

Ann Abrams Transcript

NICOLE ZADOR: This is Nicole Zador interviewing Ann Abrams. Today is November 14, 2022. And we are in the Simmons University Library [Boston, MA]. So, Ann, why don't we start off with a little bit about your childhood?

ANN ABRAMS: Sure. So, happy to be here. And I was born in Boston, at the Boston Lying-In Hospital, which goes, I don't think it goes by that name anymore. [Editor's note: the Boston Lying-In Hospital, which closed in 1962, was a predecessor to the Brigham and Women's Hospital]. And my parents at the time, had been living in Newton for just about three years. They had lived in Dorchester, when they first got married, as many Jewish couples and families did. My brother was born in Dorchester. And then in 1953, they bought a house in Newton, because they had some friends who were living in Newton, and they wanted – they were looking for an area with good schools. And they had heard Newton had good schools. And they bought this Cape Cod style house, using my father's – he had been in the Air Force during World War Two, during his veterans benefits. And it was a very low price at the time. And that enabled them to buy this very modest size home, and I lived in it my entire childhood, my brother and I lived there, our entire childhood. Our parents both lived there until each of them died. And I know that's kind of unusual in this day and age, but it was a very happy childhood overall. We had friends down the street, we walked to every school that we went to, we went to the public schools, and rode our little bicycles up and down the street, had a little yard. And it was – really from any point of view – it was, it was a good childhood.

NZ: And what year were you born?

AA: I was born in 1956.

NZ: Thinking back to your childhood, how was your relationship with the Jewish community? Like, what was it like?

AA: So, as children, of course, that was defined by our parents, their experiences and their backgrounds. My father had – my father came from a, probably would call it a

Modern Orthodox background in that his family – When he was growing up – he grew up in Dorchester – and when he was growing up, they belonged to a synagogue, an Orthodox synagogue. They kept kosher, but his father, I'm pretty sure, worked Saturdays. I have a memory of that. He was an upholsterer, and I think he was, I think they were probably working-class, but possibly got up into the middle class, after a certain amount of time. So, he had this Orthodox, kosher background. He went to Hebrew school. My mother, who grew up in Montreal, to parents who – and both my parents, my grandparents were all Jewish. My mother's parents had two daughters, my mother and my aunt, and they did not believe in Jewish education for girls. And I think they – from what my mother told me, they just were not that strong on Judaism, outside of, kind of, the bare, superficial things or bare minimum, I'm not sure. What I do remember is my grandmother – My mother told me that her mother had a tough experience as a kid because she had the kind of father who was kind of a tyrant about, you know – he was, sounded like maybe he was very Orthodox and kind of a tyrant. So, that package for her, I think, later translated into an ambivalence about Judaism. I don't think – they didn't deny being Jews and certainly, what passed along to my mother. She always said to me, that “My mother always taught me that Judaism is about doing the right thing,” that kind of thing.

And interestingly, my mother always wanted a Jewish education; she didn't get it as a child. When my parents got married and had my brother and me, and they had to figure out, “Okay, what do we do?” And they were living in this part of Newton that's right in between Newton Center and Chestnut Hill. And since my mother came from really no formal Jewish educational background or affiliation, my father came from a somewhat Orthodox, they compromise on Conservative. So, I grew up at Temple Emeth in Chestnut Hill. That's where my brother and I went to Hebrew school. They had junior congregation, I was very involved in all of that; I loved all of that. First grade of Hebrew school, the teacher called me the aleph girl, which was a little embarrassing in front of the other kids. But it was because I really loved learning Hebrew, and all the Jewish stuff. I loved it, I really took to it.

And so, I kind of flew through those years at Temple Emeth. I did the most demanding classes, I liked all of it. And so I was – it was recommended to me by the Temple Emeth principal that I go to the Prozdor of Hebrew College. So I did, which I don't know if you're familiar, but it's – it still exists, I think. It's part of Hebrew College. In those days, Hebrew College was in Brookline – on Hawes Street. Wheelock is now there. And all the classes were completely in Hebrew. 100%, 100%. Every single class was in Hebrew. And there was a companion summer camp, Camp Yavneh, which I went to for three summers when I was 11, 12, and 13, which had Hebrew classes every morning, only in Hebrew, which Jewish education classes. And I got credit from those classes for the Prozdor, and I loved it all. And, you know, I really loved all of that. And I think part of the reason I loved it all is because I was a, I guess, above average student in the rest of my education. And I had a few friends here and there, but didn't really hit my stride anywhere else. And I think Hebrew School really spoke to me, and I still love the Hebrew language. Because you know, I work at a temple. So clearly, Judaism spoke to me.

And so, in terms of – so, my parents raised us, and at home, my mother first tried to keep kosher out of respect to her in-laws. But – I loved my grandparents very much and no disrespect to them, but the story goes that even when my mother tried to keep kosher in our house, my grandmother would still bring her own dish. So, my mother was kind of like, it doesn't really resonate for me anyway, why am I doing this? And my father was fine about it. So, she stopped keeping kosher. And yet, as you may know, from that period of Jewish American history – my father was very much a [typical] American Jew of that era in terms of keeping kosher. So, in our home, I don't think we mixed meat and milk in a blatant way. I don't remember cheeseburgers in particular, but it wasn't like a forbidden thing.

We definitely didn't have ham or pork. We didn't have seafood at home, shellfish at home. But we'd go out for Chinese food. This is so American Jewish, right? We would go out for Chinese food and we'd get shrimp. I still remember we always got jumbo shrimp. We would not – my father would still, he would not eat ham or pork. That for him was the line. He wouldn't eat that at all. In fact, he once said in the army, it was kind of tough. So,

we were raised with this pretty common – if you look at the history – pretty common American Jewish – for those who weren't Orthodox – the Conservative and maybe the Reform, I didn't know from that at the time. But Conservative Jews, you know, we would go to synagogue for the main holidays. I think we would even go – we'd go for the High Holidays. We went for Sukkot. I think I would stay out of school for holidays. They didn't close school in those days, for I don't think any of them. Even in Newton, which had a pretty high percentage of Jews, I think it was 40%. And I kept liking – Prozdor, I kept liking that.

Oh, and my parents. So, my mother eventually got involved in the synagogue and she really fulfilled her wishes. She took adult education courses. And she really learned a lot of Jewish topics that she really always wanted that. It was very important to her. And they were very supportive of both my brother and me in terms of what we wanted to do. And I continued with the Prozdor, I – we both had, I [became] a bat mitzvah, he [became] a bar mitzvah. The one thing I did that I think was kind of, of note, if I may say, at the time was – so in those days, so 1969 I became a bat mitzvah. And in those days in Conservative temples, girls' b'nai mitzvah were Friday night. Now, what that by definition means, is it's less than, because you don't take the Torah out Friday night, you only take it out Shabbat morning [and/or] Mondays and Thursdays, right?

So – Oh, and then, so now rewind, go back like three years. So, the interesting thing about the Conservative movement, also, is they were trying to kind of do it, do it both ways. And I don't disrespect that. I think they were making – they were moving forward in baby steps. When I was 11, they had a Torah and Haftarah club for boys and girls. And I was in it. I learned how to chant Torah, Haftarah, and the Purim Megillah. I could do all of it. And I was allowed to chant the Purim Megillah every Purim, when I was like, 11, 12, 13 years old. Then my bat mitzvah comes, and I know how to read the Torah and Haftarah, right? So for Friday night, you do chant that Haftarah, but for the girls, for Friday night, all they would have us do was read from the chumash [Editor's note: a chumash is a codex of the Five Books of Moses]. Not chant it. And I said to my cantor, who was a really nice guy, and he taught that Torah and Haftarah club. I said, "I know how to read the Torah,

like, can't I do it on my bat mitzvah?" And he said, "Okay," now again, they didn't take the scroll out, because you don't do that Friday night. But I chanted it from the chumash. And that was, at the time, I think it was kind of a deal, you know, and I felt good about it. And, you know, certainly had support of my parents for all that. I got a lot of nice feedback. But then, two years later. I'm 13, 14, 15. I went through kind of a tough stage socially; I didn't have a lot of friends. My mother kept trying to get me into this and that and the other thing. Then when I was fifteen – so, I wasn't involved at Temple Emeth after my bat mitzvah. I wasn't interested in USY [Editor's Note: United Synagogue Youth], which was the youth group there. But then, when I was 15, I don't remember if my mother asked me to do this for a particular occasion, or I, for some reason, had an interest all of a sudden, but I called the cantor and I said, "I'd be interested in coming in and reading from the Torah," for some – it was a very small holiday; it might have been Shemini Atzeret. You know, it was really – it wasn't Rosh Hashana. And this is exactly what he said, I never forgot it. Now, you talked about memory, right? It's interesting, isn't it? Why do we remember certain things? He said to me, "Ann, if it was up to me, it would be fine. But there's a lot of old guys here who wouldn't like it." So, here I was a 15-year-old kid who wanted to come back to my temple and chant the Torah. And he was like, "Some of the old guys wouldn't like it."

