You could give that to CJP. And you could target it for that, which would also make a statement that this is important.” So there's a whole bunch of different things that happened. I think obstacles – really, it was a pretty nice run until what I call the donors who knew not Joseph came in. No names. At the time, they were very right-wing – aren't anymore – who decided that the mosque being built in Boston was going to be a Wahhabi fundamentalist mosque, and somehow, it was my job as head of JCRC to stop the mosque from being built. It was insane. I said, “First of all,

God forbid, there's a Wahhabi fundamentalist mosque in Roxbury, Massachusetts. I don't think Jewish kids at Wellesley are going to be most at risk." I said that at a meeting of donors; it wasn't exactly the smartest thing to say. That's when I was very disappointed in my dear colleague, my partner, Barry, because people were so afraid of the money that it became five years of hell. It's probably why, ultimately, I decided it was time because I lost such respect for so many people who didn't see what was happening. It changed radically once people understood that there were some people not of their total right minds who were behind this. But there were very important people who were proud of the David Project that came in and decided that this was going – this was [inaudible]. I jumped through all kinds of hoops to try to – I did all kinds of things – a conference at Harvard. I mean, I did all kinds of things. Your husband would remember.

JR: Yes. [laughter]

NK: It was a very unhappy – and it was a long time that it all went through and very serious people who I thought were out – for different reasons. One major donor rolled up his sleeves one time at a meeting to call me on the carpet because he didn't like what I said in the press. [He] said, "Nancy, do you understand that if you can't get it right in the press, not only will I not give my money to CJP, nor will any of my friends." That was the kind of stuff that was going on.

JR: Right. Flex muscles.

NK: That's where, as a woman, I think – I don't think a man would have been treated the way I was treated. I really don't. But fortunately, I was strong enough. At that point, I had been there long enough. I had the support of my board. They really wanted me to be fired. Someone called Barry once and said I was trying to ruin his marriage because I talked to his wife about meeting some Muslim women. I mean, it was insane. I talked to Myra Kraft, and then I got in trouble for it. It was really kind of – I've just written a case

study about it, by the way.

JR:  Oh, interesting.

NK: For Spertus [Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership] [inaudible] last year, and they're combating antisemitism because – it really helped me all the different roles and the challenges to Jewish communal professionals, and I did a whole thing with them and breakouts.

JR:  That's great.

NK:  Because, yeah, it really taught me a lot about even when you're – that was a tough experience.

JR:  I want to pause because I have a lot more questions to ask you, but I want to make sure we don't get cut off. [Recording paused.] It is a very interesting question about – I mean, this is probably a bigger question than we can address now.  As a historian, I think about what was it that made that time ripe, that there were all these social justice things – that you reached a tipping point there?  Were there particular –?

NK:  Well, yes.  Actually, I should mention Amos.  We had come together in 2000.  Leibel Fein was looking for his next thing, to be honest with you.  He had had MAZON, and he did the Jewish Coalition for Literacy, which is how I started our social justice work in 1993.  That's actually how it first began.  He wanted to do this thing.  I actually didn't think we should have a new separate organization because I felt like there were enough organizations.  Jewish [inaudible] Justice was doing some of this around synagogues.  But we came together on this Amos idea.  Actually, hired Jeremy Burton as the first director, but it was 2000.  It was right when the intifada – when Camp David fell apart [and] intifada started.  That was a huge turning point.  Until 2000, everything was about – we were going to have peace in the Middle East, and we had Oslo.  We could look at ourselves.  I remember Barry saying, "No, you need to reach out to the Muslims."  It was

all about intergroup.  We had the luxury that we were going to be able to – and I wrote my article in 2000 all about this – “Recapturing our soul: a vision for community relations in the 21st century.”  Because I said [inaudible] antisemitism.  We have peace in the Middle East.  Think about the different time it was.  We had the space to be able to think about social justice.  That had led to Amos, and then Amos fell apart, really, because there was just no bandwidth to think about that when everything was falling apart.  And then you had 9/11.  Actually, I think that's when it ultimately fell apart because then everyone started worrying about terrorism, and everything changed.  I think the combination of the intifada, the falling apart of  Camp David, and 9/11 – that two-year period, everything flipped, and everyone was worried about security.  It was all about security.  Everything that we hadn't worried about for ten years – I felt like I had a free pass to be able to do anything creative in social justice all changed.  And that's when the whole mosque thing happened.  That's when Israel advocacy, all of a sudden, became “We got to do it differently,” even though we'd been doing it pretty well, taking non-Jews to Israel and doing the work we've done.  So, that flipped.  But we still had the kernel and core of – and we didn't want to lose it.  We started regrouping around how we're going to keep social justice alive in this new environment.  [inaudible] Jewish Continuity.  It was a gateway to Jewish Continuity.  That worked.  Then we had this.  Then we said, “Okay, how are we going to sustain this?”  And then there was this whole Visioning Justice thing.  It was a whole study, and we had these meetings at the Cummings Foundation.  We just kept saying, “Hey, six of us have …”.  Finally, the Cummings Foundation actually came back to the six of us and asked us to put in a proposal to create a Jewish Social Justice Roundtable [JSJR].  We did it as volunteers.  I mean, we were doing it in addition to our day jobs.  We put in the proposal, and they funded it.  We hired Rockwood [Leadership Institute].  Rockwood had done Selah.  We didn’t have a director.  It was the fiscal agent.  We were the steering committee.  We just did it.  Then, finally, we realized – this is right when I think I got to NCJW [National Council of Jewish Women], which we haven’t even talked about.

