Priscilla Golding Transcript

Nicole Zador: This is Nicole Zador interviewing Priscilla Golding on Wednesday, November 9, 2022. This is over Zoom, but we are both in the Greater Boston area. So, Priscilla, why don't we start with some background? Do you know about your family's immigration to America – any information on that?

Priscilla Golding: Yes. Yeah. All four of my grandparents immigrated from Eastern Europe, three from Ukraine, and one from someplace in Lithuania. Three of them came to Boston. One went to Cleveland, and then came to Boston and met my grandmother. My maternal grandmother grew up in the East [Boston] – My maternal grandmother grew up in the South End, and then met my grandfather who came from Cleveland, and then they settled in the Roxbury area. Different – moved around a lot – Roxbury into Dorchester. My father's family – his mother was from East Boston, which had a Jewish and Italian neighborhood. And his father was in Boston, but had New York roots, and I haven't figured that out. But my parents both grew up in Boston and Dorchester and Roxbury, and families knew each other growing up. They're all very local.

NZ: And so your family stayed in the Boston area, including in your childhood, right?

PG: Yes, yes. We all stayed. My parents moved to Florida in 1980. Other than that, we've always been in the Boston area. My parents moved to Florida in 1980. And then, my mother moved back to Boston in ’95. And my brother’s in the suburbs, but we've always been around Boston.

NZ: Can you share a little bit about your childhood, and your family – your relationships?

PG: Yeah, yeah, I was born in Mattapan, which was an old Jewish neighborhood. But until I was nine, we lived in Brighton, in a housing project. My parents were working

class. And then, in ’59, we moved to Randolph, which was just starting to become a Jewish neighborhood. And I lived there; we lived there the rest of the time until my parents moved to Florida in 1980. My father worked in the post office. And my mother worked at stores, worked in Filene's in Boston [Brookline and Braintree], and then worked in Florida in stores. And my father retired early; he had a bad heart and [they] moved to Florida for the warm weather. I had two brothers. I graduated [Randolph] High School. And then I went to Northeastern for two years. I quit, emigrated to Israel in the middle of my third year, and I was in Israel for just a short period of time, and then came back to Boston.

NZ: Oh, no, you can continue.

PG: And I had two brothers; I'm the oldest. My middle brother is three and a half years younger than me. And then my younger brother was seven years younger than me. And he was gay, and he died of AIDS in 1995. Except for going to the University of Rhode Island and living in Israel for short periods of time, I've always been in Boston.

NZ: And what was your relationship to the Jewish community when you were growing up?

PG: Growing up? My parents both grew up in secular Workmen's Circle families. My mother went to Workmen's Circle camp and Workmen's Circle School and spoke Yiddish. My father did not, but his family did. And my grandfather, Jacob Golding, was a big shot in the Boston Workmen's Circle. We don't know if he was president, but he was very active, and my mother – and my father's sisters were very active [in] Workmen's Circles. So they were Jews, but they were not religious. And growing up, I didn't – until I was 11, I never went to temple or anything. You know, we vaguely did Hanukkah and a little bit of Passover. And then, my parents joined a small Reform synagogue which met at a church when I was 11, and I was *bat mitzvahed* at 13. So, I went to Hebrew school for two years, and then I was *bat mitzvahed* at a church in Canton. And I was also

Confirmed, and that was that. My parents went to temple during those times, and then when they moved to Florida, my mother became an adult *bat mitzvah*. So they became a little more religious, but you know, Reform, always Reform religious.

NZ: Can you explain a little bit [about] what Workmen's Circle is; what the ethos is?

PG: Workmen's circle, or which is called Workers Circle now, was called *Arbeter Ring,* Workers Ring. And it was a – and it still is – there's been a revival – for a while, it wasn't there – a *landsman* society or a community society of Jews in America. It was fairly active in Boston, but bigger in New York, that had – They had cemeteries; they had schools, they had camps. There was a camp outside of Framingham when my mother was younger. And mostly Yiddish. And mostly Yiddish-speaking, and Yiddish – And in Boston now they teach Yiddish, and the school has been revived in Boston, and everything because a little bit of a revival. But it was more secular – It's a secular Jewish organization. My father's parents are buried in a Workmen's Circle cemetery. My mother's family are buried down the street from where I live, and where Barbara and I will both be buried, in a *landsman* society, which is a society from the town in Ukraine where my mother's mother's family came from, and that's where, on my mother's side of the family, my great-grandparents are there, my grandparents are there, and my [parents, my brother and aunts and uncles are there. And that's a town that was a Jewish town in Ukraine. So there's a lot of ties, so we have a lot of local ties here, too.

NZ: When thinking about, kind of, your gay identity, did you always know you were different when you were growing up? Or was this not something that you realized?

PG: No, I always knew I was different. I didn't – I didn't know I was gay or anything. But I wasn't that into boys when I was younger. But I wasn't very – The reason I think, in some ways, it took me a little while – through my teens, I wasn't athletic. I'm not kind of butchy; I was, you know, I was mostly into books. And I had girlfriends. And I did date boys in high school and a little bit into college, but I never had a real relationship. And,

yeah, I always felt a little – I just felt different. I just felt different. That was the whole thing. And I had close girlfriends, but you know, I never had any sexual relationships or anything in high school. And not until I was in college. And then I didn't get involved with women until I went back to college – after dropping out and going back.

NZ: You mentioned that your brother is also gay – was also gay, sorry. Were you able to talk with him about that? Did you –?

PG: Not at all. Because, you know, I was seven years older than him, and I was away, and I moved away. He was – he had a lot of anger. And some of it is because he never really came out. And then, when he came out, he was dying. And so his gayness was very much tied to his illness. You know, because he was young, and then he got AIDS. And he didn't tell us for a while, but we figured it out when all of a sudden, he was sick all the time. And my brother and I did take – and my mother. My mother was very – he was very close to my mother. He was her baby. And he, yeah, he briefly came to Am Tikva with me, the gay Jewish group that I belonged to. And so, there was a little period of time that we were friendly, but then he got very angry at me, very angry at me when he got sick. And that's because, you know, me being gay was a pleasant thing. For him, it was not, it was not. That's my analysis of his anger. And his anger was pretty much directed against me. Yeah.

NZ: Thank you for sharing.

PG: Yeah, it's difficult.

NZ: And so – you went to college; can you describe [unintelligible]?

PG: I went to Northeastern in pharmacy school for two years and then transferred into philosophy for a semester, and then I dropped out and made *aliyah* to Israel. And that didn't work out so well. And I went to England, but I couldn't get work. So, I came back to Boston and enrolled in UMass Boston. And that's where I met my friends who I came

out with when I came back to Boston. We were all just friends. And then everybody kind of came out, said, "Oh, I'm gay." "I'm gay," you know. And we were all local people, local Boston kids that were commuters. We were all commuters. And then, I went to graduate school, and I lived with my parents. And then, I went to graduate school in Rhode Island. That was the first time I went away to school. And my friends kind of moved – by then, my friend started moving to California, they came out – because they didn't want to come out in the same town with their parents. They were all from working-class Catholic families, and it wasn't comfortable for them to come out.

I wasn't feeling as uncomfortable. Then I went to graduate school, and then lived away, and then I kind of more came out. And then came back to live with my parents for a year. And then I went back – and then I lived in an apartment for a year. Then I went back to graduate school because I couldn't – this was the 70s, so there were no jobs. So, I went back to graduate school.

And then when I came back, that's, you know, by then, my parents moved to Florida. But I wasn't as uncomfortable with my parents. I mean, my, you know, I wasn't really out to them, but my mother asked me once, and she said, "Oh, just keep your options open." You know, and once my father came to an apartment in Somerville where I was living and saw my books on the shelf, all the gay books, and he goes, "Oh, interesting books." You know, I mean, so there was never any real homophobia. That's what was sad about my brother because he could have been a little more open with my parents.

I don't know if they were happy about it, but they were definitely, you know, supportive and whatever, you know, there was no any real anti-gayness in the family. And now, and then my mother, you know – my father never knew my partner, but my mother was very close to my partner, and I'm including my brother and, you know, my extended family has been all very, very welcoming. You know, some a little shocked, but you know, not understanding – but nobody, you know, never – all my extended family, my cousins, have

been very supportive.

I'll just tell you one funny thing when we moved into the house here, one of my cousins, who's nice, but not the brightest person in the world, she walked around the house, to see the house, and she said, "Oh, there's only one bedroom." And then she stopped, she goes, "Ooh, only one bedroom." It was like the funny – "Ooh, okay," you know, finally it took – I mean, she had known me for years. I mean, I didn't meet Barbara till I was 49. So, it's not like, you know – but it took her all those years to figure it out.

NZ: To backtrack a little bit, sorry about this, but can you tell me a little bit about why you made *aliyah* to Israel? What drew you to that?