And I understand that now – obviously, I've been an adult for a long time, in the context of its time. And eventually they got there. Eventually, they became completely egalitarian. But I almost was like, I won't do any profanities for JWA. But I was basically like, "Forget you, Judaism." I could have done that. I certainly did that with Temple Emeth, no disrespect intended to current Temple Emeth. And I could have just thrown the whole thing away, right. But fortunately, I had a very attentive mother, who really desperately wanted me to have a social life of some kind. And she had connected with a friend – she was actually, at that point, my mother was taking college classes for the first time in her life because she also – her parents didn't believe in college for their daughters. And my mother didn't know how to go about getting financial assistance at the time. So, she had started taking classes and she met this woman who had a daughter my age. And this

daughter was in a youth group called Young Judaea [Joo-DEE-ah], or Young Judaea [Joo-DAY-ah]. I pronounced it Young Judaea [Joo-DEE-ah]. And my mother chatted with her friend, [who] was like, "Well, maybe you know, Ann – you could get Ann to go to one of the like meetings, at different it – it wasn't affiliated. It was only affiliated with Hadassah, the Zionist women's group; it wasn't affiliated with Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox, so anyone could be in it. And my mother said, "Well, I'm gonna try." So, she had the college student who was in charge of this, we called them clubs, call me, and at first I just pretty much hung up on her I was like, "Who are you? What is this? Whatever." But then I found out that a couple kids I was friendly with from the Prozdor were going. And I did like the Prozdor. So, I went and it changed my life. It changed my life. This was a high school youth group at the time, they had for younger kids, too. I started in ninth grade. And this really, really changed my life. Because I started in ninth grade. My two friends were there; I liked them very much. One of them, I went to high school with and we were friendly-ish. [The other] I just knew from the Prozdor, he went to the other Newton high school. But I liked them. And so that was the hook for me, and then, the way things work, at the end of the year, we had an election for president of our club. And one of the kids in the group who – looking back, it's all very poignant. I haven't thought about this in a very long time.

So, there was a woman, a girl in the group who clearly had some kind of disability, some kind of intellectual disability is probably what we would call it now. And she came to our club meetings. And you know, she was into it. And I guess I was nice to her because she nominated me for president. And I won, which was kind of a surprise. And so, that got me involved a lot in 10th grade. And then this was the kind of youth group that didn't just have local clubs; it had a whole regional structure and a national structure, including a national camp in New York State. So I was involved in 10th grade with the club. And then, I started going to the regional conferences, which were really fun. We called them conventions, meeting kids from all over New England.

And all of a sudden, I had this big social life, I had all these friends and people liked me, and it felt really good. I should say, I should say I need to be fair and respectful. I didn't

think about this [at first, here]. When I went to Camp Yavneh, I went there for three summers, when I was 11, 12, and 13, as I said, I made friends there, too. Really good friends. We stayed in touch for quite a while. So, that was probably, socially, the first very good experience and that – but those kids, they weren't – there was only one who was from Newton, the others were from Greater Boston. But then Young Judaea started, and that was all – it was Newton kids. So, that really helped me socially. Plus, I was a teenager by then, and it's so critical to have some kind of social life. So yeah, so that really changed my life.

Then, in 11th grade, I got elected to be on the Regional Board of this group. And the same for 12th grade. And the whole focus of Young Judaea at the time, which probably still is, was Israel, Israel, Israel. And this was the 70s. So we were, you know, not that far away from 1967 [Editor's Note: Referring to the Six-Day War]. And there was a year-long program in Israel. And I was fortunate, my parents were all for my going because my father had some very close relatives there, who he considered like his sisters. So, for me to go there was like this, you know, being with his sisters. And I did spend a lot of time with them. So, I went to Israel for a year after high school. That – I made friends on that trip, combined with – Oh, and in the middle. Sorry, I went to the Young Judea camp for two summers, after 10th grade and 11th grade. And there I met friends who, this weekend I'm seeing – I've seen them over the years, but we've been friends for more than 50 years. We've stayed in touch. Two are here and two are in New York. One of them and I are here and the other two are in New York now. So we're lifelong friendships. And so, Israel after high school, [and then I] came back for college. College was kind of a mixed bag for me. Tell me if you want to –

NZ: No, that's good. Can you talk a little bit about your year in Israel, what you ended up doing there?

AA: Sure, sure. And that was probably – I mean, before I became a parent and all of that – that was probably one of the most amazing years of my life because the year I went was '74-'75 and in those days – so it was a very structured program in some ways in that it was a gap year before it was called that. Not everyone was able to get credit for the

courses we took – I was not, but that didn't bother my parents. They thought it was going to be just a great experience for me; they were right. So, in those days, Young Judaea had three programs.

The one I went on, we were on a kibbutz for four and a half months. We were then on a moshav for a month. And then we were in Jerusalem for a month, studying. And then we had a month of special interest where we could put together our own thing. And we were a group of about forty 17 and 18 year olds, everybody right out of high school, from all over the United States, and maybe Canada. Open – also, in later years, kids from Puerto Rico came. In my group, everyone was from the United States. But all over, all over. I made friends from California, from New York, and in between. And it was just this wonderful program where, the four and a half months on the kibbutz, every morning, we had some kind of job. My Hebrew was pretty good from all those years of Hebrew school and Hebrew College that when I got to Israel, and was finally in an environment where people were talking, I started to speak Hebrew. Whereas before I could read it, I could write it, I could understand it. But there was – you know how it is with languages. Unless you're in the country, you can't speak it. Very rare people, very few people can do that. So, I found out I was pretty good at speaking Hebrew. So, I got to work in a children's house on the kibbutz, with the three year olds, who have their own language, actually. And that was fun. I loved that. And then we had classes every day, we had Hebrew classes. And so, my Hebrew just kept getting better and better. And we had – almost every week, we had a tour somewhere in the country. And I had relatives both in Jerusalem and in the Upper Galilee on a kibbutz and so on my free weekends, I would visit them, which was wonderful. My father really saw them as like his sisters. And I was with some of the friends I had already met at camp, we became better friends. Like I said, two of them I'm seeing this weekend. And it was just a great summer. I mean, I learned so much. I had never – my family and I had traveled a little bit when I was growing up. We would go to Cape Cod in the summer for like, a weekend or day trips. We did like New York State and Pennsylvania and a lot of New England, but I hadn't gotten really west of Pennsylvania. So, I hadn't seen mountains and canyons. So, seeing

them in Israel was the first time I was seeing those kinds of natural, beautiful things. And I don't know if you've been to Israel, but yeah – So you know, I mean, Galilee. And this was before Israel gave Sinai back to Egypt. So, we had a Sinai trip. Yeah, we camped out in the Sinai under the stars; it was amazing.

NZ: Yeah, incredible.

AA: I mean, that you know – and we did something that I know a lot of groups still do. It's touristy, but it's sort of cool. We met Bedouins and they made something, you know, coffee for us or something. But we climbed Mount Sinai, up and down Mt. Sinai, saw Santa Catarina, the big monastery. Just did – we just up and down the whole country, really great tours. And great friendships. And yeah, so that was that year in Israel; it was quite a high. It was a little tough. The after party was a little tough, the coming back was kind of tough. A lot of my friends decided to stay, and I thought about it very seriously for years. I thought about making aliyah. I even was part of a group that was planning to do it as a group, and some of them went. And after I was fantasizing about it for a while and talking about it, and thinking about it and everything, at a certain point, I decided no. I just – I don't have any regrets about that. And I have been there since, many times, because I did have some friends that made aliyah and I visited them and my relatives, but at a certain point, I just felt like I'd miss my family too much. And as my life has turned out, I'm glad I didn't go because I was able to be with both of my parents during illnesses and also my brother, to be with him. And so I wouldn't have wanted to miss that. And happy times, too. I wouldn't have wanted to miss that. So for me, it's – that worked out fine. I honestly feel no sadness about it. But for a long time, Israel was a very big part of my life. Long, long time. I went back after college to be a madricha for the same program. And that was also one of the most transforming jobs I've ever had, because I was the – I was 22, and I was overseeing all these high school graduates doing what I described. The program was a little different. This one we went to Jerusalem first and then moshav, and then the kibbutz. But this time I was the adult, one of one of the three adults in charge. But unfortunately, the other two, one of them ended up leaving early on, and the other one ended up having to leave, too. So, it was really just me.

NZ: Did they get replacements or were they —

AA: Sort of, we had a sort of replacement. Yeah. But it wasn't — by then the kids were like doing their own thing, and it wasn't such a big deal. But I learned a lot that year. And I learned about what I wanted professionally, what I — somewhat. I didn't think about library school yet. But I did rule out social worker after that year, because as much as I liked — I have decent people skills, I think — I liked being there and listening and all that stuff, and reflecting back and all that. But what I didn't like was like, no boundaries, like no — and I'm not saying — I know, as a social worker, you can have boundaries. But I'm just remembering my thoughts in my early 20s, that I didn't want a job that I was going to take home. And I didn't want a job — I just, I ruled out social work because as a Jewish woman, you sort of in those days, you had to consider social work, or nursing, or teaching. And I had no science skills, so nursing was out. Teaching, interestingly, came along later. But anyway, so that was, that was another huge year in my life.

NZ: I'm wondering, did you ever have this feeling of difference in your childhood or adolescence, like as a lesbian? Yeah, I think devoid of sexual orientation, like before that, did you ever feel different? Was it something you were aware of, or did it not come until later?

AA: I didn't, I feel like I was kind of a late bloomer, both in terms of just dating, per se, anybody and then — you know, I know everything's relative, but kind of a late bloomer, in terms of coming out to myself. I didn't feel super different growing up. I think partly because, I mean, I suppose being a Jewish kid, it's possible to feel different, but I grew up in a part of Newton that was, I'm not kidding, 99% Jewish — the area we grew up in. So, the public school I went to, I think there was one Black child, and they were revolutionary, that family. And I still remember them. There weren't very many. Now, it's very — the whole area is, you know, very multicultural.

So, I wouldn't have felt different being Jewish, per se. I didn't quite, I wasn't a girly girl. But when I was a young kid, one of my closest friends, she wasn't either, and we had each other. And then later on, when I made friends through both at camp and Young Judaea, I mean — I don't remember. I don't remember feeling like standing out in any

negative way. I really don't. I don't think that started until – because then I dated a boy in high school. I met someone in Young Judaea. He really pursued me and he was a nice guy. I feel very lucky because I dated two boys somewhat extensively, and the high school one, for most of senior year. He was just this really nice guy. Really, just very nice.

And then my – when I went to camp as a counselor. I was a counselor at the same camp I mentioned I went to in high school, I was a counselor for two summers, I dated a guy there. Also just a really nice man, young man. We just went out for probably a few months. But I feel fortunate because it wasn't like this terrible experience that, “Oh, no, man ever.” It wasn't like that at all. I think I just started to – and then, well, so then I started to think maybe there was something wrong with me that because I started college – I had sort of a patchwork bumpy college career – which maybe I'll tell you about at some point, but I didn't go out with anybody for like seven years. Like starting with the age of 19 after I broke up with this one guy, until I came out when I was like 26 and I started to wonder, like I was so lonely and I was sad. And at that point, I was living with my parents while I was commuting to BU. I went to three colleges for a variety of reasons, nothing horrible.

