Blanche Narodick Transcript

PAMELA BROWN LAVITT: This is the oral history interview of Blanche Gordon Narodick. My name is Pamela Brown Lavitt. I am the oral historian for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words project in Seattle. Today's date is Wednesday, June 6th, the year is 2001 and we are in the home of Blanche Narodick at The Summit at First Hill, which is 1200 University Street, and her apartment number is 1106, on the 11th floor overlooking much of Seattle. So before we begin, I just want to let you know that in Seattle, it's important that I have your consent on tape that you know that you are being recorded for this interview. So if you could just give your consent out loud, that would be great and we can begin.

BLANCHE GORDON NARODICK: Yes, this is being given with full consent.

PL: Wonderful. Let's start. I think we were talking a little bit earlier about where we would begin the interview and I think we'll probably just start at your beginning. So you said you were born in Seattle, is that correct? When and where were you born?

BN: I was one of the first babies born in the new Providence Hospital. October the 16, 1910 – an only child of my mother who had many pregnancies following me but none ever came to fruition. So that I was reared as an only child.

PL: What was that like, being reared as an only child? Was there anything that you considered unique?

BN: Fortunately for me, unfortunately for my mother, who was ill a good deal of the time when I was small, mother had an older sister here, Tillie Rickles, and she, Aunt Tillie and Uncle Jake had three sons. All three became physicians and they were brothers to me. I lived as much sometimes during a year more in that home than I did with my mother and

father because in case of severe illness, which happened quite frequently, I went over to Aunt Tillie's. And so I grew up with Nate and George and Julian, so that in that respect I was most fortunate. And the friendship with the three—particularly, well I adored Nate, the older one, and respected him because he became quite famous. George was a year younger than I and when we were kids he was a pain in the neck to me because we were too close in age. But as we grew older, we became very, very close. So that I did not have the lonely, only child syndrome. It could have been if I didn't have the Rickles boys and I had them. On my father's side, on the Rickles side, there was a tremendous family but I had no—and I got along with all of them as my mother did. But there was no relationship. My direct relationship was through my Aunt Tillie because she was my mother's sister, was on my mother's side of the family.

PL: Well I would like to come back to this point that you made about your mother's being ill off and on. Can you explain when you first learned that she was ill, how old were you and what was the cause of her illness and how it affected you as a young child?

BN: I never knew the cause of her illness and to this day I'm not completely sure any more than the physicians who took care of her were sure. And in those early days, I must admit that the physicians, the surgeons, loved to operate. And so one after another, took parts of her anatomy out and she was not only left sterile a few years after I was born but severely incapacitated because of the tremendous amount of surgery. And in 19¬¬——let's say –15, –16—when I was 5 or 6 years old, they weren't smart the way they are today. So I have no doubts but what the constant surgery took its toll and she was ill.

PL: How did her illness express itself in your relationship? Was she often bed-ridden or could she be a mother to you in the way—

BN: Yes, it was a definite effect on our relationship. I mothered her. I can't ever remember the time when my mother mothered me. My father was a traveling salesman. He was out of town a lot, which explains too another reason why I was over with Aunt

Tillie and Uncle Jake so much. My father would come home and want me at home when I was six, seven years old. I would stand on a chair in front of—in those days we had gas ranges not electric. And here I was, a little kid, and I could fry a steak and broil potatoes. And my father, who was an Englishman, would come in the kitchen to pour water for tea and that was the extent of his culinary ability. Mother, I must admit that when I got older, I realized that I had been unfair to my mother. I never considered her as bright, as intelligent as my father, and in my later years I realized I was wrong and that I had judged her improperly, but there was not the close mother-daughter relationship that I see between, for example, my daughter-in-law and all her children. All of that closeness was between my father and me. In the first place, I looked like him exactly. She was absolutely gorgeous and I was just a plain, ordinary looking kid. And it used to hurt me terribly as a kid because here was this extremely blonde, large blue-eyed, gorgeous woman and here was this perfectly plain, brown-haired, gray-eyed little kid, not at all interested in— She was interested in dressing me up. I was interested in reading. And my father always knew what I was going to say before I got my mouth open. We not only looked exactly alike, we thought alike. And so I was completely prejudiced toward him.

PL: So in terms of the role models of that time, it sounds like your father was more a role model for you?

BN: Oh yes. An extremely bright, a very intelligent man. From the first thing that I can remember about him, is his constantly telling me, “Keep going to school. What you learn is yours. They can take everything else away from you but no one can take away from you what you’ve learned.” And it was a lesson I never forgot.

PL: Why do you think your father—why do you think that he had learned that lesson himself? Why do you think that he felt—who was the “they” in that sentence: “They can take it away from you.”

BN: There was a lot of antisemitism in Liverpool, where he was born and where he was reared and I'm sure that's one of the key reasons why he left before he was 20. He came to Canada from England. He would tell me about the fights that he would have with the Irish kids on the steps of the Orthodox shul [synagogue] where he went with his parents. And the kids would come by, these non-Jewish kids, and call them "kikes" and "you dirty Jews" and this never left him because of everyone I knew, he was a gentleman, he was intelligent, but he had been kicked around when he was little by non-Jews and when he said "they", that's whom he meant. And he never forgot it.

PL: And how did that affect you? Or how did it have an impact upon you in your life?

BN: It really didn't have because he told me the story once and it didn't make much of an impact because fortunately, I never felt any antisemitism growing up. Never, at any time. Well, I shouldn't say that. Later on I'll tell you about my relationship with my Dean at the University [of Washington].

PL: All right, we're going to store that away because I know that is a very—

BN: That's right. That's an important part of my story.

PL: Yes. Well I want to maybe backtrack just a little bit then and just understand who of your parents or their parents came to the United States and what were the situation under which they met and married and had you?

BN: My mother's parents didn't come here until all of their children came one by one. And there was a great diversity in age because my mother met a full brother and sister—in fact two brothers and sisters—she met in the United States after they were full grown. She didn't know them as children. They were born in Mariampole in Lithuania after she left. And she came here as a 12- or 13-year-old. Very, very young. My father, as I say, he left Liverpool when he was still in his late teens. And they met. They met in Seattle.

PL: Is that where they both emigrated to initially?

BN: No, she lived in Chicago with her oldest brother, who accepted his brothers and sisters as they came individually, according to age. And they stayed, each one stayed with him and his wife in Chicago. Tillie left first from Chicago to come to Seattle to marry a man that she'd never seen and who was 12 years older than she, but he had lost his wife in childbirth and had been sent a picture of her and despite the fact that there were 12- or 13-years difference in their ages, she came here and married him in Seattle. So then after her first child was born and she did not bond well with her husband's family. My Aunt Tillie was a wonderful person but she was a distant person. She was not warm—at least she didn't show affection. I knew that she loved me and I loved her but she was not demonstrative. My mother was more demonstrative. She didn't bond well with Jacob's family at all. I think they resented her because her attitude gave the appearance of being a little better than any of the rest of his family. But that was just an attitude. My mother on the other hand bonded well with all of them. She was very socially inclined and everybody loved her. My father came here from Canada where he visited first when he left Liverpool and he went to Canada. And in Edmonton, where he stayed for several weeks, he went the first Friday night to shul and as he left the rabbi said to him, "How long have you been in Canada?" I wish I could speak Yiddish better, I would say what he said. And my father looked at him and said, "Two weeks," and the rabbi said, "But you speak such good English." And it was that English that made my mother marry my father because in Seattle at the time, she was very popular because there were very few, if any, Jewish unmarried women. There were very few unmarried women of any religion here. That's when they used to bring them across from the East Coast so there would be marriageable women in Seattle. Because there were what, 20, 30, 40 men to every woman that they could find. So anyhow, mother was chased by Jewish doctors, by Jewish lawyers, by Jewish businessmen. I could give you the names of the men who wanted to marry her, but they were all either of German extraction—they were the first that came to Seattle—or Russian. None of whom spoke beautiful English. And my

mother by this time was speaking English beautifully.

PL: Let me ask you a few questions because I'm very—just for clarification. You said that a lot of women were brought out from the East Coast. What do you mean by that or how did you learn of that?

BN: There are books written. You can read books about brides, I don't remember the names, the titles of the books, but they were brought here by shiploads for the specific reason of providing mates for the unmarried men in Seattle who probably constituted 98 percent of the population. There were no women here. This was a rough part of the nation.

PL: And your mother, the fact that her family came from Lithuania—now I may be projecting this, but I know that within Yiddish culture, people who often, in Jewish culture, they say well, "I'm a Litvak." Is there then the sense, when you said that Tillie was a little bit more aloof or felt that she was better than others in a sense, was that part of the relationship of her sense of self?

BN: Could have been. I don't know. I didn't ask and frankly I was not smart enough to ask because I wasn't aware of it. This was the way Aunt Tillie was and I accepted it because she really mothered me.

PL: Where did your mother learn English?

BN: Well when she came and she was just a little girl, maybe 12 or 13, and she had to work to pay for room and board. She learned to—she sewed blouses and men's shirts in Chicago during the day and at night she went to school. Always interested in going to school. And she spoke impeccably. You never would have known that she was not born in this country. And she learned to write very well. She would check with me and say, "Is this legible?" So that she was interested only in if she had to meet a man seriously, he had to be able to speak English well. And here came this man from England, nice

looking, didn't have a penny in his pocket, had no profession at all, and as I say she was beseeched by these wealthy men in Seattle who came here early and they were fine, decent men but they didn't speak English perfectly. So when my father came and when he saw her he was stricken because she was gorgeous. And as I used to get such a kick out of her non-Jewish friends who used to say to her, "How come you married a Jew?"—because she looked like a Swede. There were loads of Swedes here and she blended in with them very well. She was tall, she was blonde and very blonde, titian blonde. The whitest skin you ever saw, gorgeous blue eyes, and so that's why her non-Jewish friends used to say to her, "How come you married a Jew?"

PL: That's very interesting because I wanted to ask a little bit about their backgrounds in terms of religion and their sense of Jewish identity because you had mentioned that your father had gone to an Orthodox shul, so can you describe a little bit about your parents' religious differences or similarities?

BN: Well my father developed no religion at all. I mean he wasn't an atheist. On the High Holidays, because mother said she expected him to go to shul with her, that's when he went to shul. Only on the High Holidays. She on the other hand was quite religious and maintained her sense of Orthodoxy all of her life. She was not Orthodox in the sense that when she went out she ate everything. But in her own little home, it was kosher. And of course whatever she did was fine with my father.

PL: What do you remember as a child about religion in your home?

BN: Not very much because I say I wasn't home very much. She lighted her candles on Friday night, as we said in Yiddish, "bench likht," yes.

PL: Can you translate that for the oral history?

BN: Lighted candles, bench likht. And she prayed. She made the usual Friday night prayer but she covered her head or her face with her hands, and that was fine. And very

frequently she and I, if she was home with me, she and I were alone because father was on the road. Dad was on the road all the time. But anything she did was fine with him but he was not at all religious. He didn't care about that. And he was reared in a truly religious home. Figure it out.

PL: Well I'd like to return to some of the discussion about religion in the home, but I was wondering if you could, you said your father was a salesman. Did your mother take up any kind of employment outside of her sewing or did she do sewing for quite a while? What did they do for work, for money?

BN: Well women didn't work outside the home in those days. No woman worked outside the home. And so she never worked after she was married. He was a traveling salesman for most of his life. As he got older he was a salesman in town.

PL: What was he selling, Blanche?

BN: Pardon?

PL: What was he selling or who was he selling for?

BN: Men's suits. Men's suits. In fact he used to travel to the logging camps and he would tell me story about riding the trains up the sides of the mountains and measuring these big loggers for their suits because all the suits were tailored, tailored to size you see. And as I say he had no profession, he had no money. And I might as well tell you right now because I remember I think in my story I mention that I asked him when I was a little girl, "Dad, are we really poor?" Of course, everybody that we knew, everybody was in the same situation. There were not any middle class, there were the rich and there was the poor. And he said, "Yes, I suppose you would consider us poor but we're decently poor." And I said what do you mean, "decently." "We have never accepted any alms, we have never accepted any charity, we have never sought any charity. But we don't have very much." And that was his answer. And it was an adequate answer to my question.

PL: Now in those days there were many agencies for Jews to teach them English, to help them, so why do you think he felt that he didn't want to accept the help of others? Was it a sense of pride?

BN: Well, a sense of independence, pride perhaps. And not being very happy with his situation and I suppose in those days it was, if you didn't have a profession and if you didn't have some money to begin with or if you didn't have the money to travel to Alaska, where so many men did go, Dad for that reason my father never had a desire to go back to England. And he never did.

PL: Can you tell us a little bit more about you said that you weren't at home that often, that you were often staying with your Aunt Tillie and your uncle. Can you explain a little bit more about when you went? How long you stayed? What was that like for you as an only child to be shuffling between different homes?

BN: Well you get to the point where you accept it as the norm. I didn't think. And I was so welcome and so pleasantly accepted not only by my aunt, but her husband was just simply wonderful to me. He used to call me Blanchela, hold me on his lap, and the boys never resented me. They expected me to be there. So that there never was a problem. The only problem was there was another sister here, a sister two years younger than my mother. My mother was five years younger than Aunt Tillie. There must have been some difficulty because most of them are two years apart. But I was never as close to the other sister's families. Close to the sisters because they all babysat me. When I was a very little girl I remember that if it was only for a day or two Aunt Sarah would come over and pick me up and take me home for a day or two. If it was for longer periods, it was accepted that I went to Aunt Tillie.

PL: Upon reflection, how would you say that this experience impacted you or your sense of independence from your parents or sense of needing more parenting? Can you look back at that experience and do you have any way of situating it in your larger narrative as

a person?

BN: Well, you know, you accept it when you're a little kid. This is the way it is. And it never dawned upon me to ask, "Am I welcome?" "Am I not welcome?" "How long is this going to go on?" This is the way it was and of course from their house to go to the grade school, the grammar school, was a long, long walk. But I walked.

PL: Where did your parents live? What neighborhood did they settle in?

BN: My parents lived practically all the time on Capitol Hill.

PL: What was the address, do you remember? Or what streets?

BN: Yes, it was 17th Avenue. It was not too far from Providence Hospital.

PL: Can you describe—

BN: North of there. Always in an apartment. Always in an apartment because there was just the one child. Mother was not strong so there was no reason to burden her with a house and it was just wonderful to go over to Aunt Tillie's and Uncle Jake's because I could go outside and play, which I didn't have in the apartment.

PL: Where did they live?

BN: They lived close to Cherry Street, where a lot of Jewish people lived.

PL: So going between these two neighborhoods, how would you describe each of them, the neighborhood where your parents lived?

BN: Well, you know, as a child, you don't think about those sort of things, and in retrospect, it isn't fair to try to think of how you felt as a child because this is the way it was and as a child who was accustomed to behaving and doing as their elders told her to do, you didn't question it.