PG: Well, it was the late 60s, and I did get involved in left-wing politics. And a lot of it was antisemitism. People weren't supposed to be out, to be Jewish; I was just starting to, you know, I wasn't like I wasn't religious, I really, you know, didn't have that much Jewish activity, but I was very Jewish identifying. And it was a lot of stuff about, you know, you can't be Jewish and do left-wing politics. And I found it very oppressive. And so, and I had only done a little bit of it – And I always thought I would go live in Israel because it was a socialist society, and I could live without money. That was the appealing part. My problem was, I went through the Boston – we don't have a – we have a consulate, we have a constant? Well, whatever we have here. And they sent me to a very big *kibbutz,* which was the wrong place to go. It was a very big *kibbutz*, and I was lost in the shuffle, and it wasn't a good experience because I had no family. And I was just kind of – and nobody was, kind of, taking care of me. So, it was not a good experience. My brother, the gay brother, he did go to, and he wanted to stay in Israel. And he was very happy in Israel. He had – he went to a small *kibbutz* and had family – you know, people taking care of him. And my mother told me to come home. And then years later, my mother thought if she hadn't told him to come home, maybe he wouldn't have died. Who knows? You know, but his experience was better than mine. But, yeah,

my experience wasn't that good.

NZ: And then, when you came back to America, did you still find that to be the case, where you can't be openly Jewish and involved a lot in left-wing politics?

PG: Yeah, for a while, yeah, you know. I had started – I came out, and I joined a Jewish Women's Group at the Women's Center in Cambridge. When I came back to Boston, I was just starting to come out. And it was mixed there. It was mixed there about how Jewish you could be in the lesbian community there. And so a friend, I met a woman who said, "Oh, this is a gay Jewish group, why don't you come to that." And that was, like, 1978. And that's when things changed. And that's when I started, first of all, getting more religious because I started doing services. And that group was mostly men, but there was a few women. And I found it a relief to be, first of all, to hang out with gay men was much more fun because a lot of the lesbian groups were very, and especially the Jewish women, were very intense. There were a lot of separatists -- women said you couldn't talk to your brother, and you couldn't do a lot of things that, you know, I didn't really agree with -- you know. I liked being with women, but I wasn't going to cut myself off from men altogether. And live in the real world, I thought that, you know, I had to go to work and I had to make a living, and some of the women who – there's also stuff about politics that thought that – they thought if you were if you had money, you should share with other women, and some of these women were really oppressive about it. And, you know, there was a lot of stuff going on I didn't like. And then, when I went to Am Tikva, I met these really nice guys, you know, gay guys. And that was like a whole new community.

NZ: Can you talk a little bit about starting your involvement with Am Tikva and what it was like in the early years?

PG: Yeah, well, Am Tikva started in, like, what, 77. And I joined in, like, in 78. So, they'd been around a little bit, but not a lot. There had been a group called B'nei

Haskalah before, briefly, and then Am Tikvah started, I guess, in, like, 77 or so. And I joined 78-79. I went, and they met at MIT. And people ran their own services, and it was just very homey and friendly. And I met friends, some that I'm still, you know, still close to, and we ran our own services, and we had our little parties, our holiday parties. And, you know, it'd be between 20-30-40 people, depending. And that's where I learned how to do – learned more about religious services, you know, because we ran our own services. And because it was a mixed group – some people came from Orthodox backgrounds and Conservative backgrounds. And me, who, I didn't have that much religious background, and I learned a lot, you know, about different religious backgrounds and everything. And it was wonderful for a long time, and you didn't, you know, have to worry about stuff.

My mother came once, you know when she was visiting, and she liked it. And my mother – and my brother did come for a while. My brother was a singer, and so, for a while, he came and sang in our chorus, which was really helpful because most people couldn't sing. And it was wonderful for a while, you know – and then when the world changed, you know, as people came out, more people came out. But you know, I did a few speaking engagements when I was there to straight communities before it was very open. People don't realize how open it is now, but it wasn't like that before. And I spoke to a rabbinical group once. And I spoke once at UMass Amherst, we went out there and talked about being gay and Jewish, you know, and some people – it was at the Hillel, and some people tried to shut us down, and we went through all that stuff. But it was a very, you know; it was a very, it was a, it was a way for me to really become Jewish. I mean, it really was a way.

And then, I also did the international stuff; I got involved with the International Congress of Gay and Lesbian Jews. When it was, it had just started, but it wasn't brand new. I got there kind of at the beginning, but not at – and I was an unpaid staff person for numbers of years. And I went, I met people in Paris, and people in Amsterdam, and people from

all over. Some of those people, I'm still friends with. I have friends in Paris and Amsterdam that I met in the 80s through those activities. So, people say, "How do you know these people?" You know, and it was through this – we've been meeting around the country, but people internationally. So, I have friends internationally from the groups.

NZ: Do you have any particular events, or activities, or programs that you ran through these various organizations that really stand out to you?

PG: No. But things I went to – the first international conference I went to was in 1986. It was in Amsterdam. So I don't think I had been in Europe since I had left Israel, you know, since I was in England, you know, in the 70s. But what was very interesting – so that was the first time I met people from all over. And I met a lot of people of my generation that had just come out to being Jewish that didn't know they were Jewish. Because they were, they were born right after the Holocaust. So, their parents had hidden them, and you know, especially if they were Europeans. So the parents were all survivors, obviously. And so, it was very interesting that that whole world was completely different.

But one of the first things I remember is the mayor of Amsterdam coming to speak to the conference and saying, "Isn't this wonderful that there's a Jewish conference here?" And not even acknowledging the gayness of it because it wasn't a big deal. It was the Jewish stuff that people were openly Jewish; that was the big deal. The gay and lesbian stuff was nothing. That was a whole – that was very interesting.

I'm trying to think of things that I ran; I mean, I ran a lot of local stuff. And we had a couple of local conferences in Boston. The last one we had was in Provincetown, which was regional. That was, that was much later. And I took the gay guys around and showed them all the candy stores and the bakeries that I knew in Provincetown. It was fun to share, you know, our little piece of it. We did have some meetings in Boston, we used to have these leadership meetings, and we had one in Boston at my office, my work

office, and it was the day that Rabin was shot. And I remember somebody looking – somebody must have had a phone, I don't know, or somebody got a phone call, I think it was before cell phones, got a phone call to tell us where it happened. And we're all having this meeting. And there were people from all over the country there. I remember that moment. There were a lot of moments; they're not jumping to my head.

NZ: That's fine, if you think of one later, you can always come back to it. I wanted to ask a little bit about the experience during the AIDS crisis, because as you said this – you start – you joined Am Tikvah in like the late 70s, but, I mean, it existed in the 80s as well so can you tell how that shifted things – ?

PG: By the late 80s I had joined Temple Israel. I'll just say I transitioned to Temple Israel because other friends of mine were joining, and as much as I liked Am Tikvah, I was kind of getting tired of always – you had to run your own services, you had to set up the chairs, you had to bring the food. And then as I was getting more religious, more into, you know, into having more religious observances, and Temple Israel had reached out to David Passer and Marc Maxwell, who were my friends and said, you know, "We joined." And so, I joined with them, you know. I stayed at Am Tikvah for a while, I overlapped for a while, but then it got a little too much – paying all those dues, first of all. And I still have been paying dues to Workmen's Circle, so it was like, a little too much.

So, it was the late 80s. One of the things that happened that related to me and AIDS is I had a whole group of friends who had gay brothers who were sick. And we were in a little support group. And it was like six of us and they were all friends of mine, people I knew already that had gay brothers, and they were all sick and dying, and my brother was one of the last ones to die. And that was quite intense that we all went through that and, and I don't keep in touch with those people anymore. In some ways, it was a – it was such an intense time that we moved on to other things afterwards. But at Am Tikvah there weren't a lot of – nobody, we were close to got sick and died. But I knew people in

the community, you know, from other things that time. But it was mostly related to my brother, and how difficult that was.

And how difficult it was for my parents. That was a hard thing. And my brother died – in June. My father died – My father, meanwhile, had, you know, a bad heart and was always not going to live a long time. He was in his 70s. So, my father never dealt with my brother, really, my mother would come back and forth from Florida, and stay with him in East Boston. And then my father died in June, and then my brother died in October.

NZ: Wow.

PG: It's all tied together. And, yeah, I mean, you know, I went to, you know, my brother and I did go to AIDS walks together, you know, we did a few of those things together, you know, we did a walk once, and then we did registration. And those were good things. You know, I mean, he was, he did AIDS action stuff. I mean, he did get involved in the community like that. And we did some of those things together, which is more pleasant than some of the other things. But when my father died, my brother kind of lost it. And he started yelling at us about who was having *shiva*, all those things. And it was very, very bad for my mother and me.