JR:  I know.  We got to –

NK:  It was 2011.  We can't do this anymore.  We can't do it.  That's when we decided we had to have a search.  Abby Levine walked into the interview eight months pregnant.  It was a great moment.  We all looked at each other and [said], "Okay, we've got to live our values."

JR:  Right, exactly.

NK:  "We're going to live our values."  We hired her, which was a great thing.  I feel, for me, in terms of my – that is one of the things I feel really best about was the creation of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable.  What led into it – I've done an oral thing with them around all the steps that lead up to it because it didn't just happen.  There were ten years of preparing for it to happen.  Then, to see it now, that's just very exciting.

JR:  Yeah, really flourishing.

NK:  Very exciting.  I feel really good about that.  That's probably [inaudible].  Then, I'll fast forward to going to NCJW.  I was very happy in Boston.  I'd been there twenty years.  I never planned to be [inaudible] twenty years.  I was going to be four years, go back to a democratic administration in Boston – there wasn't one for seventeen years.  I was living in my suburban home.  At that point, I'd gotten divorced after thirty-five years of marriage, and I'm going, "What am I doing here?  I'm living in Swampscott, Massachusetts, in my big house.  Why?"  I thought about moving into Brookline or Cambridge, but that's where I grew up.  It was a very weird time.

JR:  Your daughter was out of the house already?

NK:  In 2007, my daughter got married, and we split up after that.  At that point, I was going to go – Ruth wanted me to come be her senior vice president, actually.  And I really was like, "Wow," but it was too much change.  I mean, I just got divorced, my kid just got

married – I can't do it. I put it all on hold for about a couple of years. I just put it aside. I just said, "I'm not thinking about this." And for ten years, I had gone for interviews for a lot of national jobs. And then I'd withdraw because my husband was never going to move to New York, and in those days, we didn't commute. So, I just put it on hold. I didn't think I could do it. It wasn't something I could do. Fast forward, I have this horrible situation; it had gone on for five or six years with the mosque. [I] felt very disappointed in some of the leadership in Boston and felt like, "What is this? This is ridiculous." There was the Gaza flotilla thing. I won't even go into that whole story. But I got this call from a headhunter. She said, "Nancy, I have a job with your name on it." I said, "I'm not looking for a job." "No, no, you got to look at this." I read the job description and go, "I have to have Israel in my life." At that point, I had been to Israel fifty-two times. I love Israel. "Oh, no, they have Israel." [inaudible] I knew NCJW. They weren't active in Boston, but I knew it because of the national work, which was wonderful. I always felt very comfortable with them in national meetings, and I went, "You should just go for an interview." I honestly never thought that I'd actually go through with it because I never went through with anything – very ambivalent. So, I go, "I'll go for the interviewer." I have this interview with these wonderful women. I have this great interview. I said to the headhunter – I'll never forget it – "I am not ready to sign on the dotted line here. I just want to be really honest." She said, "Well, you're one of eight. Don't worry about it. It's going to be a long process." I said, "Fine, but I just want to be clear." She calls me that night and said I'm down to two and I needed six references. I went, "I can't tell anyone."

JR: What happened to the long process?

NK: Yeah, I can't tell anyone. Who am I going to have for references? I haven't worked in twenty years anywhere else, and I'm not telling anyone here because that would be a disaster. Colleagues – ba, ba, ba. Right up until the end, I almost didn't take the job. Most people didn't think I was going to do it because I was like Miss Boston, and I had a pretty good deal going. But there was something in me that knew I had to change, that it

was time, and that the only place I would go was New York. So, at age fifty-nine, I made this huge change. It was the best thing I ever did. It was amazing how – and plus, I had all these friends from my two years at NYU who said you had unfinished business in New York – dear, close friends. New York is New York, right? BJ [B'nai Jeshurun] was my second home when I'd come to New York. It was a good move. It was a good move. But I didn't know I was coming to do a turnaround. [inaudible] NCJW. I was the first CEO in 120 years. They had had staff there for years who never were evaluated. They had this office in New York and the office in Washington. It was a lot. I mean, I tell Sheila Katz all the time, “You got to kiss the ground I walk on because the eight years I spent were not easy.” But it's an amazing organization. I loved everything about it. I loved the work. I loved the women, and I saw the potential. That’s when we did strategic planning, and I put [it]on the table – it's time. We should close New York and move to Washington. We should be in Washington. I was going back and forth. It didn't make any sense. I feel very good about that. We gave a year’s notice, and we moved it. It was the right thing. It was the right time. You need to know when to come and when to go. The men don't really know that as well as women do.