So, I started this campaign and I just asked out on dates these three guys that I just – were really nice guys that I knew. Two through BU, and one, like, through friends. And they met me, we had coffee or whatever, they were polite, you know; it was just very nice. And then nothing came of any of them. But no one was telling me, like, I kind of wish someone had just said, “Ann, just look at yourself.” So finally, I did come out. And it took, it just took – I had an attraction to somebody – actually, I did when I was 19, but she was a close friend, so that was a little complicated. So, it took me a while to then have that again, with somebody else who I didn't really know that well. And then I started to pay attention to it at that point. So, I can even remember that. So then I started to think, oh, maybe maybe this is who I am. And finally, you know, finally I was able to come out. But no, to answer your question, I don't remember feeling – I'm lucky in that way. I mean, I think partly because I didn't think I was a lesbian until my 20s, really. I mean, really,

because the 19 thing – you know, it was this attraction, but also I was out of high school by then. In high school – I mean, I went to Newton South High School, which in the 70s was probably very progressive for its time, but I can now think back to, you know, the boy in my Hebrew school carpool who was made fun of because he was a “sissy” or something like that. And that being not unusual. You know, so, but I didn't relate to it personally. I just – thinking back. And I thought he was a nice kid, but I – you know, I don't think I joined in on the making fun of him, but I also didn't connect like, “Oh, he's like me.” I didn't – I wasn't there yet. I honestly wasn't there yet. So, it just took me really into my 20s to kind of get to that.

NZ: We can talk a little bit about your college experience, if you want? Because you came back from Israel and then –?

AA: Right. Right. Yeah, the short version is that I had gotten into Clark University. And I went, and it was a good year, and I had a roommate who was actually from the same Young Judaea youth group. We were good friends. But one theme through my life that affected the college was my mother had cancer many times, starting when she was 43. Yeah. And midway through my year at Clark, which was a private school, she got cancer again, for not the first time, but I didn't know she'd had it before. She hadn't told me the first time because I was 12. And in those days, parents didn't really tell their kids that much. She had told my brother, who was four years older than I was, but not me. Anyway, it was this whole big traumatic thing, but she said – she had hoped to go back to work and make money so I could stay at Clark, but she couldn't. So I [went] to UMass. So, I transferred to UMass Amherst. The sort of funny thing about all this is when I applied to colleges, I got into three, I got into UMass, Clark, and BU. I ended up going to all three. So, after Clark, I went to UMass. And it was fine. I had actually a few friends there, and made a new friend. And the classes were good. My brother had gone there, so it had sort of nice karma. I liked it. But one day I was in a class, and it doesn't matter what the class was because I think I would have had this epiphany anywhere, but it was an Islamic art and architecture class, which I loved. I loved the class. But I still remember, I had this epiphany that I really wanted to be doing Jewish Studies. And again, I want to be

clear, it wasn't because it was an Islamic art and architecture class, but I remember that's what it was.

So, I called the dean of Hebrew College and I said, "I think I want to come to Hebrew College." And he said, "That's great. And I really think it's important you get a liberal arts degree, not just the Hebrew College degree." So, I did what some people did in those days, I went to both. For about a year. But it also meant I had to live with my parents, which was not ideal for any of us. We all loved each other, but boy, were we not good roommates. It was – I was trying to pretend I was in my own little private suite. And they were like, "Seriously?"

So anyway, the shortest version of what happened was. So, I was at UMass. So Clark, freshman year, UMass, half of sophomore year, transferred to – oh, so then I transferred BU. So, I transferred to BU and Hebrew College. I go to both of them the rest of sophomore year. I go to both of them my junior year. I have no social life at all because all I'm doing is taking classes and taking the train from Newton. I had a nice little [routine] with my father, which is he drove me from home to the train station, which was sort of nice for us, it was very nice.

There was also the big storm, the storm of 1978 happened when I was living with them. I don't know – you don't remember it, but you may have heard of it.

NZ: I have heard of it.

AA: It shut down – you couldn't drive for two weeks. But BU was open. So, I would just walk to the train station, the three miles; it was good exercise. So, after a year and a half of this ridiculous schedule, even though I did like the classes, Young Judaea came calling again. [Or, actually], I called Young Judaea, and said, "I'd really like to work for Young Judaea again, can I be the senior advisor?" And I knew exactly what that meant because I had been so involved and they said, "Yeah, we'd love it." So, I left Hebrew College, didn't graduate. Because it would have been just too much. I left Hebrew College, but I stayed at BU. I graduated BU in '79. And I was the Young Judaea Senior Advisor, and that – I loved that. I just – that's where my heart really was. Almost to the detriment of other things – not quite, but almost. I graduated BU and then went to Israel

again for that program. Yeah. So, yeah. I don't know. Do you want me to just keep going chronologically?

NZ: Yeah, that would work. So you stayed there, in Israel, for a year?

AA: Yes. And that was the year I thought about making aliyah. I remember thinking about it a lot. Even talked to a friend about being roommates, and looking for jobs. And I called my parents – my parents were so great. They really were, in so many ways. My mother just said, “Well, I can't say I wouldn't miss you. But you need to do what you need to do. If you really want to do this, then do it.” So with that in my ear, I could really make a decision free of guilt or pressure, or anything. And I decided to go home.

And I didn't really have anything there [in Israel] that felt compelling. You know, I think that was part of it. Maybe if somebody offered me some great job or if I had a relationship, and I hadn't come out yet either to myself, even. So I'd had kind of a lonely time there, too. I had a dalliance with that old boyfriend, and then I just – he and I both realized this is stupid. But I wasn't really reading the cards yet. You know, reading the writing on the wall. So anyway, I came back. And I went into – Oh, I forgot to mention, so funny when talking about your life, what you remember. So, while I was in college at BU, and at Hebrew College, I got a job in the Hebrew College library. So, made some money and I liked it. I enjoyed it. So, that was my first library job. I was the library assistant, I guess that's important to mention here. I got very friendly with my boss. I really learned so much from [him]. And I liked [the] people I worked with.

Okay, so then I go to Israel, and I come back, and I just went to the Hebrew College Library to say hi, I really just walked in to say hi. And [my old supervisor] looked at me and said, “Do you need a job?” I said, “Well, maybe. Why?” So, he was looking for someone. So, that was the quickest hire I think I've ever had. I've been very fortunate with jobs. So, he offered me a part-time job, which was great. I just [had come] back from Israel. I didn't know what I was doing. I had no thoughts of graduate school yet, I really had no idea what I wanted to do. Honestly, zero. There was even a time in college when we still had paper catalogs, where I looked A to Z at every topic, waiting for one of them to sort of jump out at me, for a profession; it didn't happen.

So, I accepted [my old supervisor's] offer graciously, and I started working there part-time, and then I needed a little more to pay rent. I knew I shouldn't live with my parents. They also – my father had once told me years later, he said, “When you left, we couldn't pack your bags and get you out of there fast enough.” Because part way through college, a blessing happened, which is I lived with them for a semester of college – I think that was it, a semester, maybe two. And then, through Young Judaea, I heard about a sublet in Brookline. And it was perfect. And I took it, and everybody was happy. So I knew I had to get out. I didn't want to stay with my parents. They didn't want me to stay there. So anyway, I found – what else did I do? So, Hebrew College Library, part-time, I was living in Somerville, actually, with friends, two friends that I knew from this Young Judaea group, and that year, oh, I got a Hebrew school job at.

I was friendly with the previous principal. And she connected me with the current principal, they needed someone and I taught Hebrew school for a year, which was fine. You know, it was a nice way to make a little more money. And so that year, I might have worked at another Hebrew school job, too. There was one year I also worked in Concord, a year or two. So I was the roving Jewish professional, I had two or three jobs. I didn't have a car. I had to like, get rides with people or I figured out transportation. Concord, I had to go with someone in a car.

So, anyway, I did six years of different jobs every year. So, Hebrew College, I did for a year. But then that same year, when I came back from that year in Israel, I had gotten, even from Israel, I had gotten all worked up about the threat of nuclear war, it was 1979-80, things were feeling scary. I was reading things about it. And when I came back, I volunteered at Physicians for Social Responsibility, which was, at the time, one of the most – the leading organizations working to educate people against nuclear war through the medical profession. And Helen Caldicott was the president. She was this galvanizing, dynamic woman from Australia. And I wanted to be part of that.

So I volunteered; it was a [somewhat] boring job, but I didn't care and went in once a week. Think they were in Watertown then. And I really liked the people. And it was really one of the first jobs that I was in that it wasn't like a Jewish professional or Jewish

educational thing. And that was a good experience. And it was important for my lesbian identity, too, because there was this very out lesbian on the staff, who assumed I was a lesbian. And she came up to me one time and said, “Do you know about – you ever been to Somewhere? Ever been somewhere?” and I was like, “What?” So, it turned out the lesbian bar at the time was called “Somewhere.” So, she was trying to, through code, like say to me, even though she was very out there, everybody knew she was a big lesbian. So, I didn't know what she was talking about.

So anyway, she couldn't believe that I wasn't out to anybody or myself. And I ended up having a little fling with her, which helped open the door. And she was also – she was interested in her Jewish identity. I was interested in my lesbian identity. So we had this kind of comical thing – we'd trade books. Like I gave her the Jewish Catalog, and she gave me *Our Right to Love*. So, that year was important in a lot of ways. I also encountered my first negative reaction to Zionism, which for me was kind of a big deal since Young Judaea was a Zionist youth group. It was a big part of my life.