NZ: Mm-hm. Can you talk a little bit about the transition, I guess, to Temple Israel, and kind of, the greater acceptance of gay Jews in synagogues? I know Temple Israel was one of the first, so –

PG: Yeah, yeah. And, you know, it started out with David, and Marc and David knew Rabbi Friedman – he had been his camp counselor. And they reached out and they were – we were very friendly. David and I used to run the services at Am Tikvah; we used to do the High Holiday services. And, and they said, “Well, come,” you know, so we went to a meeting, and Ann Abrams, you know, had just been hired, came, and it was us, and Andy Sherman, and Marc and David and me and another couple who are not around

now, and I don't even remember, I can picture them, but I can't remember their names, came. And, you know, Marc and Dave wanted to join as a couple; I was single. There were other gay people at Temple Israel then, but nobody really out and no couples, you know, it was the family membership thing, was the big thing. And it had to go to a vote and it wasn't – not everybody supported it, to vote to allow that – we could join – but to allow them as a gay couple, to be a family unit. So it wasn't necessarily – But we did, we joined. And like I said, I went back and forth for a while. But then, I started going to continuing ed and downtown study group stuff. [Editor's Note: these are both educational programs run by Temple Israel of Boston]. And that's why I became more active, and then it kind of faded from – By then, Am Tikvah was starting to fade because there were other synagogues that were, you know, being open and people and also people with children wanted religious school. And so they joined – so, the people I know that had children wanted to join temples with religious school. So people started joining the Reform synagogues around, and more than the suburbs, you know, Swampscott and other places.

Yeah. And so, you know, I felt a little, you know, I lost a little bit of a community. And for a little while at Temple Israel, there was a gay group meeting, but it didn't last that long. You know, so I go to that, and those were usually people that had never really been as involved in the gay community. So, it's a mixed thing. I mean, I'm very happy that we made that transition, and I'm happy that it happened. But you did lose some, you know, it's like losing some of your close community. And when we were, you know, more of outsiders, there was, you know, there was a – you had more bonding; when you're outsiders, you bond with each other in any community. And when they spoke, you know – and it's not full acceptances. I mean, I had a number – I had at least two bad experiences at Temple Israel with people.

One was at that downtown study, which I used to go to, when there was a man who said, "Well, if we let in gay people will have to let in murderers and rapists," in the middle of a

study group, and, you know, and I'm sitting there making a presentation. So, I came out to him, I said, “Well, I'm a lesbian. Are you gonna tell me that I have to leave?” I mean, it was like, you know. And then I was at a regional conference where I was speaking with Rabbi Mehlman about integrating gays into the synagogue, so it was fairly early on, and a woman from my childhood was there, you know, who I knew, I had babysat her children. And she was a religious teacher. She was a Hebrew teacher. And she looked at me, said, “What are you doing here?” And I said, “Well, I'm doing a workshop,” and she looked on the booklet, which said what workshop, and she walked away. And she was a Temple Israel person, too, and an activist. So, it wasn't all – I mean, in this – that was into the 90s, into the late 90s. It wasn't, so it's all – and I still think this, you know, this issue is – it’s just it’s much quieter now.

NZ: How did – particularly in the first instance – how did other people respond to that man? Like were they – ?

PG: One person spoke up, who it turned out – I didn't realize this at the time, now we’re – his son was gay. And he spoke, and he said, but he mostly said, “It's okay, dear, we want you here.” So we laugh about it all the time because he did say that, “dear.” He was an older guy. “It's okay, dear.” Yeah, but not everybody reacted as shocked as one would have. I mean, most, you know, and I knew most of the people. But that it would even happen, you know, and, yeah; it could have it could have been dealt with a little better, I think.

Especially in the early – you know, and I mean, I didn’t always come out. And I'm not somebody that everybody realizes I'm a lesbian, so, and I wasn't in a couple. So, it didn’t come up that often. You know, I mean, if people asked, I came out, but it wasn't like – it would happen if people knew people. I once went on this, like a kind of retreat that – what's the name of the group that just ended. Jewish community, not Jewish community – was an agent, was a group, which just folded, a Jewish group that was all different

temples of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox, and they used to have these retreats, we'd – you would meet with people that were from different types of Jewishness. And the temple sent me once. And I roomed with an Israeli woman who was Orthodox, which was unusual. And she was – gave me a lecture about, I didn't understand men, that was my problem…We talked about how men and women, you know, why were they separating men and women to pray? She says, "You just don't get men," you know, "they can't focus." You know, "they can't focus when there are women around." It was like, oh, my gosh, you know, like – and I did decide that I wasn't gonna go into a whole discussion with her about that, you know, she just thought I was a naive, young woman, and I wasn't that young.

NZ: Do you have any kind of general thoughts on your LGBTQ activism, especially in the early years? Anything I haven't mentioned?

PG: No, I mean, I'm proud of myself that I was pretty, you know, I was pretty open. I, you know, I didn't – my work history is another whole thing, because I didn't really get into that, and I [should have?] talked about that. When I first came out, I was in graduate school in planning, in city planning. And then I came – my first job back in Boston – I tried to get jobs outside of Boston, and didn't work out. And I came back to Boston and I worked in the welfare department. And then I became a social worker – child welfare worker at the Department of Social Services. And, people you know, you didn't come out in those days, but then the whole foster care events happened, which is these two men – these two gay men, I don't know if you know about that, but the two gay men, I'll tell you – applied to be foster parents. And when people found out, and made a big thing. The two men were Temple Israel people, and I was a DSS social worker. And some of us had to – we came out. We had to write letters saying, "Well, we're gay, we're lesbian. And we're social workers. How come we're allowed to have these jobs if they can't do that." And so that was like a big public thing. But it felt very comfortable. I mean, by that I felt comfortable about that.

And the one funny thing happened in our office once. There was – we sat in a big, big room, everybody all sat in one big room with desks, had no privacy at all. And one of the women who was fairly out as a lesbian, another woman said to her, screamed in the middle of the office, “Are you a lesbian, Barbara?” In the middle of the office. Everybody just looked around and started laughing. But it was like, what a thing to say. It's funny because she was a Jewish woman who was a big shot in Jewish community, so it was kind of funny. She [answered?], “Yes, I guess so,” and then she sat down, you know, like – but people were just – this is the 80s, and people were just coming out publicly.

And that was positive. And I became active in the union stuff because of all that. Then I was involved with a group that was of gay union activists, and started doing stuff because there'd been issues there, too. But that was exciting. It was an exciting time, you know, to do all these first things. To do that. So, I did the Jewish stuff, I did the union stuff. But then I've had jobs – I had a job at the state. I was the first executive director of the Commission on the Status of Women. And I was pushed out because I was a lesbian there, and that was – they hired me knowing I was a lesbian, and then some people decided that wasn't appropriate. And I was pushed out, you know, by that I want to leave because it was so uncomfortable. So, I’ve lost a job that way. You know, my other jobs, that's the only time that I've really had problems being out.

NZ: Can we talk a little bit, I guess, about your work history and about your work with unions? And –

PG: Yeah, so when I came out of graduate school, I ended up in the welfare department just because – it was a planning job, but then they – the state reorged and made me a social worker; I had no social work experience. No, no – I had never taken a sociology class. I had a history degree. I had a master's in American history and a master's in city planning. But I became a child welfare worker. And I had – in the city of Somerville, and Cambridge, and I had a good supervisor. We're all friends now, we're meeting next

week, we've been together since 1979. And I did that for a number of years. And then that's how I got involved in being a union person, because you had no control of your job, and one way to do it is to be active in the union. So, I became an officer in 509, SEIU 509. And I did that for a while. And then I got offered a job at the Garment Workers Union, doing union work full-time, and I thought that was a better fit for what I wanted to do.

And the garment workers, there's a history, my aunt had been – had worked at that union office, when I joined the people, there were still people that knew her from the 50s. But I only stayed there for a year. The garment workers were fading, they were kind of going away. And the garment shops were leaving in the 80s. So I only did that for a year. But it got me involved in kind of mainstream union activities in Massachusetts.

And then I got a job in this new agency called Women in the Building Trades, which was helping women get into construction unions. And I got hired mainly – I knew nothing about construction. As I said, I don't build things. I don't know anything about trade stuff. But I knew union stuff. I knew people knew AFL CIO, I knew mainstream union stuff, which a lot of women didn't know. And that's why I was hired. And I was also local, you know, like, talk to the local guys. And you know, and I have a working class background. So that was it. And I did that for many years. Mostly, it was good. There was the issue, but you had to raise the money. I mean, most of that was just nonprofit management, which is very, very difficult to raise money for things and be involved in all this different stuff. But I did that for 15 years. And there, I was out. You know, most of the time, it was not a problem, although people always presume the construction women are all lesbians and they’re not, you know. That was the opposite. You know, people are presumed everybody's a lesbian, but most of them are not lesbians. Very rarely do we meet gay men. There were few. And I did that for a number of years until I went to the Women's Commission, because I was doing politics. But I'm not that good at politics. It wasn't a good a fit with me, intense politics. So then I did the Women's Commission for

two years. And then I did – I ran a community agency called Allston Brighton Healthy Boston. And that was interesting because it was back in the neighborhood that I lived in as a child. My office was actually in back of the housing project. So, it was kind of fun. I like Brighton; it was fun being in Brighton. But that was raising – there was no money there, too, and I left there when the money ran out, basically, and the agency, Healthy Boston, the whole system kind of fell apart. There used to be Healthy Boston's in every neighborhood.

NZ: What does Healthy Boston advocate for, exactly?