JR: So, you were there from 2010 to 2019.

NK: 2019. Right. Yeah. And it was a lot. It was a lot. I wanted to put – NCJW wasn’t even part of the Roundtable when I went there. I mean, how could that be?

JR: Yeah, that is hard to imagine.

NK: It was sort of separate. The other problem was that it was like the National Organization for Women. I said, "We're not the National Organization. National Council of Jewish Women. So, it should be about Jewish in the world" because it was really almost like a secular organization. It was wonderful. They're doing great work, but it was a Jewish core here, and isn't this a way to do it? And I was a community organizer. I wanted to introduce community organizing. Why aren't we doing community organizing?

I contracted with JOIN for Justice [Jewish Organizing Institute and Network for Justice] early on. I said, “This is an incredible opportunity with challenges because it was these sections all over the country; they were all their own, they're all their own 501(c)(3)s. It was complicated.

JR: Right. It was challenging.

NK: It was challenging, but it was great. I had a great run. I had great lay leaders. I'm very proud of the fact there's two millennials now running it. Sheila’s done a great job, and it’s good to be able to hand over something you love to someone who's going to do better than you did. So, I feel great about that.

JR: What do you want to share about the phase of life you're in now and what you're doing now?

NK: So interesting. I never thought I’d be old. I don't consider myself old. I was always the youngest person in the room. I'm still the youngest person in the room because a lot of my friends are older. I have younger friends, too [inaudible]. But it’s very liberating. There's something very liberating about – and I think what I've stepped into – it took a little while. It took COVID, really, but I stepped into [the fact] that I have a lot of history, knowledge, seasoning, perspective. I think what [was] the most important thing when I stepped down was that I had time to think and breathe, and I didn't. I didn't. I made a lot of mistakes – we all do – because I didn't have time to think. I just feel like I see the whole thing, and I feel very determined to be part of this next chapter. I think there’s a lot of ageism in the Jewish community. There is. In addition to the sexism, there’s ageism, which troubles me. But I’ve got a lot left to give. I’ve got a lot of energy. I'm feeling good about where I am. I'm feeling good about the work with women CEOs [and] some of the strategic advising work I'm doing. I feel still underutilized, but it's okay. I would love to have a niche that I'm an emeritus senior person, but I've got a couple of them. So, it's okay. I feel okay. I feel respected and that I left both jobs with a good reputation, which

is not always the case. I think we know that. I feel fortunate for that. I know too many people who things happen, and it's not good. I feel very, very positive about that. I feel like I made a contribution to the world of Jewish social justice. People know it, acknowledge it, and respect that. And that's all you really want, right?

JR: Yeah.

NK: I'm a grandmother. I have three grandchildren. It's wonderful. They moved out of the city, which isn't so wonderful, but they're not that far.

JR: That's too bad.

NK: They're in Scarsdale. Not my place, but it's fine, and it's great, and I get to see them. And great colleagues and friends. New York is amazing. I'm really enjoying being part of it. There's just such interesting people everywhere I go. And B'nai Jeshurun is just a wonderful spiritual home.

JR: That's great.

NK: So, I feel good about where I am.

JR: Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you want to cover?

NK: The state of the political world – that'll be another podcast – Israel, United States, democracy. I did get appointed to the Biden Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, and that's been interesting. I'm going to Poland in September. That's all about trying to help people understand what life was like before the Holocaust instead of just going to Auschwitz and Israel. I'm partnering with something called the Forum, which is 400 schools of dialogue, which are kids learning [and] studying the history before the war in their towns. So we're going to partner with them. It's an official project now with the Commission, which is great. I didn't want to do

just plaques on cemeteries; that wasn't my thing.  I'm really enjoying that.  I'm very involved – I'm the senior advisor to Yaffed, which is trying to get secular education in yeshivas, an issue that I knew nothing about.  My friend Anita Altman was chairing their board and said, "Please help us."  That's been really fascinating – an eye-opener.  I'm getting a little involved in New York.  I chair the New York Jewish Agenda, which has been a lot of fun.  So, I'm balancing my volunteer [work], which I never had time to do, with my business.  So, it's all good.  I'm feeling good about it and feeling good where I am.  I'm traveling, which was what I wanted to do.

JR:  Yeah.  That's great.

NK:  That's it.  Thank you.

JR:  Well, thank you so much, Nancy.  Just in case the beginning of this one got cut off, I'm just going to restate that it's July 14, 2023.  Judith Rosenbaum, interviewing Nancy Kaufman in Newton at JWA.  Do I have your permission?

NK:  Yes, you do.

JR:  Okay, great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]