PL: When you went to your aunt and uncle's house though, you obviously knew that it was a more Jewish neighborhood. What was distinctively Jewish about it?

BN: It wasn't any more Jewish than my mother kept in her own little apartment. It was kosher. And what I do remember most fondly is that every Passover, mother managed to feel fine because the three of us spent our Passovers at Aunt Tillie's and Uncle Jake's year after year after year. And years later when I was alone in Chicago, it was the only time I would get homesick. Because I'd think back to those Pesach when my cousins, the boys, and I would be drinking the wine, more than we should have, and it was a good Jewish home and no different from what I had with my own mother.

PL: What were those Passovers like? What do you remember?

BN: Well, the food was always good and I enjoy the ritual and from my earliest memories I remember singing "Chad Gadya, Chad Gadya," and "Dayenu." I remember that when I was just a little tiny kid. And they were pleasant times. They were times when my mother and father would both go with me and all the Rickles, the boys and my Aunt Tillie and Uncle Jake. It was a very pleasant time. Very pleasant.

PL: Were there any other strong memories that you have from home or stories that you feel like you've repeated that should be part of your oral history from your childhood? There was something about your relationship with your father, you mentioned you were very close? Are there are things that you distinctly remember about him?

BN: Yes, because as I was older and I was doing debate at the University and we'd be all finished and I would come down, he'd say to me, "Why didn't you say such and such?" "Why did you let that man get in there and make that remark?" Other than that, there was a very close relationship between my father and me and as I've mentioned, huge unfairness to my mother because in later years when she was much older I realized that there was so much native capacity there that had gone unused, unfortunately. And she

was an extremely bright woman, introspective, and she kept up. As a matter of fact, when she was a patient living at the [Kline] Galland Home in her last years, the director told me that when he wanted to discuss current events or what was going on in the world, he'd go visit Mrs. Gordon. So that there was intelligence there but I refused to accept it when I was a little kid because I was much more interested in talking to my father.

PL: So did your father and mother transmit a sense of Jewish identity to you? How did they teach you to be Jewish? Did they send you to school? Did you go to Sunday School? Did you belong to a shul?

BN: When I was much older I went to Sunday School at Temple [de Hirsch] but as a little kid, no. And once in a while I'd go in and visit my mother who went to Bikur Cholim which was on the corner of 17th and Yesler. But I didn't attend, but I knew I was Jewish, was perfectly happy with it. In fact in my whole life I've never been unhappy with being Jewish.

PL: What do you distinctively remember about Seattle when you were young? What are some landmarks or events that for you make living here very specific? Do you remember the roads, do you remember how you got around or the trolleys, anything about Seattle that was very much specific to this neighborhood or area?

BN: Well of course not until I was a teenager did my father own a car so we walked which probably is one good reason for my longevity. [laughter] We walked. We walked everywhere. And we rode, there were cable cars on Yesler and James and Cherry. There were cable cars that we used to ride. I think my mother's fare was five or ten cents and as a little kid it was free. After I was six I think it was a nickel for me to ride the cable car. And that was always fun, riding the cable cars. And you could ride part of the car was on the outside so that you could sit in a long seat, maybe accommodating ten people on the seat on the side of the car, and it was in the open. The car was open. And as a matter of fact, men would jump on while the car was moving. I enjoyed that in San Francisco, the

cable cars, and they still have—they were smarter than we are, they kept one.

PL: What did your family do for fun?

BN: What dear?

PL: What did you do for fun? Did you take picnics?

BN: Oh yes.

PL: Were you involved in other organizations?

BN: Yes, there's a place called Alki Point, and when mother was feeling okay we'd pack up a basket of food and we'd have a picnic. And other Jewish people, well they all congregate in one area. You'd sit at these outdoor tables and have a picnic and the kids would play together and the older folks, my mother and father were both very good at playing, they didn't call it bridge, they called it Bid Whist in those days.

PL: Can you spell that?

BN: Bid Whist. And they were excellent. Mother was, they were terrific players, both of them.

PL: Do you know what Bid Whist is? What kind of game it is?

BN: It's just very much like Bridge except the point, the counting is entirely different. It wasn't as complicated in the figuring as we do with our playing Bridge today. But that was their fun and going to the movies.

PL: Yes, tell me about that.

BN: Well, about once a month I could go to a movie. It was only five cents for kids and once a month I could go to a movie. As a matter of fact, I got the name Blanche because

my mother was enamored with the movie actress Blanche Sweet. Her name was Blanche Sweet. That's how I got the name Blanche.

PL: So your name Blanche, does it also resonate in a Jewish sense with someone else in your family?

BN: Yes, I was named for my mother's grandfather whose name was Abraham. And when I was born, the rabbi here said to my mother, "Your child is a broche," is a blessing. And so from "blessing," my mother got Blanche. And that's how I got saddled with the name Blanche, which I've never been fond of. And they never— my mother and father never called me Blanche ever. My father was not at home when I was born. He was traveling as a traveling salesman. So at his first glance at me, he looked at me and he said, "What a dolly." So they always called me Dolly, the two of them.

PL: Was that only a family name or did people—

BN: It was my mother and father only. I wouldn't have taken it from anybody else. Dolly, they called me. And there was no name more inappropriate for me than to be called Dolly, but that's how they knew me.

PL: Explain what you mean by that. By the fact that it was not appropriate.

BN: Well, I didn't ever consider myself—I mean had I looked like my mother, then it would be all right to call me Dolly because she was so beautiful. But I didn't look like my mother so I was all Gordon, looked just like my father. But that's how I got the name Blanche.

PL: Where did you attend school first?

BN: I attended school, Pacific School, which is gone. It used to be, it was on 12th and was that Jefferson? Jefferson, James, something like that. And then because we were on

Capitol Hill, I went to T.T. Minor and it's still there. T.T. Minor School is still there.

PL: What would you say were some of the most formative experiences that you had at either Pacific or at T.T. Minor?

BN: Oh, I loved school. Always. School is to me something very, very important. It was a big part of my life. In fact until a few years ago when I found it was difficult to walk, I was still attending the University of Washington a couple of years ago, taking classes that I didn't have time to take when I was at the University. I loved school. And I was always—my father never made any demands on me but he always told me, "You are always to be number one in the class." And I never disappointed him. And for that reason many of the kids didn't like me because I always had the right answer. But I loved it. It wasn't work for me. It was something that I really loved. And it took the place—I was not athletically inclined. The only thing that I excelled at was jumping rope. I was the best rope jumper in the whole school. But as far as doing anything athletic, I was [laughter] very poorly endowed.

PL: Do you remember since you were, do you remember if boys and girls were treated differently in those days?

BN: Oh yes.

PL: How so?

BN: Oh yes. Well, if you were a boy, you were somebody. Girls were tolerated. Just. Just. I never felt, as a child growing up I never felt equal to a boy. We steered clear of them because they could get a little wild, you know. But there was always a difference in gender.

PL: Can you describe any particular events or experiences that that difference manifested itself? Especially since you graduate at the head of your class, since you

were smart and always had the answer, and you said other students maybe felt a little jealous of you. Did that have any effect, being a woman in that position?

BN: Well it was interesting because I think back on Valentine's Day in grade school I would get Valentine cards from the boys. No, there was not the jealousy or the anger looking back that I think I'm amazed that I didn't have. I didn't have any—I had one close friend, a girl, when I was in grade school. But I didn't have any really close women friends until I got to the University.

PL: Why do you think that was, Blanche?

BN: I was too interested in reading and studying and I just didn't have any time.

PL: So given that you were so interested in reading and very actively engaged in school, were there particular books that you sought refuge in or that you loved that were favorites?

BN: I read everything. I still do, whether it's fiction or non-fiction, I love history particularly. And my grandchildren are always amazed when we discuss historical subjects. "But Nana, how could you remember that?" But if you love it, it never leaves you.

PL: Were there any books that you recall reading either in elementary or even in high school that really stuck in your mind?

BN: Oh yes The Iliad and The Odyssey, oh yes.

PL: Why so? Why those?

BN: Well, because I was told that those were the best books to read and I always valued the information from my elders, particularly teachers I revered. I still remember the names of my first- and second-grade teachers.

PL: Who were they?

BN: Miss Bruner, she was a heavy one, and Miss Esaub, she was tall and skinny. I can remember first and second grades.

PL: Why have they made such an indelible mark on you?

BN: Because I loved teachers. Why? Because they liked me too. They knew that I behaved and they knew that they could depend on me for an answer. When hands were raised, half the time they didn't call on me because [laughter] they knew I had the right answer.

PL: In this time in your life, what did you think you were going to be when you grew up?

BN: I always knew that I liked to write and so it was no great surprise to my father that I majored in journalism.

PL: Let's talk about that. When did you make the decision to pursue that, when you decided to go to the University of Washington?

BN: Oh yes, oh yes. Before I entered the University of Washington, I knew that I would be going into the School of Journalism. And at that time, at the University of Washington, the only thing they gave was a Bachelor's in journalism. They didn't have a higher degree. But it was something I was always interested in. Now if I had to do it over again, I think I would not have spent so much time, I would have spent even more time in English because a good thorough knowledge of English is something that you carry with you all your life. In fact when I was working professionally and writing the book for Dr. McEachern—

PL: Can you spell his name?

BN: McEachern? M-c-capital E-a-c-h-e-r-n. And he was the leading authority in the world on hospitals. And when I finished writing his book – at least the first draft – I told him that I wanted somebody to come in and help me with the index so we could read it back and forth. It would be easier. So he called in a retired doctor, Dr. Ponton [phonetic]. And we were halfway through the index when he said, "You know Miss Gordon, the reason you're doing such a terrific job is because you have such a wonderful knowledge of Latin." I looked at him and I said, "Dr. Ponton, I've never had five minutes of Latin." Knowledge of English. He didn't believe me.

PL: What year was this that you worked on the book?

BN: In Chicago? This was after I had my Master's.

PL: Okay. I'd like to go back there because I think that there's a very—

BN: That's way over there.

PL: That's an interesting story. I don't want to necessarily impose a chronology upon this so I feel that we could full well talk about that right now but I'd like to at least set up your studies of journalism, and you excelled at University of Washington and did many things while you were there. So did you decide to go to University of Washington, was that the only choice of where you were to go?

BN: Oh sure, couldn't afford anything else. I paid $15 a quarter and you could take as many hours as you wanted for $15 a quarter. Well, lab work was a little extra. But there was very little lab work in journalism.

PL: What was the curriculum in journalism?

BN: All journalism subjects: writing, editing, copy reading. Mainly in those days, in those early days, journalism dealt almost exclusively with newspapers. See, it was while I was

there, there was no subject taught in radio, that was later. There was no radio. Of course nothing in TV. Nothing. So that's why my work when I first got out of the University was at a newspaper. I worked at the P-I [Seattle Post-Intelligencer] when I first got out. It was all newspapers.

PL: How many men and women were in the journalism program at that time?

BN: Oh, I would say 80 percent men.

PL: Do you think that you had a different collegiate experience as a woman than the men?

BN: No, I don't think so.

PL: So men and women were pretty much tracked similarly in the journalism program.

BN: I think so. Although the Dean and the courses with him, I don't know why, he expected more from me than he did from any of the men.

PL: What was the Dean's name?

BN: Dean McKenzie. Vernon McKenzie.

PL: And you had a very unique relationship with him.

BN: Very close. In fact it got a little bit too close.

PL: Can you give us the arc of that relationship? When did it begin?

BN: Well it began when I entered the School of Journalism and he was the Dean and I think he decided to take me under his wing. And I took—let's see, he taught short story writing. And my first story that I handed in, he gave me a D. And I went up to him and I said, "Now wait a minute, I've never earned a D in my life." He said, "But you can do so

much better." He said, "Get an A on your next story." So of course I did. But that's one trouble with being an outstanding student. You're expected to perform perfectly always and if you don't, they really whack at you. And you know as I got older and had more dates and spent more time running around, they still expected a lot of you. And most of the time I was perfectly happy to perform as I was expected to but you get older and you have other interests.

PL: So tell me a little bit more because you were in school for four years getting your journalism degree. Was it a four-year track?

BN: I did it in, I entered midyear, so three-and-a-half years. You can't go into journalism, in those days you couldn't really get into the School of Journalism until you were a junior. So you had two years of pre-journalism which fortunately was mainly English and I tacked on history.

PL: So Dean McKenzie, also, you had a relationship with him that was also professional in the sense that he advocated for you when you graduated. Is that right?

BN: I'm sure he's the one that saw to it that I was given an invitation to go to—one was for Columbia and one was for Northwestern.

PL: Can you tell us the story of your relationship with him and how he decided or was very interested in you going to one school versus another school?

BN: Well, when I heard that I had an invitation to come to Columbia or Northwestern. New York, after Seattle, you know, oh heavens. New York! And he said, "No," he said. "I want you to consider Northwestern. The Medill School of Journalism is the best one in the country." And he said, "Since you are going to be coming back here to teach at the University of Washington in the School of Journalism…" And I said, "I am?" He said, "Of course, that's what you've been working towards." I said, "I didn't know." And he said, "That's what I expect you to do. Come back here and teach." He said, "I would be very

much, I would prefer that your Master's degree came from the Medill School because today that's the best school of journalism in the country." And I figured this man is brilliant, he knows the subject so thoroughly, but I still wasn't convinced so I was in his office talking to him and he said, "I'm locking the door and you're here until you decide to go to Northwestern." So we argued back and forth. He was antisemitic because he kept telling me I was different and I kept saying to him, "The people you know are different. I'm typically Jewish."

PL: Did he know you were Jewish to begin with, all throughout your career?

BN: Yes. No, he really didn't until I was ready to graduate. And in those days it was obligatory for them to have the religion on your application for graduation and he said to his secretary, "Millie, what's Blanche Gordon doing to here with this 'Jewish affiliation'?" And she said, "Well, obviously she's Jewish." And he said "Hell, I didn't know that." So he told me the story. So there was one boy on campus at the University of Washington who also enrolled in journalism. Not too frequently do I admit that I'm a little bit ashamed of somebody but this boy was one to be ashamed of because of the way he dressed, he was sloppy, his English was sloppy, his work in school wasn't too, and he was very obviously Jewish. So the Dean was classifying all Jews according to this one. And so when he had to sign my certificate of graduation, that's when he said to Millie, "She can't be Jewish." "She's Jewish or she wouldn't have put it down." But we had a very, very close relationship after I was out of school. And all the time I was at Northwestern he would come to Chicago and take me out to dinner and as I've said in this, Continuity, we—

PL: And Continuity is the family history that you've written.

BN: Family history. I wanted to suggest that the family continues. Family continues. Yes, it's a family history. Vernon McKenzie was very, very kind to me. But he was a little bit too romantically inclined and he even suggested when I was working already at the

American College of Surgeons, that I should go to Europe with him as his secretary. And so I very bluntly said to him, “And what are my duties as a secretary?” He said, “Well they’re secretarial duties,” he says. “And I’ll promise you, I know you’re interested and I can promise you without equivocation that you will have a job as a reporter on The London Times when we are finished traveling in Europe.” It sounded awfully good but I never once was tempted because I knew that this was driven not by intelligence but by sex.