PG: It was a community group funded mostly through the city to do things like, you know, smoking cessation. We did ESL programs, especially in Brighton. ESL, all kinds of different neighborhood stuff. But the funding folded up for that, and I left that. Then I did some consulting, and then my last job, before I retired, was working for a regional employment board, which is the way federal money for workforce development comes into the state. And I worked in Cambridge and I was in charge of all the youth program money, so workforce development money for youth, and worked with high schools in Cambridge and Revere and Chelsea and Malden, different places like that. And I did that till I retired. So, that's why it's hard. I always, I did nonprofit management and workforce development is my two main things that I did. And most of them were very interesting. But raising money, that last job, I didn't have to – I was giving out money, which was very nice. People were happy to see me, you know, instead of begging for money, you know, it's so much nicer.

NZ: I'm interested, especially with the Healthy Boston – so you were back in Brighton, did you notice any changes in the neighborhood by that time from when you were a kid?

PG: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You know, when I lived in Brighton, it was before BC and BU were big schools. And it was, you know, working class and Jewish, although it's still – it became Jewish again. But it was, yeah, it was. There was a trolley – there were no

college students, because BC and BU were both commuter schools. So, there were no college students living there and everything. So, it's a whole different, a whole different world. And the housing project, it was interesting being in back of the housing projects, you know. The housing projects had been built for veterans after World War II. That's how our family moved there. My father was a veteran. And so, it had been changed, but it had it gone into disrepair, and then it had been renovated and kind of, by the time I went back to work, it was doing better after falling into disrepair. But it was fun. I liked Brighton; Brighton is an interesting area. I still like Brighton. Where do you live, Nicole? Do you live in Brighton?

NZ: I live in Brighton, yeah.

PG: Where do you live?

NZ: I live right off of Washington Street.

PG: Oh, so that area.

NZ: Yeah.

PG: Yeah. Yeah. The Chabad wasn't there, but there was – the two synagogues, B'nei Moshe on Commonwealth Ave. My mother was in a theater group. We didn't go to temple, but my mother was in a theater group there. And then, you know, the other one around the corner. Yeah, I mean, well, you know, so. Yeah, I liked working in Brighton. And I lived in West Roxbury, so it wasn't that bad commute. Better than working downtown. Or working in Cambridge. My last job, I worked in Cambridge, and it was hell. Yeah. And I was driving around. It was just – and the traffic round here gets worse and worse. So yeah, it was kind of fun, going back to my – when I first got the job, I felt like there were ghosts there because I was parking where we used to play, you know, where the parking – But it was Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, and that's all changed. They tore down the whole building, I worked – I worked at a monastery. It's all fancy condos.

They just went up, those new condos? That's where it was. And I'm like my father, you know, he used to say, "Remember this, do you remember when this used to be this? And that used to be that?" Now I do that all the time. That's what people do.

NZ: I'm wondering if you see a connection between a lot of your work – which was involved in activism, right, with the unions, and with gender equality in the workplace – How do you see that relate to your personal identity? In your own personal life?

PG: Well, yeah, I mean, I always felt like things should be better. You know, and I always, and I think the women's stuff I always knew – so, when I went – got out of high school, and I went to apply to college. You know, I sort of grew up working class, most of the girls did not apply to college that I grew up with. Even the Jewish girl, you know, which was unusual. The Jewish boys all went, you know, were gonna go to college, but the Jewish girls went to secretarial school, you know. And my parents said I should go to college. They always presumed I'd go to college, but they said, "You have to go to teaching college," that was the only option. Or nursing, but they knew I was never going to be a nurse. And I didn't want to be a teacher, I thought it was just too traditional. I didn't want a traditional job. And so, I think that was when my understanding of that I was different. I didn't want to be a teacher.

The irony is I probably would have been a good teacher and I did do some teaching later on. But it was just because it was forced on that I didn't want to be – and the only option. Years ago I heard a woman speak – politician – who said, you know, "Going to high school, your option was being a high school teacher, a college teacher or a nurse." That was it for working-class girls. And so, I didn't want to be a nurse, or teacher; I wanted to go to college. And my parents presumed I'd go to college. I mean, they didn't say I had to go to work. But I had a commute, you know, I mean, they didn't pay for any college. They just let me live there free, which for working class families, that's a big thing. I didn't have to give them any money. I used my father's car, you know, I mean,

but they didn't pay my tuition. So, I applied to Northeastern, to the pharmacy school, because you could become something. I had to go to college to become something. But I had no, I did not have science background in high school because I was a girl, and girls weren't encouraged to take science or math. So, when I got to Northeastern, even though I had almost a full scholarship to Northeastern, I was really behind.

I made it through two years and I dropped out before I flunked out, basically. I just couldn't keep up because I'd never had physics, I never had advanced biology. I was just, and you know, after being fairly smart in high school, and then being really dumb in college, it was a trauma. You know, so that was, you know, that was, that was a trauma. Which is a trauma that still bothers me, like, bothers me – that's got to do with identity – that as a girl I wasn't exposed to math and science.

You know, I went to Randolph High School, it was not a good school system. I don't know, it's kind of a combination of the school and the age, because things got better shortly after. People started realizing that girls need to have a little more diverse academics. So, I don't know, if I had come a couple years later, if I would have got more support or if I would have done better in math and science, and maybe I wouldn't have done as good as I thought. I do think I would have been, you know, I could have done much better. And that I could have been much more science-oriented.

Because I'm not. I read a lot and stuff, but I don't like to write, I'm not that English-oriented. I'm a little more science, you know, and I like math. But I just wasn't exposed to advanced math. I never took, you know, trigonometry, I never took any advanced math. And when I got to college, it was presumed that I'd had all that stuff. And so, you know, or if I had gone to a college where they had given me some more support; there were only three girls in my class. I mean, it was still new. Years ago, pharmacy had been a women's – had been an immigrant program – and there were more girls. Then it became more men. And now it's more women again. But when I was there, it was less

than – there were very few women. And people say to me, “Does your father own a drugstore?” And I'd say, “No.” They said, “What are you doing in pharmacy?” because that was the path, you know. So my parents were very upset when I dropped out of pharmacy school. Because it did take me years to be able to make a living, you know, and it took me years, and I made a living growing – you know, in my jobs, but I could have done much better, financially. But yeah, you know my spouse, Barbara, her father was a pharmacist. So that's one of the things when we first met we talked about oh, and she said her father never encouraged you to be a pharmacist. Yeah.

NZ: How did you meet Barbara?

PG: I met Barbara through a friend who was active at Am Tikvah. And she was friends with Barbara, and it was her birthday. This [friend] who has since left town. It was her birthday. And she told me to call – I was helping set up her 50th birthday party. She told me to call all these people. So, I called Barbara, and I had met her in passing but never really talked to her. And when she came to the birthday party in the backyard, we started talking about Temple Israel; I had just come back from Israel with the Temple. And there was a *selichot* service happening. And she seemed interested. She said she had gone once or twice. And I said, “Why don't you come to *selichot* services?” You know, and she had never heard of – And she did, yeah. And we went out to dinner. And we talked about pharmacy, and our fathers, her father, she's a librarian and my father loved libraries. And he used to sit in all the – and that's what he used to do with me, take me to the library. We’re big readers. I'm not a writer, but we're big big readers. And my father and I would read together. And my father, you know, didn't go to college or anything. And, and, you know, so that’s it, yeah, we met through mutual friends.

NZ: I know you were active in, like, local public libraries, right?

PG: Yeah, yeah, um, I've always – well, I learned to read at the Brighton Public Library. My father would take me and I would get the adult books. You know, even though I was seven and eight years old, and they would – you know, the librarians wouldn't let you check it out. And we would stand in line and my father, I'd say to my father in front of the librarian, "Here's my books," and he would check them out for me. We read science fiction, I mostly read science fiction as a little girl. And then history stuff. Yeah, and to me, a librarian, you know, Barbara, my father would have loved Barbara. Both of our fathers were gone by the time we met my father, oh, he would have been thrilled. He would have been thrilled. What was the other question you asked me?

NZ: I was asking – before Barbara, I was asking, I was going to ask about college, actually. About, maybe, your decision to go back. You went to UMass Boston, right?

PG: So, after I was in Israel, I left Israel. And there was a drug raid in my *kibbutz*. So, I left right before the drug raid. There was a lot of drugs in *kibbutzes* in the late 60s, early 70s. Hash, boxes of hash. I mean, it was – you know, and I did a little drugs, but I wasn't – And I was involved with a guy, and it didn't work out. So, I met an English woman. And I traveled to Europe with her and we went to England [to her family].

And she was working class and she had never gone to college. But I knew I couldn't get a job [and stay in England]. And so I asked my parents to send me a ticket, and they sent me a ticket and I came home. So then I moved in with them. And then I said, "Well, I better go back to college." So, I went to UMass Boston, and that's where I met the people I came out with, and I studied American history, and fell in love with American history, which I had always liked history, and in high school, but I really I fell in love with American history. And I still am in love with American history.

I couldn't get work. There was very little jobs in the 70s. So I went and got a master's in American history at URI, where our friends had gone to school. And I loved it down there. But then I came back and I still couldn't get a job. I sold jewelry at Filene's

downtown; I sold jewelry, where my mother helped me get a job. And then, I decided [to] go back to Planning school, where my friend who had gone to URI – because then I could get a job. So then I went back to URI. And that's kind of when I came out. And then I came back to Boston, and got a job in the [state] welfare department. I moved back to Boston. So, that was like 70, late 70s, I sometimes get the years confused. And then, I became a union activist, you know, after the welfare department.