I put a calendar up at my desk at PSR. And it was some Jewish calendar. And the picture said in Hebrew, something like I don't know something like, “It's good for the sake of the nation” or something. And one of my co-workers came over and said, “Oh, you know, that's a pretty calendar. Like, what does that mean?” So, I told her, and she said, “Oh, that sounds very Zionist.” and I said, “Yeah, it is.” And she said, “Well, that's horrible.” And I said, “Well, actually, I'm a Zionist.” So she looked at me and I looked at her. And it was actually the perfect kind of occurrence of these kinds, because she hadn't had an opportunity to talk to somebody like me, who proudly wore this label. And I hadn't met anyone like her, frankly, because I lived in so many bubbles, who had that negative reaction, Jew or not Jew. So anyway, we had a good talk.

And so that year, so I was a volunteer, and then they offered me a job. And I like to tell the story, because it's very important to volunteer, you never know, right? It's a great story. So, they offered me a job. I took it, I left Hebrew College; it was a full time job. And it was just – it was before really, we were doing things in an automated way. I was manually processing membership. But they were booming. So it was a lot of membership

every day to process and I was around this movement. I was sitting right in the middle of it; I didn't have my own little cubicle, it was open. So, I really learned a lot and – but it was very boring, the job.

So, after a year – as that year was winding up – funny, all the things I'm remembering now. So, I'd always loved Yiddish. I don't think I mentioned that in my form [Editor's Note: the pre-interview questionnaire]. I'd always loved Yiddish for some reason. My father's first language was Yiddish, which I only knew because he told us; he didn't have an accent. But he was like a lot of kids of his generation – he was born in 1920's in Boston, but his parents spoke Yiddish to him. So, his first language was Yiddish. And he used to like, kind of, swear in Yiddish, or you know, he'd get mad in the car. And it was funny, right? So, I just – I think that's probably why I had that association. So when I was at UMass, I actually took a Yiddish class, they had one there. This Polish man who taught this very nice Yiddish class. So I'm, this is 80-81, 81-82. So, this is the year 81-82. I'm glad I'm at PSR, but I knew I needed something more intellectually stimulating. I'd always wanted to learn Yiddish; I needed a break. I had saved up some money. So there's this program in New York that YIVO and Columbia used to co-sponsor. I don't know if they both still co-sponsor it, but YIVO has always run it. And it's this, like, eight-week intensive, like ulpan [Editor's Note: an ulpan is an intensive Hebrew course] for Yiddish. But it's not just the language, it's the culture, the music, everything – looks like you've heard of it.

NZ: Yeah.

AA: So, I went, 1982. Summer of '82, became – was a very big summer for me. So, my parents were fine with it as long as I was taking care of myself, pretty much at that point. So they were fine. Which was important to me. And I went off to New York, and because of all these Young Judaeans friends I had, one of them had been looking for a subletter for her rent-controlled, Upper West Side apartment.

NZ: Wow.

AA: Right? It was owned by Columbia, and one of our friends had lived there when she was at Columbia, and very nicely kept her name on the lease for a while. She eventually

had to take it off, but she kept it around for a while so that people like me and the woman I sublet it from, could be there. So, there was already somebody living there who I kind of knew – we'd gone to high school together. He was younger than me, but he was this very nice young man. So we had this two bedroom apartment, Upper West Side, sixth floor, eight weeks in the summer in New York City. And I found out very quickly that a lot of lesbians like Yiddish, like it was kind of a thing. And again, I hadn't really come out yet, even to myself, like I had sort of, well, I guess, yeah, I had, because of that fling. But like, I was still kind of like finding my way. So that summer, 1982, was the same summer that the book *Nice Jewish Girls* came out. Which – Have you heard of that book?

NZ: Yeah, I have, but you can kind of explain what it is.

AA: So, *Nice Jewish Girls* was published in 1982. And in the foreword, or the intro, you'll see that the editors say that they really published it – it's more of a Jewish book than a lesbian book, because they published it because they had experienced – a lot of them had experienced antisemitism at one of the women's conferences, I think it was in Mexico City, that year, and they were just horrified that there was all this antisemitism in the women's movement. So, they decided to put together this book where it's all lesbian Jews telling their stories. Now, I gravitated toward it because it was lesbians who were also Jews, and so I heard that – Okay, so the book came out that summer. My friend who subletted the room to me, she's straight, but a very big ally, always. And she said to me, "Ann, go to the Women's bookstore in New York, it was called Womanbooks, I think. She said, "I'm friends with one of the owners, Batya Bauman, so go tell her I said hi and that you're in the living my apartment and all that." So, I was like, that's a great connection, just to go meet the owner of the women's bookstore!

So the big thing about – I said to [my friend] when she said "Batya Bauman," I said, "Batya Bauman?" So when that coworker of mine at PSR had given me the book, *Our Right to Love*, which is sort of like a how-to lesbian kind of thing. It's sort of like the Jewish Catalog of lesbian stuff, right? So, there was a chapter by Batya Bauman about being Jewish and lesbian. And I remember gobbling that chapter like, oh, wow, I'm not alone. Because that is how I felt, even though, looking back, like how could so many of

us feel alone in Greater Boston, but I did. So, she was the one that wrote that chapter.

And Miriam said, “Oh, well, you have to tell her that,” and all of that.

So, I go to the bookstore, and I meet her and she gives me this big grin, and we hug and it's really great. And then I find out that that bookstore is hosting some of the authors from Nice Jewish Girls that summer. So, I got to go, I'm getting goosebumps kind of remembering this, I got to go to the bookstore. And hear some of the authors of this book that had, you know – that book didn't change my life, but that book was just an important support, and just – I still have it at home, I have the original one; I have the more recent versions. So, I went and I heard some of the authors speak and it was just so powerful and wonderful.

And then I started my – you know, I'm in my Yiddish program. And I met this woman in one of my classes who I immediately get a crush on. And I immediately want to, like, have a relationship with. And I sort of tried, it doesn't work, but we're able to be friends. But she's a long-time lesbian, and it's just kind of, for me, affirming just now being around lesbians because that was new to me. That was all new to me. So that summer, I loved the Yiddish program. It was so rich, met really wonderful people. I also met some more anti-Zionists, because I learned that summer – it was summer of '82 when Israel invaded Lebanon – and I found out that there were anti-Zionist Jews, and I was my – I was blown away. Really, I was. I remember being in shock. Like, how can –? Because they were like the socialists, you know, they were like the bund you know – the whole – so many Yiddishists were super secular and anti-state, anti-state of Israel. I learned since then – [many] Reform Jews were anti-Israel [many years ago]. So anyway, that was a very heady summer.

And then, I came back and had to find a job again. And so, I kept ending up getting jobs in libraries, because by then I had some experience. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this, but I'll just say, I got a job at Harvard Widener Judaica. Not the best year of my life, but in spite of that year, I decided to go to library school that year. The reason I decided to go to library school was because I was still trying to figure out what to do with my life. I just couldn't figure it out. And my mother, fortunately, was still around. And she said to

me, she said, "You know, if you have any interest in graduate school at all, you really should go sooner rather than later because the older you get, the harder it's going to get." And she knew because she didn't get to go to college till she was 40.

And that was – she was born in 1924. So, that was 1965. Not too many people were doing that then; she was one of the only ones. And then her friend, who thankfully she met, and connected us to Young Judaea but – and then after – it took her 10 years to get her Bachelor's in English at – here, Simmons, which she loved, every minute of it. And then she went to BU and got her – she got her degree in teaching English as a second language. And then she started teaching English as a second language, including at Temple Israel when Rabbi Bernard Mehlman invited her to teach some of the Russians, and she jumped [at it]. She loved it. So, she knew that it wasn't easy to go to school as you get older and older.

So, I had that on my shoulder. And I started meeting with, so this was probably the third or fourth year. I said I worked six years – a job a year for six years. So, this was probably that fifth year, I started meeting with the mothers of friends of mine who had professions. I met with one who was a social worker and a Jewish educator. And then I met with another one who was a big Jewish educator. "Well," she said, "Ann, you keep working in libraries, why don't you just go to library school?" And I was still thinking of aliyah then. And so I had said to her, you know, "I want something portable." And she said, "Well, that's portable." So I went to library school, because [my friend's mother] told me to go to library school. And really, I needed a kick in the tush. I really did. My mother was always good about how to do that. And [my friend's mother] did [that for me]. And I was like, okay, because I really didn't know, I really didn't know what I wanted to do.

I mean, I majored in English because I had to major in something. I like liberal arts. So, I figured, okay, you know, I'll major in English, but I wasn't like the super Shakespeare scholar or something like that. So, I applied here [Editor's Note: Simmons University, formerly Simmons College], I got in. By then I was – the good thing about waiting several years was I was ready, super ready. And I also knew I did not want to be working full-time and going to library school; I knew that would just be too stressful. So, I was able to

set up my life, so I could work part-time. And I took – I could have done this in a year and a summer, I think, at the time, but I decided to do it in two years and spread it out, which was no issue here.

So, I got a part-time job. What was I doing that year? Oh, yeah. I got a job at Countway Medical School, over there, as a library assistant, and what's nice about working for Harvard, at the time, what was nice was if you worked 17 and a half hours a week, you got full time benefits. So I had health insurance. And it was close to here. And I was living in Brookline by then. So I would just walk everywhere. I was – I want to mention walking at some point because walking is actually a huge part of my life, and I don't know quite how to fit it in. But it's a huge part of my life. I love it.

So anyway, my first year, I was just working part-time at Countway, boring job but nice people. And here, and I really liked it here a lot. Oh, I was in a relationship by then, also. I started dating a woman who we were – like through friends.

NZ: At this point were you out more publicly?

AA: Yes, yeah. I was out. I did delay telling my parents right away, when I started dating this, this first person. I told my brother, and looking back I feel a little bad because he had to kind of – you know, it was a little bit of a burden for him. But he seemed okay about it at the time. We weren't kids. You know, I was like 26; he was 30. But eventually I – it was just becoming – because we were all – I was local. We would go out to dinner with them. And you know, my brother and I would go out to dinner with them. And I was just feeling uncomfortable – I finally did, and they were – Yeah, it's a good part of my story, I guess, for this topic.