PL: At what point did you recognize his interest in you?

BN: Oh, I recognized—

PL: Recognized that he was interested in you not only—

BN: Personally?

PL: —as a protégé but as something more.

BN: When he locked me in that room, that office of his, and said, “You’re not leaving here until you decide to go to Medill School of Journalism.” There was a glint in the eye that was inescapable. And so I managed to steer clear. There was never anything emotional or affectionate in my attitude toward him. It was always collegial. I mean, I was his student.

PL: Now one could look at this from a contemporary perspective and say, I mean there was clearly relationships that happen all the time between professors and their students, this is nothing new. But there sounds to me and I’m wondering if you would agree that there’s a hint of paternalism in the way that he treated you in the sense that he had your best interests at heart, he wanted to guide you in a clear direction. Would you characterize it as paternalistic? Was there an age difference that made him—

BN: He must have been 45 at the time. And to begin with it was paternal, yes. He was my professor, he was my Dean. And I always felt that way. I continued to treat him as my Dean when I was all finished with school and working. This was my attitude toward him and I made no bones about it. He knew this is how I considered him. And he was a brilliant man and he deserved not my affection but my reverence for his abilities. And I never at any time ever intended to travel with him. However, I probably didn't say, "No," vociferously enough. To say, "No I'm not going." Because to me, he was bestowing a favor. And he always bestowed—because I knew without a doubt that it was his influence that caused both Columbia and Northwestern to offer me the fellowships.

PL: Did he ever make any physical gestures towards you?

BN: Yes.

PL: Was that something you'd like to talk about?

BN: Not particularly because I didn't cooperate. But there were. At one time, we were supposed to go to a lecture by—I got the name in here—was a brilliant man at the time at the Washington Athletic Club and I was already working on the book. And I got all dressed up and he came in a cab and took me down there. And this is 1935. They wouldn't let us in. No women allowed at the Washington Athletic Club. No women allowed. So I said, "Dean"—and I knew he wanted to meet this man, he was internationally famous. I said "Dean, you go ahead, I'll go on home." "To hell with him," he said. "You and I are going out to dinner." So he didn't go and he took me down to the nicest dining place in Chicago, it was called Henrici's, and this is where we always used to go for dinner.

PL: What was the name of the restaurant?

BN: Henrici's. In Chicago. "No din of music," they used to advertise. So he didn't go. We went out to dinner. Well you know, you can't help not feeling indebted to somebody like

this who considers you an important person, that will give up something that I knew that he had been looking forward to for months and had been so pleased to invite me to come down and imagine, “no women are allowed.” But that’s not so different from here at the Rainier Club in Seattle, women, you couldn’t be a member, and you had to use a side door. You couldn’t go in the front door until just a few years ago. Women were not permitted to enter the Rainier Club. I think my daughter-in-law was the first female member and officer of the Rainier Club.

PL: Weren’t you also—there were other clubs here in Seattle that you were involved in that broke down certain barriers?

BN: Women’s University Club and the Washington Athletic Club.

PL: Can you explain your involvement with those organizations and how it is that you felt that you watched as barriers were breaking down during the time that you were involved with them?

BN: Well, I think the barriers had already been broken. I didn’t break them. I wasn’t the first one. I never wanted to be the first one. So, I cannot claim that I broke a barrier. And as a matter of fact I resigned from the Women’s University Club after Philip died because I didn’t think I would be using it and I was going to the University of Washington, taking classes, so it wasn’t necessary that I use it for classes. That’s the only reason I joined in the first place. The Washington Athletic Club was fun and I became president of the—there was a women’s board and a men’s board in those days and my second year there—

PL: What years are we talking about here?

BN: We’re talking about—this is after World War II, it’s after 1945, yes. It’s probably around 1950.

PL: Well I want to return because when you were at University of Washington, you were also very involved with things outside of journalism, call them extracurricular. You were a part of sororities, both honorary sororities in journalism as well as a Jewish sorority. Were you a founding member of the Jewish sorority at the University of Washington?

BN: Was I what dear?

PL: A founding member or charter member?

BN: Yes, against my better judgment, and I tried to talk the girls out of it because I didn't think it was timed correctly. I didn't think they were ready. But it worked out all right. They were right, I was wrong. And I became a founding member and they were lovely gals. It was entirely social.

PL: What was the name of the sorority?

BN: Kappa Zeta. And we were—semester after semester we were the top fraternal organization – sorority or fraternity – the top as far as grades were concerned, which was understandable.

PL: What do you mean by that?

BN: They were all smart gals. I wasn't the only good student in the group. You found in those days that a Jewish gal at the University, most of them, the ones who went there to find a husband, quit when they were freshman or sophomores because they found husbands. One of my very dearest friends until the day she died, this happened. She and her husband quit when they were—she was a freshman, he was a sophomore. They quit and got married because she went to the University, no question about it, to find a husband. But there were a few of us who went there to get an education. And I was not the only one. There were several very, very bright women. And our grades were such that we, across the top of The University Daily, "Kappa Zeta Does It Again."

PL: Wow. What did that mean as a Jewish sorority to be headlining the University paper in such a way?

BN: We just took that we were being honored in the way that we should be.

PL: Did they recognize you in the Daily or whatnot particularly, did they call you a "Jewish" sorority, or were you just one of many other Pan Hellenic—

BN: Well I never saw it in writing. And what they said behind closed doors I'll never know. But they all knew it was a Jewish sorority.

PL: What was the Pan Hellenic situation like at University?

BN: What dear?

PL: What was the Greek situation like?

BN: Well at that time there was no, this was a local Jewish sorority. And when AEPhi, Alpha Epsilon Phi, came to the University of Washington, I was already working on my job in Chicago, and I got a letter from national, from Alpha Epsilon Phi, saying, "They would be very pleased if I would come aboard as a"—how did they word it—"as an ex-officio member of AEPhi." And so I wrote to one of the Kappa Zeta members and I explained what had been offered and I said, "Who else is going in?" So she wrote back – in those days, you know, you didn't use the phone, it was too expensive. She wrote back and she said, "Nobody has been asked." They took over, they had to take over a local in order to go national, so they took over Kappa Zeta, and they didn't ask one of those girls to AEPhi with them. So she said, "You are the token. You're already working, you came out of Kappa Zeta." They were saying, "See we have a Kappa Zeta member." But nobody else had been asked. So I say, "I'm not going to accept." And I told that story to Alpha Epsilon Phi, word for word, when I rejected it. I rejected the membership and I said, "Inasmuch as you did this in a very unappealing way, and if you can't, the proper way to

have taken Kappa Zeta in would have been to have taken all the girls in Kappa Zeta in as members of AEPhi. And since you chose me, I can tell you very honestly I'm not at all interested."

PL: What did you think or did they explain what the reason was why they didn't take in the girls who—

BN: Because they weren't known for their social graces. They were known for their intellectual graces. And this was a social sorority, with great hopes of being top socially. And years later, when I was asked on several occasions and I accepted and I went to speak to AEPhi membership, to the gals in school, the university gals, I invariably told them that story. But in a nice way. I mean, I said, "I'm not accusing you of anything, but your predecessors were not as ethical as you are so you keep on being ethical." But they were really not ethical. And I told them the story.

PL: Now another stories I've heard about the creation of Jewish sororities on different campuses, oftentimes it was in response to the fact that Jewish girls couldn't get into non-Jewish sororities.

BN: Well now Jewish boys couldn't get into the fraternities in those days either.

PL: So why did you, as one of the charter members or founding members of this sorority feel that it was important to create a Jewish sorority on the campus of University of Washington?

BN: Well frankly, it was not my desire, and frankly I tried to talk the gals out of it.

PL: Why were they interested?

BN: Because I wasn't interested in it socially. I thought if it's going to be educational, if it's something that has to do with learning, that's fine. But socially, I don't need it. I'm

having a hell of a good time at the University, and I was already pinned before I was a senior so I was having fun and I would go to the SAM dances and the ZBT dances, the fraternity dances. We don't need it. And they said, "Oh yes we do. And you've got to come along with us."

PL: What would SAM and ZBT stand for?

BN: SAM, Sigma Alpha Mu, and Zeta Beta Tau.

PL: Were those Jewish, non-Jewish fraternities?

BN: They were strictly Jewish fraternities. They didn't invite anybody not Jewish to be a fraternity member, and they were Jewish and they did all right. I don't think they're on campus anymore. Because now there's no exclusion for religious purposes. A Jewish boy can go into any kind of it, if he's asked. Many of them have been.

PL: Since you said it was a largely social—the sorority was largely a social organization—what kind of social things did you do together?

BN: If I remember correctly, they threw dances, and they asked the boys to come to the dances—not too frequently. And it was a girl thing. They had luncheons and that sort of thing. But there wasn't the social aspect to the Jewish sorority that there was to the Jewish fraternities. They were definitely social.

PL: I'm going to switch tapes so if you'll hold onto that thought.

END OF CD 1

PL: This is the continuing oral history interview of Blanche Gordon Narodick. We're continuing with minidisk #2. So just to continue where we left off, I guess I was wondering

about how you view the exclusivity of sororities in general that you had a sorority that was created in some ways to satisfy Jewish women's need for social life together, to mix with Jewish fraternities, and then later on that sorority then excluded the girls from ZBT, the initial sorority. How do you look back at this sense of exclusivity around sorority life?

BN: I don't approve of it. I don't like fraternities and sororities to begin with. I don't approve of the whole system. But pressure was brought to bear and after all, the majority, the vast majority—I was the only voice of dissent. And how long can you say, "No," when your friends are pressuring you and saying, "Look, we want to do this and we want you." So you go along with it.

PL: So you were saying that the Jewish fraternities were much more driven in terms of their social life. So what kind of events did you take place and were any of them specifically Jewish? Did they occur around Jewish holidays, did they—

BN: No, not that I remember. There was nothing. They were Jewish because all of the members who belonged were Jewish. But they didn't do anything special for Jewish holidays—anything like that.

PL: You were also part of another fraternal order which was the Menorah Society.

BN: Yes.

PL: Can you tell me about how you got involved with the Menorah Society and what it was?

BN: Well it was the University of Washington society and mainly I was involved because of the debating group and as with the debate organization that I worked with at the University, the women's debating group was separate from the men's debating group. And that pertained to the one from the Menorah Society too.

PL: Now the Menorah Society, what was it?

BN: Made up of Jewish students of that particular university. Those who wished to belong to a Jewish organization.

PL: Now was there a debating team that was not part of the Jewish debating team on the University of Washington campus?

BN: Not that I know of.

PL: So what were your involvements with the debate team?

BN: Well I was one of the debaters. I always chose the negative side of the question, not because there wasn't good in the positive side, but the negative side always travels. [laughter] They're the ones that don't stay home. They travel. And so I was always on the negative. Even in the University of Washington debate team. I always chose the negative because we traveled. We'd go down the University of Oregon, you know, and it was fun.

PL: I see here, I have something that was published in the "B'nai B'rith Bulletin," with your picture in it. And it says, "The Fourth Annual Debate at the University of Washington: Menorah versus Reed College. And the subject is resolved that American Judaism derives greater strength from Orthodox Judaism than Reform Judaism." And it seems to me that the Reed College team was comprised of two men and your team which actually in the affirmative here was two women. And I'm just curious, do you remember this debate? And the subject is very interesting. You were clearly debating things that pertain to Jewish life. Was that always the case? Was this a typical type of debate?

BN: Well from the Menorah Society it always had to do with a Jewish subject. Frankly I don't remember. I should remember but I don't remember. I remember Gen [sp?] very well, Genevieve Levinson. She's long gone. But I didn't even remember that I debated on

the affirmative side, but I did.

PL: How would you prepare for a debate of this nature where you're discussing something about American Judaism?

BN: You read a lot. You went over and talked to the rabbi.

PL: Which rabbi did you talk to prepare for something like this?

BN: Well, always I talked to the Reform rabbi because that's where I was accustomed to going. But other than that I don't know how we prepared.

PL: What other subjects do you remember debating?

BN: What was the subject from Orthodoxy? Hmmm, and I was on the affirmative in that. And I was always Reform. I was never Orthodox. [laughter]

PL: How might you have debated that today?

BN: What, dear?

PL: How might you have debated this today? If you could discuss sort of the relationship of Reform Judaism to Orthodox Judaism?

BN: Oh I don't think there's any doubt, the very basis, the coalescent strength that keeps Judaism together—although I'm not Orthodox—is Orthodoxy. I think there was a greater tenacity, a greater hold on your religion, when you're Orthodox. I sense that, just from all the close work that I've done with Josh Gortler. And you respect that. You respect them for it. It's not part of what you're doing because you don't believe that way. But you respect it. They have every right to feel that way. And I grant you and I think that they're the ones that keep Judaism strong.

PL: Do you remember much then about how the Menorah—because the Menorah Society had its own journal. Do you remember if they had a philosophy or a teaching? The Menorah Societies were historically came out of a very particular era and I didn't know whether or not you picked up on any of that.

BN: My remembrance of my membership in the Menorah Society was completely social.

PL: And those social things included what kind of activities?

BN: We went to dances, we went to shows together, we met boys and girls got together. That's the one where I'd beat out the boy for the presidency and we were dating very seriously at that time.

PL: What's that story?

BN: Well this chap, very nice chap to whom I was pinned later on, ran for president and my name was put up for the presidency, and of course I beat him. And I don't remember that we did anything that was particularly intellectual in the Menorah Society. I think it was completely social.

PL: Did you go to theater? I know that the Menorah Society was involved in theater at the University of Washington. Do you remember any of that?

BN: No I don't.

PL: When did you graduate from the University of Washington? What year was it?

BN: 1930.

PL: And you graduated with honors? What was that like for you? You graduated Phi Beta Kappa?

BN: Yes.

PL: That's quite an honor.

BN: I just figured this is the way I always operated. It didn't feel like a particular honor. It was fine. It's what was expected of me. My father would have disowned me [laughter] if I had come home with less. It was all right.

PL: I think it was the Jewish Transcript that wrote that you were that year the only Jewish woman who graduated Phi Beta Kappa.

BN: Oh, I didn't know that.

PL: So you didn't think that you were? Who else graduated with you that year who was Phi Beta Kappa? Were you honored in the same ceremony?

BN: Phi Beta Kappa was a different ceremony for graduation. That wasn't included in graduation. That wasn't part of graduation. The only one I remember at graduation and in journalism was a man, a young man, who was graduated the same time as I, a Jewish chap; that's the only one that I remember and he was not particularly an outstanding student.

PL: You were also part of an honorary journalism society.

BN: Oh yes.

PL: What organization was that?

BN: Now it's called American Women in Journalism, AWJ, [or American Women in Communication]

PL: What was it called back then?