But that's where I learned about the world. You know, I mean, not you know, I had come from an intact family with a loving father. And when I became a child welfare worker, I learned that the world is not so nice. And people's families are not so nice. You know, I mean, you know, I knew some people had divorces, but I didn't know that I didn't know about men abusing children. You know, they, you know, I just didn't know that – how much sorrow there was. And I worked in Somerville and Cambridge, and Somerville, in those days, was still working class. Asked before – Somerville is where I've seen the big changes. And there were generations of abused families, and you could follow the generations, still in the 80s. Now they've all left because they can't afford to live there anymore. But, there were generations of families. And yeah, I learned about the world there that I didn't know about. Thank goodness.

NZ: So, you just touched on this, and how were those early years? Because as you mentioned before, you didn't really have official training to be a social worker. How was that – adapting?

PG: Well, that was – it was interesting. And my supervisor who, you know, I still see – and she didn't have an MSW either – this before you really needed [one], and there were a couple of people who had MSWs, but she had – I had two master's degrees, but nothing to do with social work. And she had a master's in education. And she's – when I showed up there at the welfare in Somerville, after being made a social worker, I said to her, “I don't know anything about it,” she goes, “Well, he should 20 cases, this is the way

it is here," you know, but she helped me through it. I mean, you know, and like I said, we're still friends. And it was all about practicality, and helping people through crises. And that I could do. It wasn't about therapy; it wasn't about – you know, in child welfare, it's like, how do you improve your life so your children come back? Or how do you get the children out of there? and I was good at that stuff. And I was very good at it. And I was the only one that ever left the job with the paperwork done on time, too (*laughs).* That was because I did my paperwork on time. And I met a lot of wonderful people. And it was interesting, it's just, I saw such sadness.

Such sadness, and I had two families that I helped that thanked me later, which is very unusual in child welfare. One family, they got the child back after being drunks for many years and got the child back and, you know, [it was?] hard, but they worked on that. And then I was at a restaurant in Plymouth once and this woman came up to me, she says, "My life got better for me, remember me?" and she had left her parents house, and took her child with her, which was the better – she was a Cambridge family. So, I had a couple, as I said, I have two positive experiences; it was better than that. But like I said, I learned and, you know, I learned about the world.

And I would do things, like I was always on time. And my clients would say, "Oh," you know, they weren't used to people being on time. And that was good. So they'd get used to timeliness. So if I was late, they say, "Oh, my gosh, you were late," you know, "you should–" you know, and I was practical about all that stuff. And I had this one family, Somerville family. The mother had like five children, different men, on welfare. And she had one girl who she doted after; the boys were out getting in trouble all the time, which is why we were involved. The boys were just, you know, mostly small stuff, but every boy was in trouble. And I spent a lot of time talking to her. And we had some really good conversations. And once one of the teenage boys came over, and he said something this is he says, "You know, the trouble with the world is that Reagan's a Jew, and that's why everything's a problem." And I said – and she got all – she knew I was

Jewish. And she said, she goes, “Oh, don't listen to him. He's an idiot,” you know? And I said, “No, I want him to tell me, why does he think that? You know, why does he think that – that Reagan's a Jew was Jewish and why is that a problem?” And I tried to get him to talk and she was embarrassed because she didn't, she didn't want him to – but that was you know, another thing that, you know, we learn about people and stuff. Yeah. Yeah, we did have a problem.

I'll say one thing that what, during that time, one of the of the teachers was helping a young – it was a girl. I think she was still in junior high, that got pregnant. And he was helping her get an abortion. And her boyfriend, the father of the child, beat the social worker up in the projects. It was bad – It was the only time that I saw violence. I didn't see it, but I heard about it. But the social worker got beat up by the boyfriend who said he wanted that child, it was his child. That was just after – it must be just after Roe v. Wade. Yeah. Because it was legal. You know, the social worker, kind of, was helping, you know, which was a little on the edge. But still, you know, after a while you get sick of seeing, you know, 15 year olds pregnant. This one, she was pregnant by a boy rather than a man, which is the usual. Yeah, a whole world out there. But, but that is yes, we have changes in Brighton, but changes in Somerville is where you see the big changes. Big changes. Yeah.

NZ: I just wanted to pause and see if you wanted a break. Do you need any?

PG: I’m okay. I just realized, I'll take a drink.

NZ: Yeah, yeah.

PG: Drink of my tea. I did take a walk early this morning. Did you well this morning?

NZ: It’s beautiful, yeah.

PG: It's beautiful; it’s cold but beautiful.

NZ: I actually prefer a little cold.

PG: I do too. Where'd you grow up, Nicole?

NZ: Wisconsin.

PG: I like it cold. I generally like the cold better than the heat. Yeah. Right. Am I answering the questions that you need?

NZ: You're doing perfectly, wonderfully. Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, thank you.

PG: Go on tangents [inaudible].

NZ: No, they're perfect. I'm wondering if you've ever felt – I don't want to say a conflict – but if you've ever felt that your working-class background gave you a different relationship to your Judaism or your Jewish community in Boston?

PG: Yeah. Oh, I think so. And I think at Temple Israel, it definitely – I mean, that's why the Am Tikvah people were much more mixed. When I joined Temple Israel, my mother said, "Oh, I can't believe they even let you in there." You know, because she grew up here – so don't forget, I'm local – where there was, you know, rich German Jews. And she was a poor, you know, working, you know, Yiddish-speaking girl. When I was in high school – when I was in Hebrew school, we did go to Temple Israel once, for, I think it was Israel's 13th birthday, that we bused – we were bused in from the little place in Randolph that I went [to]. I think it's, you know, and I think that in the general world, people still think that Jews are all rich, you know, and that's why I bring it up more, you know, working-class, you know. I mean, we weren't poor, we weren't starving or anything. But, you know, nobody paid for my college, nobody paid for my clothes. I went to work to pay my clothes. And it is different, and it is different. And I think it's not that there aren't working-class Jews at Temple Israel, but it's still – the Jewish community still relies on, you know, people that have money. And I realized that, it's like that for every

organization. You know, all that raising money to run, that the people that have money get special preferences, you know, and it's not just the temples. But it's definitely a big thing in the temples. And Temple Israel is like other – it's like that. At one time, I thought about working in the Jewish community, and I didn't – you know who Rabbi Al Axelrad is, from Brandeis?

NZ: Yes.

PG: Well, he was [our] rabbi when he was a student. When he was an intern, he was the rabbi at this little synagogue I went to, he was my confirmation rabbi. And my mother was very close to him. When I said – when I was looking in the Jewish community, he said, “You don't want to work in the Jewish community.” And Rabbi Mehlman says to me, “You don't want to work for the Jewish community.” They both said to me, “You're not going to, you know, fit in the Jewish community.” I mean, I think it's a little more diverse now. But, you know, they didn't think it was for me. They both knew me fairly well. Yeah. Yeah. My mother was very helpful to the rabbi, because he would commute back and forth from New York. And she was to drive them to the train station and spend a lot of time with him. And he did my brother's *bar mitzvah*; and he did my confirmation. Which was kind of fun. I just – I heard from him. He called to talk to me about my family and stuff recently, which was very nice.

NZ: Yeah, that's great.

PG: Yeah. Yeah. There's a little bit of a localness, you know, a little bit of local stuff there. Yeah. I think it's – Well, I think it's a conflict in a lot of places. You know, people not understanding – and I think some people including people, you know, that I'm friends with, don't seem to understand the difference between – you know, I didn't go to camp. That was, you know, when I joined Am Tikvah, that was one of the things that – people were – a lot of them and a lot of people when we would go to conferences, they’d all gone to Jewish camp, and they would sing these Jewish songs. I never did any of that

stuff. Some of it was because of our Jewish, you know, we weren't that involved in the Jewish community when I was young, but also money, you know, my parents couldn’t send me away to camp. In the summer, I hung out in the street.

By the time I was 11 or 12. I worked, you know, babysitting, I always had babysitting jobs. You know, I mean, I didn't go off to factories. But, you know, I didn't go – I didn't, my parents didn't send me to camp. My brothers went to a little day camp. You know, my brothers did a little more than I did, because my parents had a little more money. When my mother went to work, they had a little more money, that's – my mother went to work when I was a teenager. My father finally said, “Why don’t you get a paying job?” So, and then things – so my brothers went to day camp. You know, they did a few more things than I did. But I went to dancing school. It’s not like, you know, it’s not like I didn’t do anything.