So, my mother's reaction – my mother had always been very progressive. In fact, she first told me about Adrienne Rich a million years ago; [she] loved Adrienne Rich's poetry, I think partly because Adrienne Rich wrote about cancer, and my mother had cancer. But she knew she was lesbian. Didn't say anything negative about that, seemed open. But it's all – it's different when it's your kid, at least in those days. And as a parent now, I totally get that. So, she was fine. It was a little hard at the beginning, I think, but she came around.

My father, interestingly, what either he or my mother told me – my mother was seeing a therapist at the time. And my mother's – actually my mother told me that she told the therapist about me coming out. And the therapist just looked at my mother and was like, "Well, you know, I don't see anything wrong with that." And I think my mother was a little frustrated with that answer. Because I think it was kind of hard for my mother in the beginning. My father, my understanding is, that he went to see this same therapist one time, she told him there was nothing wrong with me. And then he was fine. Like that. And that tracks with who he was.

So he really, he was fine. He died in 2003. And so, he was around for eight years after my mother died. So, he got to meet my wife, Deb. He was there for our wedding in 1998, our [not yet legal, but what we called] Big Fat Jewish Lesbian Wedding at Temple Israel with five rabbis and two cantors, and the whole thing. He was there for that. But it was a little tough for him. He asked my brother to take him home on – or my cousin to take him home a little on the early side. Not inappropriately early. But I think it was a little – just weird for him. He didn't really have a context for this.

I asked him once I said, "When you were in the Air Force, like, didn't you know – did you know people who were gay or lesbian?" He said, "Yeah, but it was more like people were, you know, making fun of them." It was that kind of thing. You know, and if he had any gay friends, he didn't know it, or he didn't acknowledge it. So, it was – I think if I were to do it differently, I think I would have been more sensitive about meeting him where he was, around him getting to know Deb, and all of that. But he was – they came around. My brother, [who was straight] from the beginning had no issue.

So, where was I? So, I was talking about – oh, Simmons, right. So, then my Temple Israel story. I mean, that could be a whole interview and of itself, but I'll tell you the short version. So, you probably know – you do know the geography well enough that you can picture this. So, I was living in Brookline. So, I would – when I was going to Simmons, I would always walk across the Riverway, go by Temple Israel, go down to Simmons. Now I forgot to say something important, which was – before I decided to go to library school, that year – the first or second year when I was back from Israel when I was looking for

jobs, I was living with [a] friend who I lived with for five years. We're still very good friends. She was working at Temple Israel. She was teaching in the Monday night program. And she would come home talking about this wonderful rabbi, Ronne Friedman, and how great he was and he was at the time, the associate rabbi.

So, Rabbi Mehlman was the senior rabbi and Rabbi Friedman was the associate rabbi and he was in charge of the school. So, one day [my housemate] came home and said [Rabbi Friedman was] looking for somebody for Sunday [School] for sort of like this creative kind of thing. Now, I already had committed to a job on Sundays [at another synagogue]. And, again my mother, who I love quoting a lot, (and I am going to write a piece about her someday for JWA. She belongs in there.) She once said to me, "You should always interview, even if you don't really want the job because it's a good experience. It's good practice." So, I knew I had a job on Sunday. So, I knew I couldn't really take a job at Temple Israel, but I wanted to meet this guy, who my roommate was raving about. So, I did. I had an interview and I was honest with him. He kept my resume because we had a very nice connection. And then – but this was before I had applied to library school.

So then, fast forward, I'm walking by Temple Israel all the time to go to Simmons, to go to Countway. And I see him sometimes – it used to be a parking lot, not a garage. Just imagine that, but just flat. Yeah, that's what it was in the 80s and early 90s. So I'd see him sometimes, or I'd see other people that I knew there. And I told him that I was going to library school. And I was in library school at that time, I guess. So, it was my first year through library school. One day, I'm walking home along Longwood Ave, coming from Simmons, and I'm passing Temple Israel on my right. And I see Ronne, and he waves and I wave. And then I keep walking to the light, to the intersection, and I hear this behind [thump, thump, thump, thump, thump]. That's compelling. And I turn around, he's running after me, literally running after me.

So, you know, I was 27 years old. I was, you know, you know, in awe of a rabbi, and kind of intrigued that he was clearly running after me – in a friendly way. And I didn't know him that well at the time; I'd only met him at that interview and heard a lot of great things from

my roommate. So, he catches his breath. And then he says, he said, "This isn't 100% yet, but we have a librarian at the temple who's retiring. And so we're going to be looking for somebody, are you looking for a job?" Now, I hadn't planned on it, because of that wonderful fantasy I had of working just part-time, right? So I said, "Well, not really, but why do you ask?" Oh, and that's when he said, "Because she was retiring." So I thought I said to him, "Oh, can you keep me posted?" And he thought I said, "I'm not interested." Because weeks went by, and I didn't hear anything. So finally, one day, I think, really, in the old days, you actually would talk to people just on the street, right? And not just text and all that. So, now I'm sounding very old. Anyway, so, I'm walking down the street again. And I see the youth advisor, who I knew – we had mutual friends. So I said, "Oh, I was just curious, did Ronne decide not to look for a librarian or whatever?" And she said, "Oh, he thought you weren't interested." And I said, "No, I kind of am intrigued." She said, "Okay, I'll tell him."

Next thing you know, I'm – I still remember – I'm at my job at Countway in a phone booth, having a phone interview with him first. And then he set me up to have an official in-person with the committee, and I got hired, while I was still at Simmons, while I was still at Countway. Because Countway was paying my health insurance, and Temple Israel wasn't quite doing that yet, because that was going to be also very part-time. So, I was back to the two jobs. But I was so happy. I mean, I was the librarian, while I was still here in library school. It was a little scary, the first year. I still remember in my interview, I said to the committee, "So in this job, who would, like, be deciding what books to buy?" And they looked at me and like, "Well, that would be you, Ann." And it's like, "Oh, okay, I'll probably figure that out." So I've been there, and this is my 36th year.

NZ: Wow. That's incredible.

AA: Yes, so but he – I wrote this in the form, I mean, in terms of my coming out there. So, the year I started working there, I had just broken up with my girlfriend. And you know how it is like, it's hard to, at least for me anyway, it felt hard to come out when I didn't have a partner, it would be easy to say, "Oh, my girlfriend, so and so..." But I didn't have a girlfriend so and so. And even though I could tell they were progressive there, this was

19 – Fall of '85, I got hired there. I didn't know, you know, I really didn't know what the terrain was. And I did know enough by then, after I'd been out, seriously out since 1982, that the Jewish community in general, now that my eyes were looking at that aspect of the world, was not open to me. And it really pissed me off because I was a privileged, middle-class Jewish young woman who always pretty much you know, had access to whatever I wanted. And all of a sudden, like what? You're telling me I don't have equal rights everywhere because I'm going out with a woman or something? And it really pissed me off. So I didn't know what the terrain was like. Plus, I didn't have a girlfriend to say, "Oh, here's my girlfriend."

So my first year there, I was very quiet, which is not me at all. I'm not an introvert. So, that was tough, that first year in terms of that. Everything else, I was liking the job; [Rabbis] Bernard Mehlman, Ronne Friedman, wonderful people to work with. I kind of got thrown in because I started in late August. Really enjoyed, you know, everything, but – so then, it wasn't till the following fall, because I think I missed the faculty orientation in '85, because I started kind of late. But Ronne would always have an orientation for the faculty, and I attended that in '86. And when he's – part of his orientation, he's saying the perks of being a teacher at Temple Israel, that even if you're not a member, you can come to services here, you can do this, you can do that. But this is how he said it. And it was the fall of 1986. He said, "If you and your partner want to come to high holiday services, or if you and your partner want to do this," and I remember sitting there, who is this guy? Like, who was talking like that in 1986?

And so, I went home, and I took out a Rosh Hashanah card, and I came out to him in the card. I mailed it to his home, because I didn't know who was opening his mail, and I still was nervous. And a couple days later, I'm at work and he comes walking into the library, and without a word he gives me this big bear hug. And that was it. I mean, really, that was, you know, and what he said to me, and it was then him and Bernard and all the other clergy that were there, they were right there with this stuff. But they – the two of them were really the pioneers. And before me – But the two of them were these huge advocates for – then it was really just G and L. L and G Jewish community. Huge. But I

didn't know that right away. I wasn't a Reform Jew. So, I wasn't attuned to that. I wasn't really affiliated with anybody for many years. So, I just didn't know. And what they said to me after I had this lovely coming out moment, they said, you know, we've been kind of waiting for this, Ann, because we want to do things here, but we're these two straight guys. So, with your permission, you know, we want to include you in this work. And what that ended up looking like, and I've heard Ronne repeat it, so he and I do remember the same way, which is nice.

So for years, if, let's say new potential members came to talk to them about joining, and they were gay or lesbian, they would send them down to me, or bring them down to me, like, "Here's a real live lesbian." And I don't mean that in a crass way. I mean it in a great way. I mean, it was like, like, yes, we are these two straight rabbis, and we can tell you, you'll be comfortable here, you'll be safe here, or we'll do everything we can to ensure that, but we want you to know we have on our staff, a woman who's out. And, you know, you can feel safe talking to her. And that's what happened. And I met a lot of people that way.

And then, I sort of met my future wife that way, sort of. Because she ended up joining in '94. And she joined. She had a daughter, who was almost six, she was five, five and a half. And she was looking for a temple to join, so [her daughter] could go to Sunday school. And she heard [that] Temple Israel was the only game in town for gays and lesbians. She lived in Brookline. And so, she joined Temple Israel. And I remember, in those days, when I'd go to staff meetings, we'd see all the membership applications. And in those days, we had what we'd called the gay and lesbian chavurah, which was a somewhat social somewhat advocacy group, mostly for congregants, but also for staff, and I used to go. And I guess it was on the membership form as an interest you could check off. So, Deb had checked that off and I was like, "Oh," and I wasn't seeing any one time. So like, oh, I wonder if, is she with anyone? I don't see anybody else. I don't see anybody there. She had a kid. I said, okay, she has a kid. That's okay. I like kids.