BN: There was a name.

PL: Theta Beta—? Hold on, I'm going to pause for just a moment. [break in tape] So what is the name of that organization?

BN: What dear?

PL: What was the name of the organization?

BN: Theta Sigma Phi?

PL: Yes. What do you remember about it?

BN: Oh it was fun. It was great. We enjoyed each other so much, but here again, I don't remember anything beyond socializing.

PL: So how in the difference, you were involved in different organizations that the Menorah Society, the Jewish sorority, and the journalism honorary society, were they different groups of people?

BN: Oh yes. The Theta Sigma Phi, I probably was the only Jewish woman, and we were lifelong friends. In fact, that Theta Sigma Phi has changed name, but the people who belong, it's still a very strong organization, Women in Journalism. Very strong. And by golly the president last year here in Seattle was a Jewish woman. But she doesn't affiliate. She's married to a non-Jewish man. But she would not deny the fact that she's Jewish.

PL: You also took on leadership positions in most of these organizations. Isn't that right?

BN: Yes, it just happened that way.

PL: Really? What do you mean by "just happened"?

BN: Well, it wasn't anything that I particularly sought, but if it was offered to me or they expected me to step in and do something, I did it. I was glad to.

PL: Can you describe your experiences in graduate school at Northwestern?

BN: Oh, that was wonderful. That was a particularly pleasant time in my life. It was an easy time. They made very few demands, I did a little bit of teaching and teaching assistant and I attended classes. And what was that? There was this wonderful man who was running for president on the Socialist ticket—a very handsome man at the time—and he was one of my professors. The level of professors at Northwestern in the graduate school was terrific.

PL: Are you talking about Eugene Debs?

BN: Pardon?

PL: Debs?

BN: No, it was not Eugene Debs. Names, names escape me. And I'm sure I have it in here. But I thoroughly enjoyed that. It was only one year—thoroughly enjoyed that year at Northwestern. It was marvelous. Then when I got my master's, and I was expected to come back to Seattle to teach in the School of Journalism, the Dean of the School of Journalism at Northwestern called me into his office the day before I had gotten my degree and he said, "Blanche, I have a very dear friend who wants to meet you. And he's already hired somebody to be the literary secretary." "Literary secretary where, Dean?" "American College of Surgeons." I said, "I don't know a thing about surgeons." "This is the hospital division, and he wants to talk to you." So he said, "I would strongly advise you to go down and talk to him. So I went down and talked to him and he hired me on the spot at $150 a month, which was absolutely unheard of it was so much. $150 a month. So I stayed and I wrote a letter to the Dean in Seattle and told him that I had accepted this job and that I wasn't coming back to Seattle then and thanked him for all the help that he had given me. And I expected to be bawled out horribly. Instead of that he wrote me a very wonderful letter—I wish I had kept it—and expected me to surpass my past history

completely because he said, “I understand that this man that you’ll be working with is the outstanding hospital authority in the whole world.” So he said, “Knowing you, I’m sure you’re going to learn something.” And I did. And he’s the one for whom I wrote the book.

PL: I wanted to ask what that means exactly, when you say, “I wrote the book for him.”

BN: They would call it a “ghostwriter.”

PL: Can you explain what that meant back then?

BN: Well, you sit down and you listen to him and he talks to you and you don’t start off by writing everything down but you take a few notes. And you say, “Now in Chapter 1, how are we going to divide this up? What do you expect to do? What do you expect to cover?” And he tells you. And of course my job was not only writing the book but I wrote all of his magazine articles. And by that time there was radio and he was making radio talks and I wrote all of his radio talks and he did even more than that. He was the one who went around the hospitals and either approved them because as you walk into a hospital if you look, there’s usually a certificate on the wall that says, Approved by the hospital division of the American College of Surgeons.” And if he disapproved of it, the hospital had to work to get the approval. And I remember the Cook County Hospital, the big county hospital in Chicago, while he was out of town—he was in Australia I think—and they called me and asked me to come over and I could see beds lined up in the hall. So I took their approval away in his name. He wasn’t even in this country. [laughter] He came back and he said, “What did you do?” And I said, “You wouldn’t have approved,” I told him. He said, “No, you did the right thing.” But he said, “How could I say?” “Well, I’m your literary secretary.” So they worked hard and they got their approval back but for six months, Cook County Hospital was not approved. They had men and women sleeping in the same hallway, not that I know of in the same beds, but they had the halls were lined with beds. This you can’t accept this in a hospital. So that was part of his work, of being the director of hospitals. So I took on, it was a lot of responsibility but I

learned a lot, learned a tremendous amount. And the book for years, nine-hundred-and-some-odd pages, was considered the hospital bible.

PL: What's the title of the book?

BN: Hospital Organization and Management. I don't think I have a copy here. It's real thick. But when computers came in, completely outdated.

PL: I'm going to explore a little bit about what it means to sort of be a woman in a position where you are not trained in surgery and in this knowledge but yet you were the recipient of much of it, and then how to formulate it and then someone else signed their name to the book. How did that feel?

BN: Well you study, you study completely. He hands you notes. You talk at great length with him. And you put it into a form that's legible and readable and understandable. And if I could understand it then anybody reading it could understand it.

PL: Did you have aspirations for a byline of your own?

BN: No, not really. I was so accustomed to doing what we called ghostwriting that it just gave me a lot of pleasure that the radio talks were accepted so well, that the manuscripts, the magazine articles, that he was just clamored after for these. I mean, he couldn't write a complete sentence. But brain, brain he had.

PL: What was your relationship with him like?

BN: Very impersonal. And he worked me hard because I had to have an appendectomy while I was in Chicago, while I was working for him, and when I came home from the hospital, he sent his chauffeur over with my typewriter and my notes and he said, "Go ahead." So I worked at home for a couple of weeks, he wouldn't let me rest. "Go ahead and work." Because I was involved in writing the book and he didn't want it delayed.

PL: Was it part of your personality or was it simply a matter of in that era for you to speak up and say, “No.” Was that an option?

BN: Say no to what?

PL: Say, “No, I’m sick and I can’t do this.”

BN: Oh. No, it wasn’t an option at all. This is what he expected and it was part of my job. I had taken two weeks off after the surgery and I couldn’t expect him to give me any more.

PL: Were you living on your own at this time?

BN: Yes.

PL: What was it like living in a city that you had gone to school but you were a woman living on your own? You had your own job.

BN: Well, I was living on my own partially. I was living with a cousin who was much older than I who was a young widow and she had the apartment when I moved in with her and we split the expenses to the point where this wonderful Black woman who worked for us for $15 a month and everything was she could tote. When a very dear friend of mine died in Seattle she pulled me on her lap and let me sit and cry on her lap. She was my surrogate mother when I was in Chicago. So I wasn’t living completely on my own. And Irene, this cousin of mine who was so much older than I but still a young widow, she would approve or disapprove of a date. And sometimes I listened and sometimes I didn’t. And now because of several incidents that happened afterwards, I wish I had listened more closely because she was much more wise in that area than I.

PL: Why do you say that? Were there particular people that you dated that—

BN: Yes, there was one about whom I became quite serious but I should have listened to her because she didn't like him. And I thought I was in love with him. But he turned out not to be the right one for me so she was right but I in the meantime had spent a lot of time with him which could have been spent studying or doing something pleasurable. It was pleasurable being with him and I thought I was in love with him. But she knew he wasn't right. I didn't know.

PL: Did you visit Seattle at this time? Did you go home and see your family?

BN: Yes, usually at Christmastime is the only time I could take a week off. And then of course when I went home and spent some time with Philip who was already in Seattle, it was because a meeting of the American College of Surgeon was for example in San Francisco and Dr. McEachern wanted me to go to attend the meeting. And I said, "Why?" And he said, "You'll learn a lot." So I went and because it was always on the West Coast, I could stop in Seattle on the way going home back to Chicago.

PL: Now you said that you were making $150 a month, which was quite a lot of money. What did you do with your money?

BN: I sent a lot of it home. Because that was the Depression era and my father didn't have a job and they were living on what I could send them. So I was frankly depriving myself not buying anything new for myself, I couldn't, and sending a check home to my father. My mother never knew. And when I was in the hospital, you see I hadn't told them I was going to the hospital. I got a letter from my father, "I didn't receive a check this month." So I didn't tell him I was in the hospital but as soon as I got out. And then Roosevelt froze the banks. But I didn't have my money in the bank. I had it in postal savings, a federal organization. You couldn't close that down. So my boss came to me and he said, "You still in postal savings" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Can I borrow $10?" He was borrowing from his secretary. He had to borrow money. Didn't have any. The bank wouldn't give him a nickel. We lived through very interesting times.

PL: It's very interesting Blanche. Especially, you were doing quite well for yourself during the Depression and men, parental figures, bosses, are coming to you for help.

BN: Well sure, because the banks were closed. He couldn't get any money. Couldn't go out to lunch.

PL: What do you think that did for your sense of self or constitution?

BN: I got a kick out of it. I thought it was the funniest thing that ever happened, that Dr. "Mach" had to come to me for ten bucks when I used to raise hell with him because the only thing he gave me for Christmas was $5, see, until I told him one time, I said, "You know, you're not doing right by me. That's not enough for a Christmas present." So he gave me $10. Big shot.

PL: When did you meet your husband?

BN: I met my husband in Chicago. This doctor who had interned at Providence Hospital in Seattle, who was a friend of Philip Narodick. This doctor's wife was a 42nd cousin of mine – way [inaudible]. And she called me one day and she said, "Blanche, come to dinner on Thursday night. Just nothing fancy, just come right from the office." And I said, "Sure, that will be fine, I'll come out to the office." And the only other guest was Philip Narodick who was in his last year of medical school. And I remember the sleeves on his jacket were too short, his trousers were too short. And he had come to their house, he had driven his uncle's car, he was living with an aunt and uncle because his mother had died and he was living with his—his father had remarried so he was living with an aunt and an uncle who were giving him free room and board as the only way he could get through medical school. So he drove me home from that dinner and asked me if he could call me sometime and I said, "Sure." I didn't expect him to call. Because I was pinned and I was obviously wearing a pin to avoid that young attorney in Chicago, and by golly about three days later he called me and asked if he could come and show me the sights of

Chicago. So I said, “Sure.” I didn’t tell him that I had flown in a plane—that my boyfriend had rented a plane and had flown me all over Chicago, and I didn’t tell him that. So he drove me around, pointed out the museums and everything else that was fun, and I told him years later, you didn’t even buy me a cup of coffee. He didn’t have five cents in his pocket. And he said, “And I’ve been paying for it ever since.” [laughter] But that’s when I met him. And he went on to Seattle to intern. I stayed in Chicago and worked. And the correspondence was desultory. It wasn’t, you know, you send me a letter, I’ll answer right away. I took my time because I was dating this attorney.

PL: What did it mean to you to be wearing the pin? Because you had mentioned a couple of times that there were a couple of different pins you wore during—

BN: Yes, well, I had never a dearth of boyfriends to be truthful with you. And with Philip it didn’t seem to make any difference to him. He went off to Seattle and the letters were very few and far between. But after, I promised him I had written him and said, “I was going to the meeting in San Francisco with my boss,” and he said, “Will you be coming to Seattle?” And I said, “Yes.” He said, “Well when you get to Seattle, you call me.” So when I got to Seattle, I called him. And we went out on a date and I went back to Chicago, to my job. And he went during his internship. And he stayed and did his residency in Seattle too. And then I got a telephone call from him which was most unusual in those days to get a telephone call, saying that he was going to New York, that the medical profession was paying his way to go to New York to do some studying, and he had a couple of hours layover in Chicago. Could he take me to dinner? I said, “Sure, that would be fine.” He didn’t call his father, he didn’t call anybody, we just went to dinner for a couple of hours. And no particular affection was shown but obviously there was a feeling there. I could tell from the way he was talking and the way he was acting. And then when I stopped in Chicago again—stopped in Seattle again—from San Francisco, he proposed.

PL: Do you remember how he proposed?

BN: Yes, he said—we were on the car, he had taken me out that evening—and he said, “Don’t you think it would be a good idea if we got married?” So I grinned and I looked at him and I said, “Best idea you ever had.” And he didn’t see any reason why I should go back to Chicago as long as we decided that we should get married. “You stay here and send for your belongings. Why go all the way—? Just stay here.” So I think we were engaged about two weeks before we got married.

PL: At what point did you decide that it was a good idea?

BN: Oh, he was such a superior person and very handsome and very, very affectionate and very bright, and had accomplished so much in his profession and obviously was going to go a lot farther. And he was an extremely handsome man and you know in those days before I appeared on the scene, I couldn’t imagine the invitations he got from mothers of eligible gals. Here was a doctor, unmarried, handsome, sure he got all kinds of it. But he was very busy doing his—they didn’t realize it, with an internship and with a residency, he was tied to his job. So I don’t know what propelled him to propose to me but I was delighted. He was a real man.

PL: So how did you plan your wedding?

BN: What, dear?

PL: How did you plan your wedding?

BN: We didn’t have any money. I had my Aunt Tillie and Uncle Jake and Aunt Sarah and Uncle Sam and some very dear friends of my parents. I think there were twelve of us at the wedding. And of course it was in the home of Aunt Tillie and Uncle Jake.

PL: Why did you decide to get married there as opposed to in a synagogue?

BN: Well, I could afford them because there was no charge.

PL: So synagogues charged?

BN: I didn't even check. I knew that Aunt Tillie wanted me and it was what I wanted too. And my mother and father were still in a small apartment, and they had a big house. And I think we had twelve, there were twelve at the wedding.

PL: Who married you?

BN: Rabbi Philip Lang. I had met him in Chicago and my cousin Irene with whom I lived was president of the women's auxiliary and the Conservative shul was not too—it was on the North End—not too far from where we lived. And the man was obviously so brilliant and so dear and so open, he was Conservative but he was open to all Judaism and this is what I wanted. Well, the New Year's Eve before Philip and I—we got married in the 16th of January—New Year's Eve of that year, Philip was in a bridal party in Seattle, Dr. Alex Grinstein, and Marion and I, his bride, was a very good friend of mine. I was at the wedding. And they used Rabbi Koch who was Rabbi at Temple de Hirsch and the rabbi, Philip was on one side of me at dinner and Rabbi Koch was on the other side of me and he said, "Well, Blanche. I see that your wedding is my next one coming up." And I turned to him and I said, "I'm sorry Rabbi but you're not going to perform the ceremony." I didn't like him. He was goyishly Reform.

PL: Explain.

BN: He was very—no Sephardic was permitted in his congregation. He wouldn't permit it. He was so narrow-minded, and this necessarily, maybe that's the way Reform was in those days. I don't know. Because it certainly isn't that way now. The most outstanding members in our congregation at Temple DeHirsch are Sephardic.

PL: Today?