But yeah, I mean, I didn't – you know, when I went to college, it was a state school. Even though – you know, this is stuff I regret – is that in my era, if I had applied to small private schools, I probably could have gotten money to go. There was a lot more money – you know, things were a lot less expensive. I could have gone away to a fancier school, but I didn't know that. And that's got to do with being working-class and parents not understanding college. That's the stuff. It wasn't even the money. It's really the understanding, which people go through now. Understanding how to access things. That's the difference. Because I could have accessed, if I had had, or I had gone to a school that had had guidance counselors, I could have accessed a lot more stuff. In that era, you know, I could have gone to private school, and probably could’ve gone away. I mean, I got full scholarships to go to Northeastern. In science, and I didn’t even have a science background. So, you know, it was a different world, but it's really about understanding access. And I think some things – and I think people in Jewish community think, presume, that everybody, you know, went to camp and everybody was sent away to college, you know. When I tell people, I didn't go away to college, I

commuted, some people look at me, like, you know, “Oh, my gosh.”

NZ: I'm also wondering about the relationship between your queer identity and your Jewish identity. Did you always feel them as kind of intertwined or were they separate? I know, your Jewish identity obviously, obviously changed throughout the years.

PG: Yeah. You know, they became intertwined, you know, I have to say, because, you know, when I joined Am Tikvah, I hadn't been out that long. You know, the first group of people I came out with – none of them were Jewish, but they were all working-class, Christians – Catholics that had to leave their family. And I felt a little bit my parents – you know, that and I felt the Jewish community was always a little more open. You know, even though it wasn't as open as it is now, but it was all – it wasn't as – I knew, it wasn't as – you know, and the people I knew that were Jewish that came out didn’t have as hard a time.

At one gay pride parade, I ran into – it was a guy that showed up at Am Tikvah that had gone to school with me in Brighton in kindergarten, and it turned out his mother and my mother had been friends, which I asked my mother about. And he said, “My mother wants to see you. My mother wants to see you,” And he came running over – I was on motorcycle – and he comes running over with his mother to say hi to me. It's funny because he looked the same; there was something about him that was like a little boy. You know, it was always easier – I mean, I think being Jewish and being gay – that was easier because most of the people I knew were Catholic; they're having a hard, hard time. And nobody I knew – I mean, I've met people since whose families cut them off, but nobody I knew, family cut them off, you know? So, it felt a little more comfortable.

And yeah, I never really felt a conflict – that I didn’t feel a conflict. You know, and I think as I got older, and I loved Judaism even more, and Jewish people – even those – you know, there were issues with them – that I feel, you know, blessed that this is the community I came out with, you know, and that the Reform movement became, you

know, open fairly quickly. And, yeah, I just, you know, I feel happy that this is where I am and that I'm in Boston. I think growing up here, yeah, you can't get much better, I think, you know, then coming out here and doing stuff.

Yeah, so you asked me about meeting Barbara, and then my mother met Barbara. I met Barbara ‘99. My mother moved back up to Boston to be near me. She moved to Newton, which she always wanted to, so that’s the funny thing, she went to senior housing in Newton. But just down the street from me; I helped her get into housing. She really loved Barbara, and she came up the weekend we got married. That was a weekend – she sold her house on Thursday in West Palm Beach, a hurricane hit on Friday, and she took the last plane out. She got the last plane out before the hurricane hit for our Saturday night wedding. And it was the only time that a hurricane had hit her neighborhood in West Palm Beach. So there was damage but she had sold the house already, her condo. And as she moved up, and she lived with us for a couple of weeks.

And it was ‘04, when the Red Sox were winning the World Series, which was a big thing in our family. She would stay – first, she stayed at my sister-in-law's mother, but it was too dirty there, she didn’t like it. So she moved in with us. And she would stay up at night and watch the baseball game when we’d go to bed because we had to go to work in the morning. She couldn't understand how we could go to bed when the Red Sox were playing the World Series. But Barbara lost her voice. The funniest thing is Barbara, my mother and Barbara got along well, but all of a sudden, Barbara was a daughter-in-law. And daughter-in-laws are different. And my mother started watching Barbara cook, and Barbara lost her voice; she became mute because my mother was watching her as a mother-in-law.

And my sister-in-law thought that was so funny. She says, “I know it's different when you’re a daughter-in-law and your mother-in-law's watching you.” But at our wedding, we were – it was very nice. My niece and nephews came and my sister-in-law's mother –

who's Catholic, my sister-in-law was Catholic; she converted – she came. But Barbara did not invite her family, which is just her mother, she had no siblings, she had very little family. But my family was all there. We had a lovely wedding at the temple with Rabbi Jonah Pesner. Just very informal. We did not send out invitations or anything. So some people didn't show up, they were waiting for the invitation. We just told people to come on a Saturday night; it was a *havdalah* service in the sanctuary, and a little – and then sandwiches and champagne in Slater [Editor's Note: Slater is a lounge in Temple Israel]. It was lovely.

NZ: Yeah, that sounds, that sounds lovely. Did, I guess, Barbara's relationship with her family – Did that impact the feeling of the wedding at all? Did that add any tension or stress?

PG: Well, her mother was older and lived in Albany. And her mother met me, but she never really acknowledged that we were married. You know, she was nice to me; it wasn't like, you know – but it just wasn't – And Barbara has no siblings. She has cousins who were very nice to me, and knew we were married. And now we're very close, you know, but not – they're – our age, you know? And now Barbara has a cousin – her cousin's daughter is a lesbian. We got together with her twice. She was in California, but now there's a bond because she's married to a woman. So there's that thing.

But Barbara decided she just didn't want to bring her mother in and talk about it. And it was fine. I mean, I think it was mostly fine. You know, like I said, by the time we got there, her mother was older, you know? But I don't think she would have been as open as my family. You know, my mother was quite open. And my mother was fine with my brother. Just, you know. I mean, she took care of him. My mother is pretty open. My mother was a pretty open – When she moved to Florida, she had been active in B'nai Brith in Boston, had been very active in B'nai B'rith Women. And I was in B'nai B'rith Girls. But that was what I did – And I did do that as a Jewish kid. And I did youth group

stuff, too, you know. But my mother moved to Florida, and she says to me one day, she was going to join Hadassah, she says, “Everybody says B’nai Brith is just filled with dikes.” (*Laughs).* She said she’ll try Hadassah, she said she’d try Hadassah, which she did. It was funny. But she liked saying things like that. She liked it. She liked to be on the cutting edge, my mother a little more on the cutting edge. Yeah. She was a bit of a character, my mother. Sometimes embarrassing me, but you know, but very open about those things. I was lucky. I think my father – I wish my father had met Barbara, he would have loved Barbara. Because she could have taken him to the Widener Library, and oh, he would have loved to see that. Even my brother Jay, my brother Jay’s tombstone is a book. He never met Barbara, but he would have loved Barbara, too. And she would have been a good buffer for us. But it didn't happen.

NZ: And your other brother, he also lives in the Boston area or – ?

PG: Yes, my other brother, so he's the middle. My brother lives in Holliston and he's married to his high school sweetheart, someone he grew up with, who was born Catholic, but was in the smart classes. So, she always had Jewish friends and she met my brother at a mutual – one of our cousin’s sweet sixteen. So they've been together since they were sixteen-ish. She converted after a couple kids were born. So they have three kids.

My brother's been all right. He did have issues, and it was hard for him when my other brother got sick. And he would say, you know, “I have – both my siblings are gay, poor me,” you know, and there were issues that – he had some issues, but he dealt with my brother. I made him – I forced him to ask him about him having AIDS. I made him ask him, because I felt like they talked more than I talked to him. But anyway – he's done okay. And he likes Barbara. But I'm very close to my sister-in-law. She hangs with us. She goes to P-town with us. She goes to the theater with me and my friends. We spend a lot of time together. So I see my brother and we get along okay, but unless you talk

sports and stuff, he really, you know, he reads, but he mostly talks sports. But when he met Barbara, she was still playing golf, and he's a big golfer. So they had that to talk about and they still talk about that because my nephews play golf, but I'm very close to mine – and we're both very close to my niece and nephews. We see them fairly regularly. My niece lives in Vermont and my nephews both live in Rhode Island. They each have one kid, and we're close to – we see them we, you know, and keep very much in touch with them. Yeah, that's our, that's our family.

And at our wedding – it was the first time my niece and nephews, none of – my niece had a boyfriend then, had just got a boyfriend who she married. My nephews were still teenagers. That was the first wedding they'd ever been to. So my sister-in-law thought that was fun, that their first wedding was a gay wedding. You know, because they had never been to weddings since – But, yeah, they've been very, very happy. Yeah. Well, I'll tell you one, one funny story of my niece and nephews. When my nephews came with me – it was my niece and nephew. They were still little, they were little kids. And they went with me to a friend's kid's birthday party, and it was two mothers, you know, and the mothers were having – the boy – their son was like three or four. And my nieces were like – and my nephew were like seven and nine or something. They were all young. And they came back; I brought them back to the house. They go running over my brother and they go, "Jonah has two mothers!" And they thought that was like the best thing that could ever happen – two mothers! [*laughter*] Instead of one another, my brother says, "Oh, okay." I just remember they were so funny, they go, "He has two mothers." Sometimes I tease them about that, yeah.

NZ: I know you mentioned a little bit how the greater acceptance of gay people, specifically Jews, kind of, maybe, lessened the need for Am Tikvah? Do you still feel that in like today's world, there needs to be kind of queer only spaces, or do you think that the needs have shifted?