So independently, a mutual friend of Deb and mine who was a member of the temple, one day said to her, "Oh, you joined Temple Israel? Have you met the lesbian librarian

yet?" That's exactly what she said to her, we still tell this story. And Deb said, "No, I haven't met the lesbian librarian yet." She said, "Oh, you should go meet her." So one day, I'm at my desk. In those days it was in the back. And this cute woman walks in and says, "Oh, are you Ann?" I said, "Yes." She said, "I'm Deb," she said, "So and so suggested I come meet you, and I'm interested in the chavurah." [Editor's Note: the chavurah refers to a support group at Temple Israel for gay and lesbian folks]. And I told her about the chavurah. And around that time, it was in the fall, and I was in the process of arranging for the author Lesléa Newman to come speak. It was an anniversary of her book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*. I think it was – if it was '94, it might have been five years. It was an anniversary, it hadn't just come out. I remember that. So anyways, having Lesléa come, and I think Deb had heard about that. And she said, "Do you need any help?" And I said, "Well, yeah, you know, I could use some help." So anyway, she ended up coming to the event. And a congregant, who was a film critic, had given me some movie passes. And so, I invited her to a movie. Anyway, we ended up dating and we've been now together over 20 years. So, I kind of met her because of the great [open and inclusive] polic[ies] of Temple Israel. I once told Bernard and Ronne, "That you really made my family possible."

NZ: I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about the work that you did with the gay community at Temple Israel? I know you said set up a support group for their families. You had the chavurah. [Editor's Note: The chavurah was organized by a congregant, not Ann].

AA: Yeah, I mean, a lot of what I did was not, like official or, you know, part of any kind of committee or group except for – so the chavurah, was pretty much run by a congregant. And she just made sure it happened at different people's houses. And sometimes it was like for havdalah or whatever. And I just, I would go and offer support if needed. So, one of the rabbis helped me write a grant to CJP [Editor's Note: Combined Jewish Philanthropies], they approved it. And I just did outreach to anybody, both at Temple Israel and beyond, and different rabbis, to have – to model it on PFLAG [Editor's Note: Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays]. And, like I said, I think we met for a couple

years, and [it] took me all over the place. The idea of it was to anchor, to have a rabbi, and people who had gay or lesbian children, and then me, and just to have a talk about what people were going through. And in those days, that's what people – that's what it was, like, it was really as simple as that. And I met a lot of really wonderful people that way. But it just kind of organically disbanded after a couple years.

This, I brought this [Editor's Note: a copy of the book *Kulanu: All of Us*, 1996] because – so I think I got asked by the UAHC [Editor's Note: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, now known as the Union for Reform Judaism or URJ] to do this. Or maybe they asked one of the rabbis and the rabbis thought I should do it. So, the UAHC which is what URJ used to be called. So they put together – I mean, they were right out there with so many things. They had, you know, the CCAR [the Central Conference of American Rabbis] did position papers, the Sisterhood, [later called] Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ), had [position] papers. I mean, everybody had these really great progressive papers, that Temple Israel then could stand on those shoulders and could use them. And I mean, I remember when Temple Israel got some pushback about sanctioning – before equal marriage happened, but they would officiate at same sex ceremonies. They got some pushback about it. And they just, I still remember this board meeting I attended, where one of the people on the board just pretty much read what the UAHC was saying, like, we're right in line with our organization, everybody. We're not being these crazy extremists.

So this [book] came out in '96. And it's called *Kulanu: All of us* a program for congregations implementing gay and lesbian inclusion, a handbook for UAHC congregations, was published by the UAHC Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Inclusion, like they had that, which was great. So, it has six chapters. So, they asked me to contribute. I wrote this chronology of just everything I could think of that seemed relevant, that we had done at Temple Israel in my time there. And so, that chapter is called, I think it is just called oh, here, "Chronology of Events: Temple Israel, Boston." So I can give this to, if you want, or send you a copy of it. So, it has these two pages here. And I started, I predated myself by one year, because this is what I knew about. And I thought they might

– I mean no offense to them – but I thought they might edit it; they didn't, they published as is. If I could do it again, I would, because I was very uneven about when I did have people's names, when I didn't. And it wasn't always significant, why I had people's names and why I didn't. I wrote it fast. I think I had a deadline.

I started in the fall of '85. And it goes through the meeting – when there were meetings at rabbis' houses. And this is when Bernard Mehlman and Ronne Friedman, and Roy Einhorn, the cantor, they very proactively – “Let's meet at one of our homes and talk about your issues.” And you know, and I still remember Bernard Mehlman saying to the group, you know, what, “How are your Jewish needs different than mine?” You know, and basically, the person answered, “They're not really different, you know, I want to be able to come here for services, I want to be able to kiss my husband,” or those days probably wasn't husband, “Shabbat Shalom,” you know, “I want to be able to just be myself.” And they said, “Okay, we can – we're gonna do that.”

So, it just kind of – everything I could think of, like, every single thing I could think of that had to do with anything, I thought might have been significant that I was involved with, so I could speak about it directly. And, you know, trying to keep the library, trying to have the latest, anything on LGBTQ and Jewish books, always, resources. These days, I have at the top of my list to do a resource list about gender and pronoun issues, because that's really what's the focus now. I mean, it's so on everybody's mind.

NZ: Yeah, that was perfect. I want to offer you a break if you need –

AA: Yeah, maybe, just a few minutes. [Break in audio]

NZ: All right. We are back. I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about how music has impacted your life. I know you mentioned you write, kind of, parody songs and your PIQ [Pre-Interview Questionnaire], if you could tell us a little bit about that.

AA: Yeah, thank you for asking. I mean, music and me – I have always loved music. I've never been strongly talented in terms of singing or playing a musical instrument. I took piano lessons as a child. I was in choirs at the summer camp I mentioned. And I loved that at camp. I still remember one of the songs that was a very difficult song that really stayed with me. That was a good experience. And I was in, like, school choirs, but never

as a soloist, but I can carry a tune. I have a sense of rhythm, and I realized those aren't to be taken for granted. And I've always liked music. The youth group I was in was big on music, folk songs and all of that.

And then, in terms of parodies, I can't quite remember when it started. But what makes sense is my father used to buy me Mad Magazine. Do you know that magazine? When I was not super little, but maybe 10, 11, 12, or something, and one part of it was this – they would do a parody. And it was a cartoon with a song that was a parody, like to a Fiddler on the Roof song or something. And I don't know if that's where I first got the idea. I'm not sure. But from a very young age, I started writing little songs, like for people's birthdays, things like that. And I just kept doing it. It was just like – became the thing I did. And then, obviously, I'm not the only person in the world that does that. So, it was something like camp people, you know, sometimes we do things at camp. To this day, it's something I do for birthdays, graduations, other celebrations. And occasionally, and again, because it's just something fun I do when I feel like it.

Oh, when I was in library school, I actually remember sitting in the back of class one day, and it was when, I think it was when the CIA was recruiting here at Simmons, in the library school. And I wrote a song about that, to the tune of, "I'm Just a Girl Who Can't Say No." And I'm not going to sing it all right now, but I wrote about it, and I did a version about the CIA and the FBI because there was also an FBI story with libraries around the same time. Maybe later, where there was a story in the news about how there was a librarian who was asked by the FBI to tell them the identity of someone who had borrowed some particular books that maybe had to do with something bad that had happened. And she refused because we're not supposed to do that. And I don't know if she got arrested. I don't know what happened. But I wrote a song about that. So, I did it in library school. And one of those got published in something like the Special Library Association. I sent it around, I thought somebody might like it, and somebody did. I've had them published here and there in little kinds of journals. And I've done things on gay and lesbian topics, too.

I wrote something called – to the tune of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game", where it talks

about how ballgames are [not] the safest place to like, hold somebody's hand if they're the same sex. And that got published in, like, a gay journal or something. So I've done some political things, too. And it's my creative outlet. It's really fun for me. I mean, with this, I've mentioned, I'm seeing these three old friends of mine this weekend, and I'm working on a couple songs that we could do together. And that's like the thing I do; people almost expect it at this point. So, I do it for family events and for all kinds of things. And I performed a little bit, I had like my five minutes of fame.

So when I was in my 30s, there were a couple lesbian bars around, and [there] was one in Central Square [Cambridge], and they had, like, a “rising star night” and I went and played some of my cute little songs there. And it kind of went over, and then I did it in a coffee house in JP. So, I did that a few times. But the real high was – I went – I think it was 1990 – I went to the Michigan Women's Music Festival, and I played at an open mic at quarter to two in the morning. And there were six people there, including three of my friends. And they clapped really loud, but it was really exciting to be at the – I mean, I was at the Michigan Women's Music Festival! So, I played there. I even made a tape of my little songs. And maybe someday I'll send them to the Lesbian Herstory Archives. But right now, I'm not sure I want them released to the public. And they were – they were a little racy, not horribly, a little racy, but I'm not sure I'd want them out there. But they were fun for me. And they were a way for me to express myself and different parts of my identity.

And the summer of 2017, when politically, things were really particularly awful here [in the United States]. And also my brother was very sick, found out soon he was going to be dying. I just wrote this body of songs, like they just came out of me. And they were all about political things. They're about awful Republicans and this and that, and they're kind of funny too. And some of them are just angry. And they just came out of me as I was walking around the reservoir. And so they're just – it's my creative expression. It's kind of my therapy. I'm very focused when I'm writing. And when I'm writing, it's usually just when I'm walking, (there's the segue to walking).