BN: Today. They weren't then. They weren't permitted. Rabbi Koch wouldn't permit it. No Sephardic was a member. So Rabbi Philip Lang, and I think I have the letter to show you. I'm not sure, it may be in here, the letter I received from Rabbi Lang when he heard that Philip and I were engaged. The dearest, sweetest thing in the world. And he would not take five cents from Philip [who] tried to pay him. No. And they gave us the most lavish wedding gift, he and his wife Ruth. Well, he considered himself a friend. And he was a friend.

PL: What was it that he gave you?

BN: I still have a big gorgeous glass tray. But it's an unusual. It's large, with silver on the ends. And it had 12 glasses, liquor glasses that were part silver and part glass, and this was the wedding gift they gave us as a wedding gift. And I dearly loved that man. I don't know why it was that I didn't join that congregation.

PL: What was the name of his congregation in Chicago?

BN: Oh, in Chicago.

PL: You said Rabbi Lang was—

BN: Anche Emet [phonetic].

PL: And that he was a Rabbi in the Chicago Conservative synagogue.

BN: Yes, and he came here and was the Rabbi in the Conservative synagogue here: Hertzl.

PL: Oh, Hertzl.

BN: When Hertzl was in Seattle on 20th and a block North of Yesler, whatever that street is.

PL: And I seem to recall that he and Rabbi Koch had very different views as well.

BN: Oh. No similarity there at all. Not even in brains. I mean this man was brilliant and not at all, I mean there was no division in his heart if you were Reform, if you were Orthodox, you were welcome in his Conservative synagogue. He was a real rabbi. Really true.

PL: So tell me a little bit about your wedding ceremony. Do you remember your dress?

BN: Yes. I wore a white satin dress that I bought at Magnin's for $10 – silk satin, floor length, and I tried to give it to my granddaughter but she couldn't get into it. And I wore and I still have. I have it here where I can show you, the silver shawl that my mother wore at her wedding and I wore at my wedding and I'm hoping that my granddaughter will wear at her wedding. It's a beautiful shawl. And it was Philip's first time he owned a tuxedo. And the guests were very few, about 12, mainly Aunt Sarah and Uncle Sam. Of course it was in the home of Aunt Tillie and Uncle Jake. And Nate wasn't at home, George was in medical school, Julian, the youngest one, he was there.

PL: What was the ceremony like, Blanche?

BN: What, dear?

PL: What was the ceremony and did you have a reception? What were they like?

BN: Well the ceremony, I don't remember. How could you expect me, I was in a fog? I was in a fog. The reception was made up of the people who were there at the wedding. We didn't have any further reception than that. And the food was an ice-cream bar. In those days there was an ice-cream company in Seattle that made ice cream in various shapes and forms. And there were some that were typically bridal and that was all of our food for the wedding.

PL: When you say it was typically bridal, meaning the shape of the cake itself?

BN: That's right.

PL: What shape was it in?

BN: It just looked like a wedding cake. And I did have a wedding cake. I had ordered a wedding cake. But that's all I could afford.

PL: What would you say was Jewish about your wedding? Did you have a ketubah, did you break the glass?

BN: I broke the glass, we had a what do you call the—

PL: Chuppah.

BN: The chuppah. Oh yes. My mother, "You going to have a chuppah?" I said, "We'll have a chuppah." So we had a chuppah and four men holding the posts and Philip broke the glass. Oh, it was a typical Jewish ceremony. Very small but typical.

PL: Did you have a honeymoon?

BN: Yes. We traveled by train to San Francisco. I think we spent the whole week in San Francisco which was a long time for Philip to be away from—he had just started his private practice and not only had a private practice but he was director of the TB hospital and it was that that determined his specialty. But that was our whole honeymoon.

PL: You called your relationship "a true love story." What did you mean by that?

BN: Well Philip and I were completely devoted to each other, and it was not only what was important about that marriage, was not only the love but the respect. And that's really important in marriage. And I think Philip considered me a truly equal partner—even back then. And I remember we were talking to some friends at one time and the friend

said to him, “Well how does it feel to be married to such a smart woman?” And he said, “So far she’s never put me down.” And I thought to myself, “You don’t know how hard sometimes it is to keep my mouth shut.” [laughter] And I learned, I learned fast, you don’t ever try to correct him because everybody makes mistakes.

PL: What were your aspirations at this point? You had just come out of a job making a good amount of money. You moved from Chicago where you had a good job back to Seattle.

BN: Yes, well, I got pregnant right away. And in those days, I didn’t know any women who worked outside the home. But I knew that I knew how to write so I went into public relations. And the first paying job was for the symphony. And that year the ballet started for the first time in Seattle and they must have talked to the symphony. And so I really put ballet over. Because in those days I had no difficulty of getting—there were separate—a women’s section in the newspaper. It was devoted entirely to women’s organizations. And I never had any difficulty getting on page one in that section because those women who worked in the women’s pages knew that I was a professional. And it was like shooting ducks, very simple. And it was fun. And these women and I became lifelong friends. June Almquist died just I think must be two years now, and she became an Editor of the Times before she died. And Sally Raleigh was the women’s editor at the P-I [Seattle Post-Intelligencer] and she and I were like. So with having friends like that, I mean my job was in public relations was so simple. And very gratifying because when you write your stuff, you want it to go in the way it’s written and most of the time some of these editors feel that they know better than you do and they try to make—these gals never tried to make changes. “Blanche submitted this,” “Blanche wrote this story,” it went through.

PL: So was this essentially a business that you had started on your own or were you an employee of the ballet and the symphony?

BN: No, you're not an employee. This has been on a free basis, free-will basis. You get paid for it, and what you charged, but you have your own business and you pay your own taxes and you have your own permits. And the business is yours.

PL: So you started a business and some of your clients were the ballet and the symphony.

BN: Symphony.

PL: Who else?

BN: And the opera. I stayed in that realm because they got to know me immediately, and it paid off. And it paid off in getting the tickets too. Philip and I went to every symphony, every opera. In fact Dr. Fuller, who was the head of the—started the art museum here, he called me one day and said, "Blanche I need good seats." And I said, "You can have ours." He said, "Will you change with me?" I said, "Sure. But let me talk to Philip first." So Philip said, "Dr. Fuller? You bet. He can have them."

PL: So you essentially witnessed an era in Seattle's art history or performance history where there was a blossoming or an efflorescence of ballet, of the symphony, of the opera.

BN: Well the ballet just started.

PL: So can you talk a little bit about what it was like to witness this and be writing about it and introducing others to it through the newspaper at the same time?

BN: Well, it's like starting every other new business. I mean you have to have the publicity. And this is what I could furnish. And they never asked price, they knew that I would bill them fairly. And I never charged a Jewish organization.

PL: Explain?

BN: Well, I did publicity for Hadassah, Council of Jewish Women, for the Temple, for synagogue, any Jewish organization that asked me for publicity. I never said, “No,” and I never sent a bill. This is my pleasure. What I was doing for the community. But they had to be Jewish.

PL: How much would you charge those who were not part of that community?

BN: Well, honey, what I charged then and what I charge now are so different, the two charges, that it doesn’t even pay to conjure up because it was minimal by comparison with today’s prices.

PL: Can you give me an example of the kind of publicity that you wrote, and did your name appear on it or was it more like a press release?

BN: Oh, no it was a press release. In those days they didn’t put your name on your newspaper story. And they certainly didn’t give you credit in the radio and finally when TV came in. They just used your material. And they knew that you were being paid by the organization, so you didn’t get any remuneration from the newspaper or from the radio station. Your remuneration was their using the material.

PL: At what point did you witness or did you push to have your work on the front page of the paper and not just in the women’s section. Did you see that as a challenge?

BN: No. I never saw that as a challenge and I don’t believe I ever had a page-one story in either paper because I hope that they were running material that was of interest internationally and nationally about which I knew nothing. No. And I knew enough about newspapers because my first job when I got out of the University of Washington was with the P-I.

PL: But you haven’t told me about that so what was that?

BN: That was like a cub reporting. They took me on, they didn't know what I could do but my first assignment was to go out and check—in those days on the streets of Seattle we had those great big clocks, especially outside of jewelry stores. Really big clocks.

PL: Like the one down by Ben Bridge [Jewelers] still today?

BN: Yes.

PL: On Pike Street.

BN: And all of the jewelry stores have big clocks. And so I just walked around town and checked time and wrote a story on the difference in the time. You look at the clock and you think that's the time but you walk another block and it's a different time entirely. Well it was a cute story and it landed me a job at the P-I. But I didn't work there very long because I went on, you see, to Northwestern.

PL: I understand though that some of your writing and your creative juices very much flowed from the downtown Pike Place Market, Seattle area. I think that you had mentioned in a previous oral history that you actually defended a pretty famous author who you had kind of a muse relationship with. Can you talk about that?

BN: Norman Reilly Raine. He wrote The Tugboat Annie stories.

PL: Which are what, can you describe what those stories are?

BN: Oh, they're wonderful. They're wonderful stories about this woman in many, many years ago, who was the captain of a tugboat. And Norman Reilly Raine wrote the stories about Annie, you can still get them in the library – Tugboat Annie, it's called. And he was so creative and so articulate in his writing and he was a very dear friend of Dean McKenzie's. And so it was through Dean McKenzie that I met Norman Reilly Raine. And he'd say, "Blanche, let's take a ride together." And he would drive me down to the

Olympic Hotel and we'd sit in the lobby and he'd say, "Look at that man crossing there. What do you think his life is like? Be creative, tell me what you think he's like." Or we'd go down to the public market and he'd pick out some slovenly looking women around, "What do you think she's doing in the market?" I mean that creative mind of his was with him all the time. And occasionally he'd say, "No, that isn't what I would say at all." And I said, "What would you say?" But it was fun because he pushed you to be creative. But he was a very famous author. And he and the Dean—see I taught one year of high school.

PL: When was this?

BN: This was when I first got my degree, Bachelor's degree, from Washington. I worked as a high school teacher for 1 year. And I taught journalism, English and History. And Vernon McKenzie and Norman Reilly Raine would drive up to that high school. It took a good three hours. There were no freeways. Each way. They'd drive up and they'd have dinner and make their little speeches to my journalism classes, and of course the whole school would turn out because there are two famous people coming up, and then they'd drive back.

PL: What school was this and where were you teaching?

BN: This was right out of Mount Vernon. What was the name of that high school?

PL: Cedro? Was it Cedro Wooley [High School]?

BN: Cedro Wooley. You remembered reading that. Cedro Wooley which is still there as a town, as a little town. And I can remember that the fathers of some of the students would bring their boys in by the ear to come to high school and they'd been in the Navy. "I'm paying taxes, you're going to school. Come on, you're through with the Navy for a while." And here were these kids older than I and they knew darn well that I was just a kid but these boys had been in the Navy, some of them, and some of them were such terrible students. But I had a couple who were very bright, extremely bright. But Norman

Reilly Raine and Vernon McKenzie used to drive up to that school. I'll never forget that. That was the nicest favor, the choicest thing that those two men could do to show their friendship. I enjoyed them.

PL: I think we're going to stop here and we'll continue with the next session.

BN: Good. It's five o'clock!

PL: It's late so I'm going to thank you for this first part of the interview.

BN: Thank you. Thank you.

[break in tape]

PL: This is the continuing oral history interview. For some reason it's not recording so I'm going to stop there. [break in tape] This is the continuing oral history interview of [break in tape]. This is the continuing oral history interview of Blanche Gordon Narodick. Today's date is July 25th, 2001. My name is Pamela Brown Lavitt, I am at the home of Blanche Gordon Narodick at The Summit in Seattle. This is minidisk tape #3 and I am conducting this interview for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words project in Seattle. So to continue our interview from where we left off, you had been telling me last time we met about much of the PR work that you were doing after you got married and I wanted to explore and hear a little bit more about your work with Jewish organizations. Can you roster some of the Jewish organizations that you did PR work for?

BN: Yes. I can name all the Jewish organizations in Seattle I think did PR for most of them. Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, let's see, what else is there? Those are the two big ones. There must be a dozen.

PL: B'nai Brith?

BN: I don't think I did anything for B'nai Brith, for the women's group. But those were the two big ones: the Council of Jewish Women, National Council of Jewish Women, and the Hadassah which has dozens of chapters here in Seattle. Those are the two big ones. Frankly at the moment my memory forsakes me. There must be at least a half a dozen others that, oh the City of Hope, what else is there?

PL: Would you consider City of Hope a Jewish organization or a non-Jewish organization?

BN: Predominantly Jewish. It's nonsectarian actually. But it is predominantly supported by Jews.

PL: How so?

BN: I don't know, that's just the way it's been organized. And Jewish people, I find, in working with so many different organizations. Jewish people contribute, not only verbally but financially, a good deal more. I realize that even when my husband went out on fund gathering for medical organizations. The Jewish organizations always gave more graciously and more liberally. And whether that's built into our culture, I think it is.

PL: So when you were doing PR work for these different organizations, what was the title—

BN: I did not charge if the organization was Jewish. I figured I'm doing this on a volunteer basis. Oh, and I did a lot of PR for the Jewish Family Society. Good deal. As a matter of fact I have a humorous story to relate about that. Many years later when the director called me and asked me to come in, that he had a big job that he wanted me to do. And I went in and I said, "Sure, I'll do it for you." A couple of our very prominent Jewish women here in Seattle went to see him and they said, "Why are you using Blanche Narodick? Her fees are high. We can get somebody who's not going to charge or will charge much less." And he called me and he said, "Blanche, this is what both…"

and he named the women, who happened to be friends of mine, or I thought they were friends of mine, and so he went ahead and said, “She volunteered. I asked her and she said, ‘Sure I’ll do it for you.’” And one woman said, “You mean she’s doing this for free? That’s her profession.” He said, “She has never charged us. And he said I don’t think she intends to.” So that was part of my being Jewish. I just figured that these were charitable organizations and in good faith I had to be charitable too. And I did a lot for that particular organization. In fact I’m still doing a lot. Donna Benaroya was chairman a couple of years ago and we cemented a wonderful friendship between the two of us, and she knows that I’m always there, ready and willing, to take care of that organization. Now what else do you want to know?

PL: Well, I guess I’m curious as to the nature of the PR that you were doing for them.

BN: In those days, the newspapers were much more generous in giving space. And I used newspapers and I used radio a lot. TV in those days was just up-and-coming. We used that. But predominantly, it was newsprint that carried these stories and they have scrapbooks full of it. And it helped. Particularly—and this is interesting because I’m now living in a home that is a Kline Galland Home. On every one of the Kline Galland big challenges for raising funds, I went in there and did the PR and we raised millions of dollars on several of those drives for Kline Galland. And Josh Gortler—

PL: Can you spell his name?