PG: I think that needs have shifted, but I miss it. I have to miss it. You know, and I know, yeah, it's queer only – And when we were doing it, when I first started, it was just gay. And then it was G and L. By time, I left it was G and L and B. But I left before the T's, you know, for groups in the groups, you know – so still getting used to that. But I miss it. But mostly I think it's good. But I do miss the only space and I think for younger people, I think it's still necessary. I don't think it's necessary for me. You know, my life has gone on, but I miss it.

There's a whole new thing going on with senior housing, I'm going to tell you about this. So this is the next, the next step in our life. Well, a lot of us, especially those of us without children, although even people with children, you know, as you get older, you need – we all know – we're being very practical that you need some services, and you can't stay in your own home. Most people feel that way. Not all. But to go into senior housing, like after you've been in the gay community, and then to go into some straight senior housing where you don't know who these people are. It's a big issue. It's a big issue in the LGBT senior thing. And it's funny in that at Am Tikvah we talked about it when we were young, where we would go when we were old, knowing that it could be a problem.

And 2Life Communities, which has a bunch of senior housing. They're based in Brighton. But my mother was in their housing in Newton, when she moved up here, they’re building a middle income housing development. And they did outreach to Stonewall communities, which is the Lifelong Learning, a gay lifelong learning group. And all these people signed up. And now we have a whole community – it’s at least 30 households, mostly lesbian, but a few gay men that have signed up to this housing, which is going to be next Coleman House right down – attached to where my mother lived, and we put our downpayment and we're going and it's this whole new community, and it's a way to feel as you age, you know, to not be – so that community is going to be probably about a third, GL, probably about a third GL, might be more mixed than we

know. But it's very exciting.

And it's a Jewish Agency, 2Life communities; there's a bunch of Temple Israel people going, too. So for us, it's going to be quite a mix, because there's this whole community of mostly lesbians and a couple of gay men that are close friends of mine, that are all going into this community [called Opus]. It's not even built yet. It's not for another couple of years. But it's something we always talked about, and now this agency, this Jewish agency, is doing it for us, basically. So, and but it's middle income, it's expensive; I mean, not everybody's gonna be able to afford it, you know. That that's another whole – becomes a whole issue. You know, as your age, you know, finances. And, you know, financially, I'm in better shape than I was because of – because of being with a partner, who had more resources than me. But also, because it's two of us, we're much, much more comfortable than I thought I was going to be in my old age. But this is a whole community going in. So that'll be very interesting. It'll be interesting, because it always overlaps the Jewish community, and also the lesbian community. And there it is, and it's just down the street from where I live now. So, that's an exciting thing. Because people talk a lot, you know, especially in the aging community, aging LGBT community about what we're going to do. And here we have somebody doing it for us, basically. So we have this group, it's about 30, 30 women and about five, six men that have already signed up for this housing. That'll be something to look into.

NZ: Yeah, and I know you just touched on this, but you mentioned kind of the changes in awareness surrounding the gay community, right, like the lesbian and gay, then bisexual and transgender, how that [the awareness] kind of evolved? Do you have anything to say on kind of the evolution? How that changed your idea of the community or your activism or anything?

PG: Um, yeah, I mean, a little, you know, I mean, because I'm not, you know, active in the community as much now. You know, the transitions – But I remember, you know, at

Am Tikvah, the bisexual issue. I mean, some of it was just the acknowledgement that gay didn't mean women, you know, for a long time gay meant women, too, and in the gay Jewish community, a lot of the groups were mostly men, you know, and then women started, you know, and when I did the international stuff, that was a big thing about women being involved, it's still – in that there's still a group, and they still a little more men-oriented. But, you know, getting women involved, and that was all that was in conjunction with women doing everything. I mean, you know, the same way in the straight community, you know, about women in jobs, and, you know, I think that was the same.

And the bisexual was a – it was an issue. That was an issue, because, you know, “Make your –” people said, “Make your decision up.” And it's funny, because I don't think that's an issue at all. I don't know if people talk about that. I don't know, I don't, you know, I'm not in as much the community. And I think that the transgender is a more difficult issue. Because I think it is different. I don't think it's the same. And I did have a partner that became transgender. And my family did acknowledge that too. They said, “Oh, I can see, oh,” my brother, my brother, Mark said, “Oh,” you know, [I don’t even remember what it is?], “So and so isn't a woman anymore.” You know, like, look at my brother. That was something he acknowledged. And my mother had issues like, at my brother's funeral, my mom said, “Who is that man that came up to talk to me?” Because that man had been a partner of mine, previously. My mother knew that he looked familiar, but wasn't sure. Yeah. But [he] didn't say anything bad, just was, “Who was that?” You know, so my family, there's been some discussions. I think it's a little difficult. I think we were talking about the pronoun stuff. I think that's hard – as one of the women – I'm the coach, [do] you know TILLI? So –

NZ: Can you explain a little bit of what that is, just —

PG: Oh, right. Temple Israel Life Long Learning. And I'm the younger, you know – young for that crowd. Most of the people are in their 80s and 90s. Some of them in their late 90s. And somebody else said something to me about pronouns. And I said, “It's difficult for me to,” you know. I mean, we didn't grow up like that, you know, to acknowledge the different pronouns and to say they. And, you know, it's difficult, we work on it, and she said, “I made a mistake.” I said, “It's okay.” You know, it's something – but it's as difficult for me as it is for some of the older people, too, because – I said to her, “Seventy years and saying one thing, it does take a little time to switch.” You know, I acknowledge that people want to be known – if they want to be, it's their choice to be they, but, you know, we just have to work on it. And we'll get used to it. It'll be different.

I mean, I went, we went through the transition at the Temple adding, you know – our fathers and mothers, you know. Adding Leah, Rachel [Editor’s Note: Adding the matriarchs’ names to the *Amidah*]. I mean, I didn't grow up like that, either. And I remember the first time I heard the prayers, it was a little different. But now, you don't even think about it. Now you don't even think about it.

Oh, I know. The other thing. Oh, it's somewhat related, is when I was going to just the gay synagogues, gay and lesbian synagogues, they always had – this is somewhat at the beginning with AIDS – they always had a prayer for healing. And the straight synagogues did not. So, the *Misheberach*, you know, we always did a *Misheberach*, and then Temple Israel, sometime, they started adding it. So that was where, so that, you know, some things come from, they come from the margins, and then they become mainstream. And I think the transgender stuff is kind of on the edge around here. Not everywhere – around here is becoming much, much more mainstream. But it's, yeah, I mean, it's growing up.

And as, you know, the issue with I think, in some ways, from the lesbian community, is that we grew up with – I'm at the edge, I grew up with kind of the end of the butch/femme

stuff. You know, like I said, I wasn't, I mean, me and most of my friends could not identify as butch and femme. And we didn't go to bars in the early days. You know, so we're at the edge of it, but then all of a sudden, you know, that there's no more masculine women. I mean, that's the interesting thing is that you have to – do you have to be transgender, or can you just be a woman? And that relates to my work related like with trades women. You don't have to be man to be a tradesperson. And if you're a woman that wants to be a tradesperson, you shouldn't have to want to be a man, you should be able to be a woman, and feminine, if you want to be feminine or whatever you want to do. And I feel like in some ways, women – there's like a backlash about women – what a woman can do. And that's a little upsetting to me. But it's not my business, if this person feels, feels that they are transgender, they're transgender. Not my business, I just hope women don't lose some of the gains that we spent so many years fighting for. And we're just on the edge of, I mean, in the trades, women are still very much a minority very, very much a minority; it's not changed that much, minimally changed.

So, you know, and as you age, you know, like I said, 70 years of doing something one way, it's a little harder than somebody that's eighteen changing their ways. So, on any issue, on any issue. I like that, you know, and Temple Israel is fairly diverse on lots of levels, and I know we're talking about that at all the time, about being welcoming to everybody. And everybody's identity is their own identity, whatever that is. You know, and I think that relates a little bit to being Jews and Jews of choice, you know, and Jews of color and stuff like that, that we're at – we're at the Jewish community, we just kind of really understanding that, you know, not every Jew is Ashkenazi and White. And, you know, I think that's a good model of us to look at, you know, the whole diversity, which is very exciting. I find that very exciting, so.

NZ: So I know we have a little bit more time left, I just want to see if there's anything I didn't cover that you want to talk about, I know we kind of breezed through some of your work experience. So if you have anything that you want to bring out that we didn't talk

about?

PG: I'm trying to think – I'm sure there are things, you know, work-related stuff that we're letting you know –

NZ: Or anything, you know, anything that you want to share.

PG: That's related. And the changes in the Jewish community. I remember once, I heard a speaker from the Conservative movement, whose daughter was a lesbian, you know, he was – I can't remember his name, but he was a big shot rabbi, and how the Conservative movement was just starting, after we had already started. But it wasn't – I mean, it was a while ago, but because of his daughter, you know, and that all of this is related to knowing children. And I think the transgender stuff, that is definitely related to that, you know, when you have children, and your nephew or niece that you're – you know, is somebody, and it's the same with coming out.