I think the best when I'm walking. And I think it's just because I'm just, I like to walk flat. I

don't really like hiking mountains and things. So just walking, where I don't have to really pay attention to my feet. And my mind just wanders, I don't always listen to music [when I'm walking], sometimes I do, but not always. And I get ideas when I'm walking. I've been walking to work for the last 30 something years. And when I first started at – I was at Hebrew College in Brookline, I was actually living in Somerville. And my walking seriously, really, began that year, because I – for the first few weeks, I would take the bus from Somerville to the train, and it took almost an hour to get to Hebrew College. And one day, I was waiting for the bus, and I just thought, I wonder how long it would take if I walked? So I just started walking, and it took like an hour and 10 minutes. And I thought, well, that's not much of a difference. So, I just built it into my schedule. And I just started walking from Brookline to Somerville. And I haven't really stopped.

I mean, I walk to work now, I walk just about everywhere. I bike a little bit, but I really, really, really like walking. And it's just now as I've gotten older, it's so important. It also just makes me feel good. If I don't walk, I feel it. So my body won't let me be a couch potato because I really get uncomfortable. Just it's not even like, oh, I should walk. It's like, I'm not comfortable. I have to get out. So that's good. And I do my best writing when I'm walking and just think of things in my head. And over the years, I've gotten pretty good at using my phone to just open a Google Doc and just write down the lyrics and revisit it later. And I do that better than longhand because I have terrible handwriting. And sometimes I can't even read – I literally sometimes can't read what I've written. So, it's good that I know how to use a Doc. So that's –

Oh, and then this [Editor's Note: Shiron L'Shalom songbook, 1986] so this was a real coming together of my – all my Jewish education and music and camp and love of Jewish music and from Young Judaea, all the songs I learned in Young Judaea, with my getting a little bit involved in working against nuclear war when I was at PSR. So I had an idea, years before this actually happened, of doing a peace, Jewish peace songbook and I already had the name. Because I knew this song – it's a song Shir L'Shalom, and I knew it from Young Judaea. It's a very, probably from the '70s, '60s or '70s, at the time, popular Israeli song, about peace. And all I had was the title [for a possible peace song

book]. That was it. And one day I went to this conference – my friend Laurie was actually supposed to go [to] but she was sick, so she didn't go and asked me to go. So, I staffed her table, which was, she was running a sort of a Jewish PSR or Jewish ESR. There was also Educators for Social Responsibility, and she had started Jewish Educators for Social Responsibility. So, I went to staff her table. It was at this gathering, I think it was Temple Shalom in Newton, with all these different Jewish peace groups.

And I sort of knew, I sort of knew this woman, I can't remember how I knew her, who was more like my mother's age. Maybe I met her at some event. But anyway, she comes over to me and says, “Ann, I want you to meet my daughter, Lucy. I think you'd really like each other.” So I start talking to Lucy, who is a musician and an educator, and a Jewish educator. At the time she was, and I, for some reason, it just came out of my mouth, I said, “Oh, I have this idea to have a Jewish peace songbook. What do you think?” And her eyes just lit up. And fortunately, if it wasn't for her, this idea would still just be an idea in my head because she said, “Oh, we have to start meeting once a week and get file folders.” And again, this was in the '80s, “get file folders and do this and do that”. And I'm like, ah, I was a little stunned, but okay. So, we started doing all of that.

And she had a Reform background. So, she had all that Reform, wonderful Reform music, Debbie Friedman, and Jeff Klepper, and Danny Freeland, and all of them. So, we were a great team. And we liked each other, we really got along – we became good friends. And so, we put together this book, pretty much all manually. We met every week, and we put together songs, and I had a friend who knew some calligraphy, and she had a friend who knew somebody who might help with this and that. We hired somebody who did the typesetting. We hired someone, the artist did this beautiful picture on the front, and did the calligraphy, some of the calligraphy. My friend did the Hebrew calligraphy. And artists did some – all the pictures that are in here. There aren't that many, because we couldn't afford that many. I had gotten some money from my family, and I just decided to use it to do this. And so we printed 2000 copies in 1986.

We had a wonderful book party. By then I had been working at Temple Israel for just a year. But Ronne Friedman loved the book. He bought a bunch to give out to teachers as

presents, which was a lovely sign of support, and said I could use the youth room for a party. I had a book party there. My parent, my mother was totally into it. She admitted it was because she didn't think she'd ever have a wedding to plan and that – she said it in a nice way. It didn't feel bad. Like I think I asked her I said, “Is it because –” she said, “Yeah,” but she threw herself into it. It was beautiful. And you know, we had food. We invited all our friends, some of our family. And it was great. It was great. We had a great time. Lucy and I have been friends for a long time. And she and I went around – not a lot – but we went around and performed some of the songs. I can play guitar a little bit. I'm self taught. She's a professional musician. And it was great.

And we eventually sold out [all the copies of the book]. It took us four years to sell 2,000 books. But we did – this was mostly just very little advertising, mostly word of mouth. We did get them into the Jewish bookstores here. And we got them at conferences and things. And it's fun. Every once in a while I look up to see if they're on sale at wherever different online vendors. And they are in a lot of libraries; I was happy to see that. So yeah, it was a very good experience, the whole experience of making a book and just working with someone like that. And we were fastidious about getting permissions about everything. And I met Debbie Friedman because I wanted to get her signature on a permission form. And she was in Boston for something, so I like, kind of tracked her and made arrangements to meet her and she signed the form and we have four of her songs in here. We have some Jeff Klepper and Danny Freeland songs, David Broza. One Leonard Cohen song. When he was performing in Boston, I ran over – this was way before the internet – I went over to the theater where he was performing. And I just – I didn't know if it was going to fall into a black hole or anything. I had in an envelope – this thing [permission form] to sign – and a return envelope with a stamp to send back to me. And I said, “Any way you could get this to Leonard Cohen?” and they were like, “Okay,” and we got it in the mail. He signed it.

NZ: Wow.

AA: Yeah. Yeah. So, it was a great experience. It really was, um, and the only other thing musically I've done, I always wanted to play the drums, which wasn't – the only thing I

can trace that to was when I was a kid, and my father's parents still lived in Dorchester, they lived in a triple decker with some other relatives. And one of the relatives had a kid who was older than me, he was like 15 years older than I was. And he played the drums, he had this full drum set. All I remember is seeing the drum set, I don't remember ever seeing him play it, but something about it stayed with me and I always wanted to play the drums. And in my 40s, I finally took some lessons for a few years. There's a place in Brookline, really wonderful music school, the John Payne Music Center, and I took drum lessons. And I'm not very good, but I can do the coordinating – you know, pressing the pedal and hitting at the same time. We live in a small condo, so I wasn't able to – I did for a short while, keep a drum set in our – in my very small study, but it just became too much. So I gave them all away except for the snare drum. Someday, someday I'd like to try that again. And someday, maybe, I'd like to play with other people. I've never really played with other people. I have this little fantasy of maybe starting a group where we do parodies called the Brookline Village People. I have the name –

NZ: I love that.

AA: But I don't have a – I haven't moved that anywhere yet. So, parenting and all that, marriage and all that. Yeah. So, Deb and I – So, you know, we met, we got together, and then Temple Israel clearly was being right out there with supporting gay and lesbian unions. And they weren't right away saying this is marriage or a wedding. In the beginning – the first same sex ceremony, which was in the early '90s, they called it publicly a commitment ceremony. I think the two women to each other called it a wedding and a marriage, but the temple was reading its members, and they felt they couldn't yet say marriage, in those years.

And by the time, Deb and I came around, and we were meeting with [Rabbi] Bernard Mehlman, by then Ronne Friedman had gone to Buffalo, and he was there for five years. So, we were working with [Rabbi] Bernard Mehlman. He – we were struggling with the word, with the language, which seems funny now, but I remember at the time, being ambivalent of – like, not – just marriage, you know, you have to remember that this wasn't, I can't honestly say this was my story, but for a lot of gay people, marriage was a

very negative word. It represented the patriarchy and represented heterosexual privilege, and it wasn't anything that they wanted. And I wasn't quite, I came out, I was already, like, 26, and it was 1982. And I just, I wasn't part of all of that, though I certainly read about it, heard about it.

And so the whole thing of people saying, "Oh, I'm against marriage," I was never that. But then here I am with Deb, and we're thinking we want to get married. And I knew that Bernard Mehlman was going to be retiring soon. I could just, I mean, I was working there, I could tell it was going to happen soon. And I said to Deb, "If we want to do this, and if we want him involved, I mean, yeah, he could come back as a retired rabbi, but I think we should probably do this soon." So, we started meeting with him and at a certain point, we were angsty about what to call it. He said, "If you want to call it marriage, that's – you can do that." And so we did, and he made a point of saying it at our wedding blessing. We had the whole thing. Friday night, we had a wedding blessing and my father, like I said, was still alive. He came to that. And I was so moved because Bernard made a point of – when Bernard was not standing up with – it wasn't a bima, it was sort of out in the atrium, or you know the building, it was in the atrium, so, it was flat. But when he wasn't needed to be in the bima section, he went and sat next to my father. And I know that was meaningful for my father. So, anyway, he used the word marriage many times and we had our ceremony. It was really beautiful. It had like 100 people, that was our big deal thing, and we had a party – we did the whole thing. It was really fun. And then Deb and I went to Italy for 10 days. We left our daughter with a babysitter. At the time, our daughter was then nine, nine and a half.

And yeah, and then equal marriage, as you know, came in 2004. We had [our son] in 2000. And I adopted both kids. I had never, you know, in the '80s, before I – when I was out, but I wasn't yet thinking about being a parent, I didn't think I wanted to be a parent. I was very happy being like the community aunt. I had friends who had kids. And I was really – I was available and I liked kids. And I would, I'd babysit and I really loved it. I really loved it. To this day, I have a nice relationship with those kids that I babysat, like, 25 years ago, kind of thing. Or more, I guess. And I was content with that.