BN: Yes, G-O-R-T-L-E-R. First name Joshua. He is the CEO of all of Kline Galland. And he came here about between 30 and 35 years ago and called me and said, “I understand you’re the person that I must get to know very well.” And so I went out to see him, we chatted, and I put together the fundraising drives, two of them, each of them raised more than a million dollars. And in those days, that was a lot of money. Today that doesn’t sound like very much. And here I am, 35 years later, living in a residence that is sponsored by Kline Galland. But Josh has never forgotten it. When he came in here to

The Summit and introduced a program, he introduced me immediately and explained to the audience what I had done for Kline Galland years ago. And it just seems incongruous to me that I would be living here now after doing all of that charitable work so many years ago.

PL: Well why do you think it's incongruous?

BN: Well, because never in my wildest dreams did I ever dream that I would be living in a retirement home. This is so entirely different from anything else I've ever experienced.

PL: Can you describe? I mean we're getting out of the chronology but I think it's a great time to talk about where you are living because The Summit is a new retirement home, apartment complex, here in Seattle, and I think it's important to talk about it as one of its first residents.

BN: Well it's a remarkably fine construction. I understand the best of construction went into it. And my remark always is I think I have a very charming apartment. The best part of it is the view. I love the view. It is sponsored by Kline Galland [Home] which is Orthodox, which means all the meals and everything about the home is Orthodox. However, I knew that before I moved in. The important part of living here is getting to know the people who are here. I am an only child. I've always been a very private person. And suddenly to be living with more than a hundred people, to me, is fascinating. I went to a group the other day that was called "The International" and all of these women—and they were all women because I would say 98 percent of the—maybe 99 percent of the residents—are women here. We live a lot longer than the men do. The whole importance of that meeting to me was learning about the beginnings of other people. How different—as we're all Jews. That we have in common. That's our custom, our inheritance. But our beginnings are all so different. And I listen to these stories and I wonder at these women.

PL: Can you be more specific or detail what you mean by “everyone’s beginnings are different”? What were some of the beginnings you were talking about?

BN: Well, so many of them are European, Middle-Eastern born—born—and have learned to become American citizens. Their thinking is different from mine. I think they think I’m—well, I’ll tell you very frankly, one woman said to me one day, “You’re not Jewish.”

PL: And who was she?

BN: One of the residents. Obviously very Orthodox, because I said, “What do you mean I’m not Jewish? I’m just as Jewish as you are.” She said, “No, you’re Reform.” And so I had to say to her, “Look, we’re all Jews. Fundamentally, we’re all the same. Doesn’t make any difference to me. I respect the fact that you think differently than I do but you have to respect the fact that I think differently. I’ll give you respect but I demand respect too.” She turned around and walked away.

PL: Are there other ways that The Summit as—because you all eat dinner together, right? There’s one meal a day that the entire community comes together, or at least in separate dining rooms perhaps, and has a meal together. You said it’s kosher food here as well as [inaudible].

BN: Yes, everything’s kosher. Very kosher.

PL: So as a Reform Jew, how do you feel about that?

BN: You adjust. You’re not always pleased with what you have to accept but you signed up to come in here, you said that you would reside here, and there’s no [unclear]. We criticize. We have a round table. There are eight women sitting at that table. And I’ll tell you very frankly, we have now considered ourselves family. And I look forward to going down there every evening and meeting these women and we find a—“What did you do

today?" "What did you do today?" "What are your plans for tomorrow?" And I know that if I ever needed something, and if I don't show up and I neglect telling them, "I won't be there for dinner tomorrow night, I'm going out," one of them is sure to call me because you must be ill or you'd show up. We come from very different beginnings, all eight of us. I think we're all American-born.

PL: How many are Seattle-born, Blanche?

BN: I would say half are Seattle born and I knew one of the women very slightly. All the others are brand new to me. But we're learning. We're learning about each other. Last evening, when we finished dinner, one of the women said, "Blanche, come on up, you were not at dinner that night. I gave cherries to everybody who was here. Cherries my brother had picked from his own tree. So I've got some in the refrigerator for you." So I went into her apartment and you have new friends. These are now, some of them even more than friends, they're family.

PL: So if you were to kind of step outside and look at this new situation that you are living in, what's going on? What's this new situation about? What is The Summit about and why is there a need for something like this in Seattle? Is it specific to Seattle?

BN: Well, I went around the table the other evening and asked each one, "Tell me because I want to write it down." I didn't write it down but I remember it well enough. "Why did you move here?" And one of them said, "Well, it's all Jewish." And I sensed this from my own experience too. The older you get, the more connected you feel to religion, the more connected you feel to every Jew, at least I do. I think there are some of the Jewish people there, a very few who are really ultra-Orthodox, who feel that I'm not Jewish. But that's very few. So she came here because it was Jewish. Another one said she came here because she figured this would be the last change that she would make in her address. And she's by far the youngest one at the table. I think she's probably in her very early 70s. Another one said she came because her children insisted on it.

PL: And how about you? Why not Florida or California or Palm Springs?

BN: No. I have only one son and one daughter-in-law and my one grandson is here. Family to me—maybe it's because I'm an only one—family to me is extremely important. And I'd never think of moving away from where my son Kit is. Not that I see him very frequently here. He and his wife are both extremely busy people. But I know they're here. That's a tie that can't be equated with anything else. I knew Kit and Sally expressed themselves, that they thought this would be a good move. Sally happens to be among a dozen other boards, she's on the board of Kline Galland. And so they encouraged me and I felt very frankly with diminishing returns from my body, that it would be a good place to live where there is assisted living. If necessary, they have accommodations on floor two where people who need assistance, they live on that floor. I hope it never comes to that, but it's there and it's something that you sort of bank on if necessary. In the meantime, I am getting around. Force myself a lot but I get around, and I'm signing up for classes.

PL: Let's talk about what those activities are. It sounds like there's also—there's a center here where there's activities?

BN: Yes there are a lot of activities and I must admit, sometimes shamefacedly, that I don't attend many of them. Some days none at all because I have an addiction. I love to read, and anything good that I get my hands on I read. And they're doing something very, very well here at The Summit: they're building up a beautiful library and we're all contributing our good books to the library. It's very simple to go down and check out something that you find that you'd have not been able so far to read.

PL: What are some of your favorite authors that you've read over the years?

BN: Oh, I love all good writing.

PL: What kind of writing, a particular genre?

BN: Particular—[break in tape]

[END OF CD 2]

PL: We're continuing with the oral history—

BN: One of the things that I love to read, most I think are history. I love history. I love to read about other cultures. I enjoy good, light fiction. The other day I was amusing myself, I was reading three different books and one was a novel and one was history and one was not a novel, it was very, very light. I love to read, I love to learn. And as long as I am fortunate enough to be able with the use of my glasses to keep reading I intend to do it as long as I can.

PL: I think we'll return a little later in the interview back to this area that we're discussing. I wanted to go back a little bit to when you and Philip were first married. What year were you married again?

BN: January 16, 1937.

PL: And at what point did you decide to have children?

BN: Right away.

PL: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BN: Well, I became pregnant within a few months after I was married. And Kit came early. He was in a rush to come as he's been in a rush all of his life. He was born on November the 29th of the same year, and genetically—I must have inherited this from my mother—had a great deal of difficulty. And I did become—well I'll tell you later—I did become pregnant when Philip was in the service.

PL: With your second child?

BN: With the second child. Kit was then nearly six years old and we decided that perhaps they would be spending all of their time in the Army in this country but that didn't happen. They went overseas. But I became pregnant, and I was pregnant when Phil left to go overseas to go to Europe in the Army.

PL: He was a medic?

BN: Pardon?

PL: He was a medic in the Army?

BN: He was a medic. It was called the Fiftieth General Hospital. There were 50 doctors from Seattle – all went over together. It was sponsored by Providence Hospital which is Catholic but they were glad to have Philip. He was the only Jew in the group overseas and he made some lifelong friends. As a matter of fact, when we get around to it, one of my dearest friends was Gertrude Levitt whose husband was from Providence Hospital. Not Jewish, the name sounds. Gertrude Levitt, she is not Jewish. In fact they had never known any Jewish people until they met Philip and me. And one thing I loved about Gertrude and Darrell, they were daffy about Kit. They had one child, a girl, but Kit was their primary joy. And it was Gertrude who said to me, "Blanche, you've got to go on some boards. There are not enough people in the city of Seattle who know Jewish people." She said, "Darrell and I did not know one Jew until we met you and Philip and more people should know Jewish people."

PL: Where did you meet them?

BN: I met them because Darrell and Philip were in the same Army unit and Gertrude invited us over to dinner, to her home. She initiated the friendship to the point when the men went overseas and Gertrude continued to have Kit and me over for dinner. My six year old son said, "Auntie Gertrude you should be Jewish." And she said, "Kitso, why?" And he said, "Because you cook so well." [laughter] But she was the one who insisted

that I go on boards and meet a lot of non-Jewish people, which I did. The first board was the Florence Crittenton Home. In those days, that was a home for unwed mothers. In those days, we had to protect and hide the girls who were illegitimately pregnant. Of course, that changed after a few years.

PL: Can you detail what you mean by “hide”?

BN: Yes. We hid the girls when strangers came to visit because among the strangers might be someone who knew the girls. These girls were from all walks of life, some from the very highest society in Seattle, from New York, from Chicago. Parents would send them as far from home as possible to hide the fact that they were illegitimately pregnant. And I made lifelong friends. As a matter of fact, Illsley Nordstrom and I became very close friends and she came to my home for lunch one day, looked out of one of the big windows and said, “Blanche come over here and take a look. You can see the roof of my house down in Windermere.” In those days, Windermere was restricted as Broadmoor was—no Jews allowed. And she said, “See that blue roof, that’s my house.” And I said, “Illsley, don’t you know we look down on Windermere?” —because we were up high on a hill and Windermere was on a lake—and she turned around and looked at me and smiled and she said, “I know what you’re saying.” So see, Gertrude started something very well because Illsley and her husband became very good friends of ours. We exchanged dinner invitations and through them I met an awful lot of other non-Jewish people who I think were, I don’t know that they were amazed, but they seemed to be pleased, to know some Jewish people.

PL: Did you somehow feel like a representative?

BN: Yes. That’s exactly how I felt. I felt that I was—not that I ever felt I had to be on my best behavior—but frankly I was always so proud to be able to introduce Philip as my husband because to this day I consider him one of the finest human beings I ever have known and I think people on meeting Philip realized that immediately.

PL: At this point, had you served on any boards in your life?

BN: Oh, I've served on many boards, yes.

PL: But at this point, when Gertrude Levitt was encouraging you to get involved with boards, was that an experience that you had at that point yet?

BN: That was an innovation. I had never gone on a board. I was a wife and a mother and starting a business in Seattle and I was busy. It never occurred to me that the proper thing to do was to give something back to the community.

PL: Did Philip also get involved with the Florence Crittenton Home? Did I pronounce that correctly?

BN: Yes, not as a board member but he did come out, he did make speeches. He did attend dinners where we were raising money, raising funds. And also deciding how the girls should be treated.

PL: Why would you have particularly been involved in helping unwed women with early parenthood, and here you are pregnant yourself – am I right – at this time? With your second child?

BN: Well, don't forget, Kit was six years old when I was pregnant with the second child and I became pregnant when I was in Colorado Springs because this is where the Fiftieth General Hospital, where the men were at the fort before they went overseas. But when I came back and during the War I became very active on the Boards of Jewish organizations and I know this is what you want to hear too.

PL: I'd actually like to hear it all but I'm wondering about the—I'd like to hear a little bit more first about the Florence Crittenton Home. Is it still in existence and can you describe—

BN: In the East I believe there are a couple of homes left. They almost went out of business because it didn't become necessary—1950, '55—it wasn't horrible to be illegitimately pregnant anymore.

PL: What shifted?

BN: The whole culture shifted. And for the life of me I can't figure out what sparked it, unless it was the War. But it was a horrible sin in those days. In fact, from that point I worked for the State. I set up as the head of a committee, Rules and Regulations Governing the State's Care of Unwed Mothers. I have the exact names written out in the book here.

PL: Was this when you served on the Health and Welfare Council?

BN: Yes.

PL: So who were you helping? Who were these girls? Where did they come from? Did you have a personal interaction with them?

BN: A little, up to a point. You didn't push it too hard because the whole focus was on maintaining their secrecy.

PL: Where was the home?

BN: The home was in the South End, near Renton. And it was disbanded after a few years because, as I say, it was no longer necessary to hide them.

PL: Were there girls of all walks of life?

BN: Yes, we even had a couple of Jewish girls.

PL: How did you hear about that?

BN: Well, the director told me. She called me and she said, “Blanche, I want to tell you about some of our new people here.” And frankly at first I was horrified and then I thought, “After all, we’re human too.”

PL: So what did the women do when they gave birth and where did they give birth?

BN: Well, in those days it was highly desirable to put them up for adoption because there were waiting lists with the adoptive agencies, parents who couldn’t conceive who wanted to adopt babies. But there were many people who were very much against that, including many of the physicians who felt that wasn’t right, that the women should keep their children. It was an issue that I did not take any part of because I felt that was entirely a personal desire. Some of the girls were able to give them up immediately and some of them as soon as that baby was born it was theirs.

PL: What kind of structures were in place either psychological or in terms of funding to help these women out?

BN: Well, there was state funding and of course we set up—the board—we had drives where we set up funds for the girls. And some of them came from very, very well to do homes and quite a good proportion of them came from outside the State of Washington so they either went home or different arrangements were made for the girl and the baby.

PL: Were there phrases or sayings to talk about women who were in that situation? There have always been sort of metaphors that “she’s with child.” Do you remember phrases that you used to use to talk about the girls who were pregnant?

BN: No, no. It became so utterly natural to want to take care of these [girls]. Because they were children. There was one girl 11 years old, believe it or not—which horrified me. Children having children, which is abominable. And as even happens today, it’s the grandparents who then have to rear their grandchildren because how can a child rear a child? How can you expect an 11 year old to know how to care for an infant? Fortunately

there weren't too many that young but many of them were very [young]: 12, 13, 14, just awful.

PL: Having done this work and having worked with this organization and working on the Health and Welfare Council, you made recommendations regarding what? What was that government council about that you were involved in?

BN: Well mainly the Council was not dealing with the girls at all. It was setting up rules and regulations as to how to care for them. How to care for them while they were in the home and how to do follow-up work because that's a very important part of the job.

PL: Why is that? What kind of follow-up work are you talking about?

BN: Well, you know there were most of us on the board were not social workers but we did have social workers, very good, professional women who were absolutely dedicated to the cause. And it was necessary to set up rules and regulations so that we were all thinking in a similar pattern. The whole idea was take care of the girl.

PL: Were there any major controversies or tensions around setting up those rules, that people had different ideas?

BN: None whatsoever. There was a great consensus of feeling because the whole emphasis was on helping the girl.

PL: Was there anything specific about your being Jewish that inflected this work?

BN: You know I never thought about that. I don't think so.