When I moved to West Roxbury, Barbara was a little worried about that. But it was just the time of gay marriage was starting. We moved in '01 and West Roxbury was known as being kind of conservative and White, although it always had a Jewish community – there's a temple. It's always had – you know, so being Jewish wasn't – even though the majority of people are still Catholic, less and less now. But they still are, probably. But when they happened to have the gay weddings, one of the guys said to me, I was active in a community group and they said, "Those old Catholic ladies love going to those weddings. They love those gay weddings." He says, "They love those gay weddings," you know? And it's because now they know, you know, it's not so strange, you know, and I think that the transgender is the same way. It's just not so strange when you know people, when you know people. When you know, Jews of color, or when you know different people, it does really help, you know. Who's what, whose identity is what. At the same time, you don't have to hide your identity. You know, you don't have to hide it. It's nice to not hide. I mean, I, you know, because I'm old enough to remember that you

didn't tell people you were gay, you know.

And most of the time, most people seem to know I'm Jewish, so it hasn't –. I've never been able to hide that. Although sometimes I've had people think I'm, you know, Greek or something. And when I was in, when I was in Miami, at a Cuban restaurant, a woman started talking to me in Spanish, she says, "Oh, I thought you were somebody else." But that's because a lot of Cubans are Jews, so that's, you know. It's good.

You know, so, um, I mean, I love all that stuff, because I read a lot, you know, and I feel like, you know, just being kind of mainstream, you know, Ashkenazi East European Jew isn't that interesting, but it is interesting in some ways. I always laugh. I say, you know, when I've read a lot about, you know, about secret Jews and Marranos and Sephardic Jews that, you know, I'd say, "I don't think Ashkenazi Jews could hide, could stop talking about it."

You know, we always talk so much that you know, because I met – at a gay conference, I went to a speaker, this was really fascinating. This was at a gay conference at a workshop. And the guy was from – a secret Jew from New Mexico. And he grew up with his grandparents – Catholic, and they didn't eat pork. But they had a few things. But he didn't know what – he never knew Jewish people. And he went to college and he started meeting lots of Jewish people. And then he got invited to a wedding. And they had a chuppah and he came back to his sister and he said to sister, "They did things at this Jewish wedding like we do." And then she said to him, "That's because we're Jewish." She said to him – And he was a linguist. So that was the other thing – and he said to her, "That's because we're Jewish?"

And it's because they the, you know, in a secret Jewish stuff, the women know, the women keep the secret. And the men generally don't know. It's a matriarchal – and because women can keep the secret, and men don't. And all I could think of – I don't think Ashkenazi Jews could keep secrets for 500 years. I just don't think we could do it. I

think it's a whole different culture, you know, not telling anybody for how many years we're Jewish. I don't think it could happen. I mean, it didn't happen. And that's why a lot of people died, you know. So anyway, that's an interesting thing. And same with transgender stuff, if you think it's all related, you know, secrets, because there were people that had gone through transitions that just passed and didn't talk about it. No, it's not brand new. It's not brand new. So, I guess it's a whole big thing about what is secret and what is not a secret?

NZ: And being forced to kind of keep the secret by other people, you know?

PG: Yeah. I just read a novel by Alice Hoffman about Camille Pizarro. Do you know who Camille Pissarro [is]?

NZ: He was an impressionist painter, yeah?

PG: Yeah, and he was from St. Thomas, of Jewish, a Jewish Sephardic family. And she made up I think the stuff around it, but the basic story is the same, and also about African roots, you know, because they intermarried – there was intermarriage with African, some slaves, some free but the – and I've read another book about that, about Jews in New York about the mix with slaves. There's a whole new thing about a lot of the famous big names in New York that have African descendants, because, you know, from the 1700s and 1800s. So it's interesting, I find stuff, all that stuff interesting. Because I like history. So I like all that stuff. What else?

Oh, well, I was just gonna say the only thing about – you know, so I'm the co-chair of the Life Long Learning thing, and I'm the only visible lesbian there, but it's like, not even a, you know, not even a wink or, you know, nobody. Nobody thinks a thing.

And I went to my 50th high school reunion with Barbara. And Barbara is very friendly. She mingles, so she mingles with everybody. And there was some family – my sister-in-law's family in-laws, were there. So people I know. But she you know, met my childhood

friends from my street, you know, people that I knew – and she's out there mingling, and there's a couple of very conservative people because I got on Facebook with some of them, and one of them's definitely a fundamentalist Christian, but nobody seemed to, you know – there was Barbara telling everybody she was Priscilla's wife. Running around dancing with everybody and buying them cheap drinks. So maybe that's why they were friendly. Because it was at an Elks Hall or – you know, where the drinks are really cheap. Anyway, that was kind of funny.

Oh, now I've just thought of one more thing – about the Jewish community. So, I went – a guy I went to high school with was head of this Jewish Agency, which of course I can't remember, and he's retired and gone now. I mean, he's – and I came out to him because I was going on a retreat from his agency and it was when I first joined the Temple. And so, I came out to him. So, then I said, well, now everybody – you know, the guys I went to highschool with, who I don't really see – but you know, now I'm out to them. And then I found out that his wife had left him for a lesbian. So, it was interesting, but I tried to explain that now – you know, that was my way to come out to my youth, my high school friends. But nothing bad happened from any of that. [inaudible] All right. I don't know. That's all I can think about.

NZ: Okay, no, that was perfect.

PG: Thank you, Nicole.

NZ: Of course.

PG: Now you're finishing school. [Break in recording]. When I was in highschool, like I said, I didn't date much. You know, but I didn't say I didn't like – I just didn't date, I just thought boys didn't like me, I'll just say that. But I had this girlfriend that I was friends with, you know, just a friend. And we were close, but I wouldn't say we were really close; it wasn't, like, sexual or anything. But we decided that we would go steady with each

other, and we'd take a ring – we wore each other's ring around our neck. And it was kind of like my protest against these people that all had to go steady. And then, I ran into her at like my 30th high school reunion – and we lost track, and stuff – and the 30th high school reunion, and I came out to her, and she was very uncomfortable. And she was very – and then I saw her at my 50th and she was friendlier. She lives in Atlanta now. If I go to Atlanta, I might look her up. But, it's funny because at the 30th I told her – first I said to her, "My brother Jay –" he had just died, and I said something about – and she knew who he was – and I said, "You know, my brother Jay was gay and he died." And then I said, "And I'm gay, too." I remember I said it that way. "Oh, my brother Jay was gay, but I'm gay, too." And she was uncomfortable with that. She didn't say anything, but she was clearly uncomfortable. And I wondered if that was tied – because we had – and she remembered that we had pretended we were going steady.

And I don't even know why I did that – but anyway. That was interesting.

NZ: Yeah, I actually have a quick question. I know that Stonewall happened when you were in your late teens; did that – how was media coverage? I know that was a completely different location – did you hear anything?

PG: I don't remember – later, a couple years later, I remember it. I remember it in the early – in '72, '73, when Boston had its first gay march. I didn't go till like '77. But I didn't know about it. Yeah, I didn't know about it.

One of the events that I do remember was the Anita Bryant. Anita Bryant did this whole art – and we had a t-shirt, and I wish I could find it – and I did find it, it was so small, I couldn't believe I wore it. And it said, a day without sunshine – without oranges or something, "A day without sunshine is a day without human rights," and has an orange on it or something. And I left to go to an anti-Anita Bryant rally in Boston. And I was living with my parents. And my mother said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to fight against Anita Bryant." You know, and I was just barely come out, and I'd just started

hanging out with lesbians then. So that was that one. I went to that one. That I remember, yeah, I don't remember the – I mean, later, after, a couple years later, when people talked about Stonewall, but not at the time. I think if you were outside of New York, I don't think it was even noticed. I don't think it was even noticed. I think if you knew New Yorkers, then you did.

NZ: Mmhmm.

PG: Yeah. I'll tell you one more thing about – my father is very handsome. And there's a sketch of him from World War II. He was in the service for all his formative years. And there's a drawing and one day he said to me, "You know the guy that drew that was gay." Which I thought was interesting, because it's a beautiful sketch of my father. You know, that was, I think it was after my – Well, it was before – well, it was when my brother was – they probably realized my brother was – I think they always – you know how they always know about boys? You know, my brother was, you know, a little sissy boy. So, he did musical comedies, you know.

NZ: Right.

PG: It wasn't surprising. It wasn't surprising when he came out. I'll tell you one more thing about him – When he was dying. He was at Brigham and Women's Hospital for a week before he died, and he was dying. And my aunts and uncles all came to see him. My Auntie Irene – Auntie Mira came everyday to see him. And the nurses said so many people. So many people had no visitors, but he had a lot of visitors. Some people had nobody. But you know, our family was all around him, for him. Yeah, yeah. That was a hard time. Okay.

NZ: Okay, I'm happy to stay for longer if you have anything else.

PG: No, no, I'm fine. I'm going to go meet a friend for lunch. Alright, thank you. I'm fine. Just that – it's for other people, not for my brother. But those other people who had

nobody.

NZ: Yeah.

PG: Alright, and you're gonna send me the link where it's going to be going and stuff like that?

NZ: Yeah, so, I will –

[END OF INTERVIEW]