There's even a song, "The Family Maiden Aunt," by Judy Small, who used to be this Australian singer, and now she's a judge [and a] lesbian. Anyway, she wrote this great song called, "The Family Maiden Aunt," and I loved it because she's just saying, you know, "I love going out with my nieces and nephews and taking them to the park and having a good time, and handing them back at the end of the day." And it's this oom-pah-pah rhythm of the song. It's a happy song. And I thought, yeah, that's me. And I had no feeling of regret. In fact, there was a moment when both my parents were still around, and I was in my – getting into – before I met Deb. I was well into my 30s, and I decided that I didn't want to have kids.

And I remember when I went out to lunch with my parents, and I told them, I said, you know, "I just kind of want you to know." And my mother said, "You know that I have no problem with that." My father – I was touched by this again – He said, "I have to admit I, I, you know, I would kind of like it if you had a kid, but it's your choice. No, no question, your choice." That was such a feminist thing to say. He didn't present as a feminist guy in a lot of ways. He was a World War Two veteran, but he was also, you know, he loved his family. I mean, and he respected his family – he clearly respected women. But he was a man of his generation. So, but it was so clearly, like, [my] decision. Also, I was a lesbian. So I think for both of them, they might have even been surprised I was bringing this up. But also in the '80s, so separate from this conversation with my parents, this is when the whole lesbian baby boom was starting.

There was a conference that I went to, out of curiosity, really, that was "Lesbians Having Children." That's what it was called. And that's where a lot of the movement really got started around, you know, sperm donors and setting things up at Fenway Community Health and all these things really got started, once again, in Boston. But it was very potent, and I still remember thinking, Oh, do I want to have kids? And it just – I never had that yearning. I felt very happy, very content. Then I went on a semi-blind date, like, someone I kind of knew. And she had a baby. And she had had the baby with two gay men. So, this was – and they were part of that whole revolution thing. And I remember sitting there with her, with the baby, and the baby was cute. And I was thinking, how hard

could that be? Stupid, right? And I went out with her two or three times, and we didn't click, but it got me thinking about, oh, would I be open to being with someone with a kid? And then Deb came along, and she had a kid. So, by then I was open to the idea, whereas, maybe I wouldn't have been if it had been a few years before. And once again, I thought oh, how hard can this be? I don't think I thought that this time, actually.

Again, this is pretty ancient history to some degree, now [my daughter] is 33. I was very open, and Deb was also a very good – she was very good at letting [my daughter] and me figure it out. No pressure about anything, and you don't have to call me anything, you know. [She] actually called me Annie in the beginning, and then later Ann. I didn't care, I didn't need to be called mommy or mom or anything. So, that was quite, you know, a big change to my life. And we, after a year, we moved in together, we bought a condo together in Brookline. So, both of us like being in Brookline, which was nice to not have to have a fight about where we're living at – And then after a while, we talked about having another child. And like I said, we had Ari in 2000, and he's now a senior in college. And [our daughter] lives in L.A., [our son] goes to a school in DC. And I can't say I regret any of it.

I mean, I really, I was scared when we decided to have [our son]. Because with [our daughter], I mean, Deb was really clearly chief parent, and I wasn't challenging that. And I read a lot of books about step-parenting, which is what this felt like, and they all said, every book said, “Don't swoop in there and try to change things, and you take your cue from the other parent. And you support the main – the biological parent.” And that wasn't hard for me to do. And then, with [our son], I got to experience it from [age] zero. So, I feel very fortunate, I've had all those experiences. And you know, I think, I think that also our kids, in terms of having two moms, living in Brookline definitely made things easier than if we had been somewhere else. And being at Temple Israel, both kids went through Temple Israel. So clearly, [there's] support there, in every way. Not an issue there. And they both went to the Reform Jewish camps. So, it felt like we did what we could do. And we were lucky that the kids were growing up at a time where those things were in place already. You know, [our son] had more of it than [our daughter] did. You know, because

when [our daughter] was a little kid, there was no such thing as equal marriage.

NZ: Right.

AA: So, I remember one of her friends once saying to me, “So, are you, like, married to —’s mother?” And the kids, then, were only like seven or eight years old. So, I remember standing there – we were waiting for [our daughter] in the locker room or something. And I’m thinking, how do I say this to a like seven or eight year old kid? Wasn’t easy. But we had it easier than a lot of people we know. And, of course, in the world. Yeah. I don’t [want to] talk too much about their personal lives, but in terms of just queer stuff, they’re clearly, you know, there’s no issues, and they both have – seem to be open, open people. And so, we feel, we feel good about that.

NZ: So, I know we’re running a little short on time, but I did want to – let me check this here – one quick question about ESL?

AA: Oh, yeah.

NZ: And I was also wondering if – your mother’s involvement also, as an ESL teacher, [if she] influenced you in your decision to start teaching?

AA: Yeah. So yeah, so the ESL happened. So, about four years ago, my full-time position at the Temple was reduced for budgetary reasons, and I needed to get another part-time job, a part-time job to make up for that. And I went through an interesting process that I hadn’t gone through really since I graduated college, which was, “Okay, what else do I want to do?” And the short version – because anything for me could be the long version – but the short version is, a good friend of mine had gotten an email from JVS Boston [Editor’s Note: Jewish Vocational Service in Boston], that they were starting a – they were having a TEFL [Editor’s Note: Teaching English as a Foreign Language] class in the summer of 2018. And they were looking for people and I was like, “Oh, that sounds perfect.” I had been thinking about ESL. I’d also been thinking about being a barista. I mean, honestly, that’s where I was. I just needed some, a part-time job. So I looked into it, and it seemed great. And they were excited to meet me, and I was excited to meet them. And I ended up doing that program and getting certified.

So, my mother had been an ESL teacher when I was probably in my 20s. I remember

sometimes she invited me to come and just play a song with them. I'd bring my guitar and do a song. She taught international students at BU. And it was later that Rabbi Mehlman asked her if she'd teach the Russians at the temple. And at the time, I was very respectful of her; she loved it, she just loved it. And a lot of the reasons she loved it, I think, first of all, as I told you, she didn't go to college until she was 40. She was a woman ahead of her time. So, it was hers. It was just hers, you know. And my father was very supportive. I mean, he was, really, in a lot of ways, unusual for his generation, I think.

Anyway, but I never – it never, at the time, I never thought, oh, I'd like to do this. It didn't occur to me at the time. And I think it was just when I was kind of forced to think about, okay, what else could I do? Then I started researching ESL programs, I'm sure there was an influence that my mother had done this. And then, when my friend sent me this thing – and I knew about JVS, because when I was in my 20s, I went there for some career coaching, and also my brother had done volunteer work with them. He had, in the 80s, he had – my brother did some mock interviews for Russian immigrants at JVS in the 80s, and he got a certificate for it, which I now have side by side with my TEFL certificate; feels very significant. And my mother taught the Russian [Jews] at Temple Israel, and then, look at me. So, yeah, it feels nice. I mean, I, my only regret is when, after my mother died, and I was going through her things, and I – you know, again, she died in '95, and so that was, I had books that she had used for her teaching, and I wasn't thinking about ESL at the time at all. So, I called BU, I said, "Do you want them?" And they did take some of them back.

But I did keep some of her file folders because her handwriting is on them. She had beautiful handwriting. So I have some of those. And I have a label with her handwriting on it from one of the file folders above my desk. So yeah, it's a nice – I wish she knew I was doing it, that would be a nice connection. But it's there anyway, right? It is there. And I love it. I mean, I have to say the real silver lining about all this was, I got certified, they offered me a job because they were looking to train people that they could hire. It wasn't expected or promised, but they'd hoped. And I'd hoped, and it happened.

So, they hired me, one class, two mornings a week. Started August 2018, in the building at 75 Federal Street. March 2020, we all went home. I've been teaching on Zoom ever since. And that will probably stay like that for this particular program I teach in because it removes a lot of barriers. People don't have to take a bus or train or drive into town. It's worked for a lot of the teachers, too. And I get my person to person stuff at Temple Israel. So, I kind of – I do miss seeing the students. But at some point I'll be able to do that, it looks like. But I love it. I teach adult immigrants from all over the world. I teach a high intermediate level, which means I can pretty much talk to them like this, pretty much. And the whole focus of this particular program I teach in, because they have a lot of English classes there and a lot of programs, is helping people get jobs. And the curriculum is interview questions. So, our whole curriculum is built around the basic interview questions. What are your skills? Tell me about yourself? When are you available? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?

NZ: Yeah, wow.

AA: Yeah, and I love it. I just – A couple nights ago – a couple evenings ago, I wasn't feeling so great. And my phone dinged, and it was 5:30, so technically outside of work hours, and it was one of my students texting me, and she was kind of – she said, “Are you there, teacher?” And at first I was like, oh, I should have boundaries. I'm like, she's reaching out to me. And I knew she was nervous about a possible job thing. So anyway, I wrote back, I said, “Do you want to talk?” So, we talked for a few minutes, and she was nervous because she had gotten a call about a possible job interview. So, we talked for, like, five minutes, and she felt a lot better. And I hung up and I thought, boy, that's the best medicine I could get. I love it, really. And I meet people – right now I have students from Taiwan, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Morocco, Algeria, Syria. I mean, everywhere. It's just, it's really – Cape Verde. It's very moving to me. I really love it. And they're the most respectful, kind people I think I've ever met. They are so respectful to teachers, so respectful to teachers. I mean, when I started, I didn't know what they should call me. And Ann felt a little, not quite right. And I've never been Miss Abrams, or Mrs. Abrams to anybody. And one of my colleagues said, “You know, I have my students

call me Teacher Laura.” I thought, Oh, I kind of like the sound of that. It's kind of nice. And also they like it because most of them are from countries where they revere their teachers. They just revere them. And so they were already calling me teacher, they were just saying, “Teacher,” even if I said, “You can call me Ann.” So I thought I might as well formalize it, and it's stuck. So anyway, to answer your question. I really, really love it. Yeah.

NZ: All right. That's it for my questions. Do you have anything else that I didn't cover that you'd like to say?

AA: No, it's very moving to get to talk about your life like this. Gosh, I don't think so. I don't think so. I'll think about it, but I don't think so. But thank you really, this is such a privilege.

[END OF INTERVIEW]