PL: Or any values that you were—

BN: I was the only one on the board who was Jewish. I don't think—well yes, because of Gertrude probably I was in the beginning chosen because I was Jewish. And this was a

new experience for the board. We did have following me we had one, two Jewish women I can remember at successive times. But I don't think it made any difference business-wise, socially. It didn't seem to make any difference. I don't know that I still have but I have two great big scrap books that I mailed out to the national headquarters of Florence Crittenton Home. This was many, many years ago and the pictures were taken of all of us on the board working together, eating together, socializing together. Gertrude was right, it was the right thing to do.

PL: I understand to parlay this into a more personal experience, during World War II, you found yourself in a predicament as a pregnant woman, a wed pregnant woman, where your husband was absent—he was abroad—where you were going through your own difficult time. Can you talk a little bit about that? This was your second pregnancy?

BN: It was the most difficult time of my life. It was horrible. First place, separating two people who never should have been separated. And separated at a time when we both needed, when I particularly needed him. It was a difficult pregnancy and the baby only lived two days. In the meantime, my father [phone ringing]—Is that my phone or yours? Well, let it ring dear.

PL: As long as you're not distracted, keep going.

BN: My father sent a wire from Seattle overseas saying, "Wife and daughter doing fine" because, you know, to be able to have a girl after the boy and the family was just heavy with the male sex. [answering machine] Let me break [break in tape]. So at any rate, when the baby died I knew that I had to tell Philip because I couldn't let him go on thinking he had a daughter when he didn't. So in those days of course they kept new mothers for two weeks in the hospital, down flat on your back, and so I called the Army wanting to know where Phil was. Either they couldn't or they wouldn't tell me. Had no idea where Major Narodick was. So I lay there in bed and I thought, "How can I get to him?" Suddenly, where the idea came from I don't know because I've never even ever

thought of the Red Cross. I thought, “The Red Cross has a tracing service.” I called the Red Cross and the Red Cross found him. They found him overseas. The Army had sent him to the front lines to do the surgery right at the front, right where the soldiers were injured, which is a smart thing to do. Don’t bring the injured soldier to the surgeon, to the hospital: set up there. Have the surgeon go right to the front and work on the injured soldier right at the front.

PL: Where exactly was he?

BN: France. So they found him and they told him. And I didn’t know until—he didn’t write me about it, I didn’t write him about it, nothing was said. Philip was a very introverted person. Whereas I’m a complete extrovert, he was an introvert. No conversation was ever held between Philip and me at any time about the loss of that baby. Now when he came home, one of the officers had a cocktail party for all 50 doctors and their wives and for the chaplain. The original chaplain, Father Sharp [phonetic], unfortunately he died before they went overseas. This chaplain, Father Gilmore [phonetic], also Catholic because it was a Catholic outfit, came up to me and said, “Blanche, I don’t know if Philip told you but we said kaddish [the mourner’s prayer] for your daughter.” And I burst into tears. I said, “No, Philip doesn’t talk about her at all.” Well, he said, “He was so ill with worry about you, he thought something had happened to you too. That there was just no consoling him until we finally got in touch with you. But,” he said, “I just couldn’t console him.” And he said, “I thought maybe the kaddish would help. So we went to the enlisted men and we got nine Jewish men and Philip to make the tenth, and he said, ‘I know Hebrew,’ so we said kaddish.” Well, you know, there are wonderful people in this world, there are no people more wonderful than those Catholic chaplains. All heart and all love. It was just beautiful.

PL: Blanche, what was the cause of the loss of this child and who supported you when you were needing that support?

BN: There was in Seattle a first cousin. I had mentioned to you that I lived in the Rickles home and the eldest one—they were all three doctors—and the eldest one was six-and-a-half, seven-years older than I, Nathan. And he kept in close touch with me. And he came over and spent a lot of time with me and was a good deal of support. And I still say your friends are wonderful but if you've got good family, boy, that is support. I found out years later from a physician that I had what is called RH-negative, which means that your first child, if your spouse is—most, 99 percent are RH-positive. Your first child will be all right if one of you is negative. Your second child, in those days, no way. About a month after I lost the baby, a friend of mine in Portland, Oregon, had a baby girl, RH-negative, and by that time my physician didn't know that, by that time, they drained all of that baby's blood at birth and infused her with RH-positive. What is she now? She's 50-some-odd-years-old, perfectly healthy. But that was unknown when my baby was born. But that was the cause of it, I was RH negative. And my mother, you see, that was genetic because that's why I'm an only child.

PL: You mean she knew or she had tried to have another child.

BN: She didn't know. I didn't know. I didn't know until years later. Whoever heard of the term RH-negative?

PL: At what point after this experience do you remember the hospital starting to test for this?

BN: That I don't know.

PL: Well, let me ask you a different question which is that during the pregnancy, were you aware that there was any [problem]? Did you have any physical side effects or anything?

BN: Well, I was so ill during both pregnancies that it was no different from the first pregnancy really. Maybe a little more acute but there were no indications that there were

going to be any difficulties. As I say, we didn't know that there was anything wrong.

PL: And the child birthing experiences, were they similar? Was it, when you had Kit, was it an easy birth? Was it a difficult birth?

BN: In those days they used to put you to sleep.

PL: At what point?

BN: Before the baby was delivered. So you had no pain at birth. I had no pain with Kit. Kit was a model baby: loud, boisterous and yelling. And I'll never forget in the hospital I was embarrassed and I said to the nurses, "He makes so much [noise]. Binging him down the hall, you could hear him yelling and crying over all the other babies. And the nurses said to me, "Long eyelashes can do no harm." The eyelashes were so long they were ridiculous. But he was a perfect baby. Very loud, very nosy, very boisterous, healthy, bright and gorgeous.

PL: And when you had the second baby, the baby that did not survive, did it also, was it ill immediately from birth or is that something—

BN: I never even saw the baby. I never saw the baby. And a cousin, Nate's wife, brought Kit to the hospital with a little bouquet of flowers. He was dressed in his best. And he came up to the bed and he said, "Mom, I want to see my baby sister." And of course she was gone and she didn't have the guts to tell him. I had to tell him there was no baby. And he looked at me and he was crying and he said, "But Mom, you promised me."

PL: Would you like to pause for a moment, Blanche?

BN: Hmmm?

PL: Would you like to pause for a moment?

BN: No, I'm fine. And his mother always kept her promise. This time you see I broke my promise. It was tough on the kid.

PL: You know, there are some women in my family that had a similar situation, and nowadays, they do certain things to make the mother feel better, right, a lot of focus is on the mother. They brought in the child, she got to hold the child, and they actually said kaddish and had a rabbi and actually went through an entire burial ceremony.

BN: Do you think that helps?

PL: Well I'm not sure but I'm wondering what discussion was there for your support. It sounds like you were, tell your husband, tell your child, but how were you doing?

BN: My main support came from my father. He took care of all the gruesome details. As I say, my mother was ill most of the time but my father took charge of everything. And from infancy I had always relied on him. He was the strong member of the family and he came through.

PL: I understand when you met with, I'm trying to remember now. One of the things that I wanted to ask you about was how this parlayed into your interest in the Red Cross. Because it sounds like the Red Cross located your husband for you and was that when you first started getting involved with the Red Cross, their tracking system is that what brought you to the Red Cross?

BN: No. The Red Cross sort of evolved as a result of my board membership that Gertrude had stimulated.

PL: Okay, then let's talk about that in a moment. So at what point did you decide to get pregnant again, you had a second child at some point?

BN: Well the baby that I lost. That was the last time I ever got pregnant.

PL: So, you said that you and your husband didn't really talk about it and when the chaplain told you that was the first time that there was a kind of acknowledgement of it. Did you talk about it after that?

BN: No.

PL: Why do you think that was?

BN: No, because I've realized that this was too painful a subject for Philip and being the kind of introvert that he was, that he wasn't the kind who could talk it out. I could. But he couldn't.

PL: How did that reflect largely in your parenting, in the division of labor in your parenting? What were you like as parents and what were your roles?

BN: We were in complete accord as parents. If Philip said something to Kit that was from his Mother and his Dad. And both ways, we were in complete accord. We never had any difference of opinion about how Kit should be reared. I think I probably was a little more lenient with my son than Philip was because I watched Philip being very strong-handed with his son. He expected him to act perfectly and it was too much to expect from a boy who was a tomboy. And so then of course I had the rearing of Kit all the time that Philip was gone, which was almost three years: two-and-a-half, three years. I was Mother and Dad to this boy and I was, this is sure, but if you can't spoil a kid when he's little when is he ever going to be spoiled. Give him his way once in a while. And Kit and I became very, very close and of course we still are because he remained the only child and I listen to him.

PL: What kind of values or rules did you establish with him? What kind of values did you specifically want him to—

BN: Ethics. Ethics and truthfulness. When you tell a lie, you just have to tell another one to cover it so you don't lie and you don't try lying to your Mother because it never works. So he stopped. He tried. They try you out, especially if you have one who is relatively smart. When we came home from overseas all by ourselves, Philip went overseas right from Colorado Springs. I learned to drive a car in Colorado Springs and I was pregnant and Philip said, "You're going to drive the car home and it's Christmas time." Snow, ice on the ground in Colorado, going through the passes. And I said, "I don't think I can drive." He said, "You can do anything you want to do." And I learned later, I said to Philip, "You know, it's a funny thing. I'd do anything that you put your mind to." It's true. If he said, "You can do it," I did it. And I drove home. It was wild. Kit, in Cheyenne, Wyoming in the only hotel and in the only room with a naked bulb in the ceiling, Kit was running 104 temperature and I put him to bed and we put a cot alongside of him. And Gertrude—her brother had come from Seattle to drive her car home—she had been driving for years but she wouldn't drive through the passes by herself. So her brother drove. So she was in the hotel too and she came into the room and she said, "Blanche, you've got to get some sleep. You can't stay up all night with Kit. Here." And she handed me a tumbler full of bourbon. This was good for medicine, always. I said, "I can't drink all that." She said, "Put the glass in one hand, put your hand on the string for the light in the other hand, drink it and pull the light." That's what I did. And I slept. And the next morning, Kit's temperature was normal. Years later, when I told the pediatrician the story, he said, "There's the moral." I said, "What's the moral?" "You should never have taken his temperature" [laughter]. We got home all right. In the meantime our house had been rented out to a Navy man and his wife who had a little boy the same age as Kit. I didn't have a place to go except to my Aunt Sarah, Mrs. Aaron [phonetic]. And Kit and I slept in one bed there with his kicking me from the outside and the unborn infant kicking me from the inside. And I didn't hear from Philip for a month. I was worried sick. Those were terrible years. Awful years.

PL: What did you learn about yourself in those years?

BN: What dear?

PL: What did you learn about yourself? You were both mother and father, and single mother. What did you learn about yourself, Blanche?

BN: I never even thought about it, dear. I had a job to do and I did it. I tried always to be fair with Kit and not to expect more than you should from a child. And he was not an easy child to rear. He had an abundance of energy, an abundance of brains, and the combination of those two is very, very bad. Very difficult for a parent.

PL: What kind of things did you like to do together?

BN: Well, we played a lot of cards together. We even learned to garden together. In those days, the President declared “victory gardens.” You go out and you plant, we planted corn and I never ever in my life tasted such delicious vegetables as Kit and I grew during those years when we were alone. The corn never tasted better, the tomatoes were beautiful. I haven’t gardened since.

PL: What’s a victory garden? Is it a public garden?

BN: No, victory was your own garden. You were doing this, you see during the War. People who stayed at home were issued stamps which you had to have in order to purchase milk, butter, eggs, the staples. To buy a pair of shoes, you got a kid wearing out a pair of shoes every month, you can’t afford to have shoes for yourself. But the victory garden was so-called that by Roosevelt, by the President, that would help us get victory if we grew food for ourselves. So I had never done this before in my life and never did it again but Kit and I together, we did a lot of things together. We bolstered each other. It was a learning experience.

PL: When did your husband return from the war?

BN: My husband returned in October, 19—was it ‘45? I think so. I hadn’t heard from him. When they went overseas they went over in an old, old beat up boat trying to escape the Nazi submarines. It was a little boat that had—it was a passenger boat between Seattle and San Francisco. And this is how they sent them to Europe. When they came home, they were coming home in bucket seats on a plane. So I knew that he was coming home safely. And all of a sudden I got a telephone call from downtown Seattle, it was Philip, on Fifth and Pike. They were taking a bus full of returning officers to Fort Louis, which is south of Tacoma. And Philip made the bus driver stop. He got out and used the phone and said, “Can you get in the car and can you drive to Fort Louis?” I said, “Can I!” I went to school and grabbed Kit out of school, and when we were driving Kit said, “Mom you’re going to get a ticket. You’re going too fast.” And we got there, and there was Philip all in one piece. Oh [sigh], he had signed a waiver to get in the Army because he was 205 pounds, which was about five pounds over his normal weight, and when I looked at him, when we got back, he weighed 140. But he was all in one piece and he drove us home in the car. So everything was wonderful from that time on.

PL: What did you and your family then do together, like to do together?

BN: Well everything we did, we liked doing together and Philip, you see before he went overseas, we had a little boat. Philip had a love affair with salt water. In fact I accused him of having salt water in his veins. And we had the little boat before he went into the Army. He sold it to a friend of his who painted it gray and used it here in Elliot Bay in the Coast Guard. So when he came home, we had to have a boat. So we bought a boat. This is something we did together all the rest of our lives. We boated together, and to the point where in a 46-foot boat he and I were the only crew. We got so that shortly before we gave up that big boat, he and I went by ourselves, the two of us, to Alert Bay, which is the first stop before Alaska. Just the two of us alone. And that took some handling from me because whereas the weather up there is predominantly awful, and it took very good captaining on his part to get the boat laid alongside the pier when it was blowing and

windy and cold. The second person in the crew had to tie the boat down both the stern and then run to the bow and tie that line down and then jump off the boat and tie the lines down on the dock. So we did that, we did it for a couple of years until one of our friends broke his leg jumping from his boat and so Philip said, “I don’t think you should jump anymore.” Because this is what is called a bridge deck, where the deck was up higher so in awful weather you couldn’t use a ladder because the ladder was not stable against the dock. This we always enjoyed doing together. Toward the end of our lives, just before he retired, he would come from the office on Friday night to the boat and have another doctor cover for him over the weekend. I would meet him at the boat with food and provisions for the weekend and the two of us would just go out by ourselves over the weekend.

PL: How long did you share this sailing experience together? You started when he returned from wartime.

BN: Oh, we started before he went overseas. We started shortly after we were married because no matter what, he had to have a boat. In fact, in my story, I think it’s humorously portrayed, in our first apartment after we were married, the first piece of furniture we had in our living room was a 25 horsepower motor.

PL: In the middle of your living room?

BN: In the living[room] – before I ever had a sofa or a chair – we had an outboard motor there that for an outboard boat. We didn’t have a boat. He would rent a boat to go fishing, you see, on Saturday or some Sunday usually. And we only got rid of that when we were able to buy our first little boat.

PL: So did you jump into the salt water with eyes open, eyes closed? How did you get so interested in sharing this with him?

BN: I had never been on a boat until I was married. Didn't know the first thing about it. But it was so important to him and I found it fascinating. I liked it. Fortunately I like the water. Otherwise, I mean, it was so brand new to me.

PL: I want to ask you a question before we continue about your reunion that you just mentioned a moment ago. You talked about seeing him for the first time in three years and he had been on the front during World War II, and you're both American Jews, what were your different experiences like? Did you talk about it? Where was the Nazi/Holocaust/Jewish experience in all this? Or were you going through your own traumas so much that that wasn't predominantly what you needed to talk about?

BN: We talked about that too. He did talk about that. It was a horrible, horrible experience for him. And they did see some awful camps, not many fortunately because it was enough to make them horribly sick to their stomachs. But one remark that I consider classic was the remark that my mother made to him when she found out that he had [volunteered]. See he was beyond the age where he had to go in the Army, he volunteered. And my mother went to him and she said to him, "How can you volunteer to go in the Army when you have a wife and a child?" And I may have said this to you before, but he said, "Mother, it's because I have a wife and a child that I'm going into the Army."

PL: How did you feel about that, Blanche?

BN: I never said "no" to [him].

PL: [coughs] Excuse me.

BN: I wasn't crazy about the idea of having him go away but I knew that it was something that he personally, morally, ethically, felt that he had to do. And this is the way he felt. There was no sense in not agreeing with him.

PL: What did you then learn about the war and his activities, since it was very infrequent that he wrote.

BN: Yes, well, he wrote as frequently as he could but of course you know, the mail was censored but he was very—now for example, he was not supposed to tell me when they got overseas, he was not supposed to tell me where they disembarked when they first got over there. That was absolutely forbidden. So in his first letter, he said, “I know we’ve been thinking about what we are going to name our child when he is born. Have you—“what was the name of that town on the coast of England? It’s a man’s name. “Have you ever thought about”—

PL: I’ll pause it. You want to look it up? [break in tape]

BN: Go ahead. What else do you want to ask me?

PL: So you were saying that when he was away he said, “I would like to name my son according to this town.” Why is that significant?

BN: Well, because by saying that, he was able to tell me where they had landed. It was an English name and I took the letter and I ran over to my father, because my father was born in Liverpool, and my father said immediately, “That’s where they are.” The name is on the tip of my tongue but I can’t—here [pointing to her memoir]: Chester. See. [reading] “Cleverly he suggested in his letter that since we were considering names in the event we had a boy, we might like to consider the name Chester. I took the letter to my father who immediately placed the Fiftieth correctly in Chester, England.”

PL: Why do you think it was very important to you that you could locate where he was?

BN: Oh yes, it was important. Then I was able to tell all the other 50 people in the unit, “Our men are in Chester, England. They’ve landed safely.” Sure. And years later my husband took me to Chester.

PL: So tell me a little bit more about your relationship and your marriage and what were the things that you enjoyed? You said you enjoyed sailing together, what were the different kinds of things that you and your husband shared and where were the tensions and conflicts, if there were any?

BN: There must have been some tensions and some conflicts but so help me, I don't remember them because, frankly, Philip and I had the kind of marriage that most people dream about. We were most—I used to say, "I was most fortunate." It was a true union: two people who really loved each other and who were in perfect accord. We enjoyed everything together, emotionally, physically, intellectually, we operated like two parts of one unit and the only time I sometimes I think irritated him is the one time, twice, during his stay at the Cobb Building where he was practicing medicine.

PL: Can you spell the name of that building?

BN: Cobb, C-O-B-B. Still in existence. Philip never knew what he was charging. He left that to—he wasn't interested at all in the financial aspect of his profession. He was there to help people and that's all he was interested in. And frankly, had I been not more mercenary minded, it would have been too bad because one time when I was in there I witnessed one man repeatedly coming into the office, beautifully dressed and he always flashed a great big diamond ring at me. He knew I was Mrs. Narodick. I was taking the secretary had gone on vacation and the girl to replace her had become ill so Philip asked me to come down and fill in Because I always told him, "A wife does not belong in a physician husband's office. She has no place there." But he was stuck so he called and I came down and here was this man who came in, day after day, flashing this, "You don't have to worry about my bill, Mrs. Narodick. See, you don't have to worry a thing." So one day I walked in and I said to Philip in his office, "You know, that man is a conniver. I don't believe him. He has not paid us one nickel. We've been paying his laboratory bills." So Philip said, "Have I helped him?" And I said, "Well the so-and-so wouldn't be alive if it

weren't for you." He picked up some disease in Africa. So Philip said, "So if I've helped him, what are you worried about?" And I said, "Look, he's not going to pay his bill." So he said. "Don't worry about it." So do you know that man was thrown into prison because he was illegally bringing in diamonds from Africa. We never did get paid [laughter]. Didn't bother Philip one bit.

PL: How else did you negotiate things like money? Were you living comfortably at this time?

BN: Oh we always lived very comfortably. Philip decided right after we married, "You buy for the house, you pay the bills." And after about three or four months, he said, "You pay all the office bills." He said, "The girls will make it out but you sign, I don't want to be bothered."

PL: So you took charge of all the bookkeeping and personal bills?

BN: Well, no, bookkeeping we had a professional outfit doing, but I would check things over. And one time it just paid that I checked things over because our secretary, who was a Jewish girl at the time, had been stealing month after month after month. And the professional bookkeeper – she was so smart [inaudible], she only stole cash. All the checks were deposited but the cash she kept. This went on for a year. The bookkeeper didn't catch it. I looked at the books one day and I said, "Something's screwy here. The deposits don't match what has been paid." But the poor guy, he said to his secretary, "We're going to lose that account." That was terrible. They didn't lose the account but the girl lost her job. We had to fire her.

PL: What other kind of—

BN: And I said to her, "Why didn't you tell me you needed money? We would have given you some. You were paid amply?" "Yes."

PL: Did you bring charges?

BN: No, we just fired her but we didn't bring any charge.

PL: What other kind of responsibilities are you juggling at this time? You're helping out with balancing the books.

BN: Well, I have a PR business I'm working at but I'm thoroughly enjoying. And I'm there to help Philip if he needs me. Didn't happen very often.

PL: One second. [break in tape]

BN: Do you need cough drops?

PL: What boards are you serving on at this time? What other extra-civic involvements are you—you had talked about the Florence Crittenton Home. Can you tell us about—

BN: We belonged to the Washington Athletic Club and I was chairman of the Women's Board. It was Washington Athletic Club.

PL: What did that involve?

BN: Social activities. Completely. The Women's University Club, I did the PR there. I was chairman of the PR committee there. I was chairman of PR for Washington Athletic Club too.

PL: Correct me if I'm wrong but these were formerly exclusive clubs that Jews were not allowed into these clubs.

BN: Formally yes, but I was asked. I never petitioned it.

PL: Was it considered an honor to be asked into these clubs?

BN: Oh yes.

PL: Why?

BN: It was an honor for anybody, not just a Jewish woman. Yes. Women's University Club had certain reservations. I mean you had to be a college graduate.

PL: Can you put your finger on specific achievements or talents that you had that highlighted you to them as a member?

BN: Well, they knew about the work that I was doing, and I suppose that gets "noisied" around about your background and about your activities but—

PL: What does it tell you or can it tell us about the social circles of Seattle in particular?

BN: It was a very social city. And in those days, quite restricted – even among Jewish people. Jewish people drew the line among Jews. Which was not good.

PL: Where were those lines drawn?

BN: Pardon?

PL: Where were those lines drawn and in what examples?

BN: I don't know. I think that people in certain professions kind of got together. My women's journalism group, we became socially friendly. The men, the medical group was very friendly, particularly on the tail end of Philip's profession and after he quit. The Jewish men in the medical profession had a social group reserved for Jewish doctors, which is all right. I see nothing wrong with that if that's what they want. Personally, I don't believe in drawing the line. Professionally, when according to your religion, that to me is totally unnecessary.

PL: Well I know that one of the things that you're most proud of is some of your work with non-Jewish organizations, and I wanted to ask about your involvement with the Red Cross. Where does that story begin?

BN: Well, let's see. The Red Cross. I was drafted into the Red Cross because of PR, I think. There was an ongoing PR committee and they needed a chairman. They wanted somebody to leave off the drive for funds. The interest was sparked, you know, when I was in the hospital and lost the baby. When they found Philip, I vowed to myself, "They have done me a favor. I have to spend the rest of my life repaying that favor." And that's exactly what I've done. To this day I am active in the Red Cross. They call me, they come here, they come right to the apartment and sit down and we talk about the drive for funds, and I'm amused because this last man, Fred Mathews, he brings me a list of names of wealthy people in Seattle who are Jewish. Now he said, "I see that you've collected funds, you know, [from] Sam Stroum. And the nicest one, the one that was easiest to handle, was Benaroya – an absolute living doll. He'd never given before. Only had to ask him once. Some of the others were more difficult and they don't all give. But there are several—Fred Danz has always before I even came in the picture. Fred Danz from Bellevue was a constant contributor to the Red Cross.

PL: How did you approach people? Did you call them on the phone and say, "Hey Fred," "Hey Jack"? What's the means by which you did the fundraising?

BN: Well, in some cases you go to see them personally. With Fred, when a couple of years were skipped, Philip and I took him and his wife to lunch. Took them to lunch and sat down and said, "Come on now, what's going on?" And Benaroya, all it took was one telephone call.

PL: But it's interesting. Generally speaking these are Jewish networks for the American Red Cross.

BN: Yes, well that's a source that they had not been able to tap in the past. And here they got a built-in Jew who knows these people and you have a foot in the door if you know them. Sam Stroum, I went to see him at least four times and I didn't get very much but we made a dent, we made a dent. Sam was darling but I had to respect his ideas. He said Blanche, "I have my priorities." I said, "Sam, that's your privilege."

PL: Generally speaking, were you approaching men or were there women that you approached for money?

BN: They were men, businessmen.

PL: And why was that? Would that be the same today?

BN: No, no. I think there would be many more women that I'd be able to approach, my daughter-in-law. Of course, I hit my son over the head a long time ago. But in those days, the main industrialists were the males.

PL: Could you see in the Red Cross the outcome of all your work, and what were the rewards and satisfactions that you got from doing the fundraising?

BN: The Red Cross does such marvelous work. Most people are unaware of what the Red Cross does for all of humanity and they're constantly in motion taking care of people, and constantly handing out money, handing out clothes, handing out help, and not asking for repayment. Most people don't know that. And there were illegitimate unfair, untrue stories that came out during the War about the Red Cross, about "they're charging for coffee" and that sort of thing. Even my husband said to me, "Do you know the Red Cross was charging. In England they charged us for coffee?" I said, "That wasn't the Red Cross. That was an English rule." They were told by the English government, "We charge for coffee. You're in England, you charge for coffee." And I said, "I have proof to show that." He didn't even know that. I mean the doctors, the officers were told you want coffee? Sure you can have coffee, you pay for it.

PL: Your work with the Red Cross extended far above and beyond the local Seattle activities. How did you transcend those borders? Even the borders of the United States?

BN: Well because you see the Red Cross has no borders. They need help in Oregon and California or New York, they need help right away. Help goes out from the Seattle Red Cross.

PL: So what did you do, I understand that you were awarded a national award, the Harriman Award?

BN: I've got it on display over there.

PL: What is the Harriman Award and what did you do to receive it?

BN: The Harriman Award is awarded – if they can find somebody – once a year to one person who is the outstanding volunteer nationwide. That includes hundreds of thousands of people. And they pick out one for the Harriman Award. The Harriman Award is the highest award that the Red Cross can give nationally to a volunteer. I accompanied Philip on a trip to China where five doctors from Seattle were invited to go China to the hospitals to try to teach them new procedures. And while I was there, while we were in Beijing – it was then Peking – and, "Why haven't I seen a Red Cross building [unclear]?" Well, I tried to get the bus driver to stop and I don't know where the Red Cross is, forget it. Then I put back my head and I tried to remember some history. The Red Cross was set up in China before it was ever set up in the United States, and the city that it was set up in was Shanghai, "And that's the city we're going to next. I'm going to the Red Cross." So I went to the Red Cross.

PL: With Philip?

BN: They had a setup, very, very poor but they had a room in a decrepit old building. But fortunately for me, the man in charge spoke English like I speak English. He had been

educated in the United States. Wonderful man. He came to the hotel and he brought a couple of helpers with him.

PL: Do you remember this man's name?

BN: Yes. Chung. C-H-U-N-G. And recently, a couple of years ago, he died.

PL: Is this him in this picture?

BN: Yes.

PL: Can you pronounce his name?

BN: Well it's [pronounced] "Chung," really. Dr. Zeng Dajun in Shanghai. Zeng Dajun.

PL: Wonderful. So tell me about meeting him.

BN: Well he came to the hotel; that's how I met him. And while we were sitting there and I served some tea to him and his helpers, and I said, "Have you ever thought about setting up a kind of committee, a relationship with a Red Cross chapter in the United States?" "No,"" he said. "We don't have anything like that in China. We've never had a relationship with the United States." So I said, "So, why don't we start one?" So we said, "Let's talk about it." So we talked about it and we set it up, he and I. Took us about four years. I had all the correspondence between him and me. Constant correspondence between him and me. And Philip and I, between the Red Cross and his medical relationship in China, we made five trips into China.

PL: What time period is this that you're traveling to China?

BN: What dear?

PL: When are you traveling to China? During what era?

BN: Oh those years escape me.

PL: Is this the early ’80s?

BN: It was before that, dear. The relationship between Shanghai and Seattle, I think was set up, what in ’69 or ’79? I’ll have to look it up.

PL: I guess what I’m getting at is what is travel like for Americans in China at this time? That you’re going back five, six times.

BN: It wasn’t comfortable but it wasn’t too uncomfortable. You see we were among the first to get into China after Nixon opened it up. And we went after Nixon opened it up, Philip and I went the next year with this group of doctors. And the United States had never had any kind of relationship with the Red Cross in China. This was a first. And so “Chung” and I set this up and what did the United States Red Cross do? They slapped Blanche across the wrist. “What’s the matter?” “You didn’t go through channels.” I said, “I was there and I had to take advantage of it right away.” Well, after they thought about it, then they put a halo around my head and they gave me the Harriman Award which as I say is the highest award they can give a volunteer. I was very pleased with that. I consider that a real accomplishment because that relationship is still going on and that’s since, I think it was ’79. And we made trips there. They come here. There’s a close relationship, and we’ve learned a lot from that. And they’ve learned a tremendous amount from us. The only trouble is, they look at us and they see dollar signs. And we’re not—the Red Cross is giving money to individual people and families, not to another country. So we’ve had a bit of altercation. They’re not serious but they ask and we just tell them, “We’re sorry, that’s not anything we can do.”

PL: So in what way does your sister city status express itself? Do people, delegates, go back and forth?

BN: Oh yes.

PL: Do you learn different medical treatments from each other?

BN: Oh yes.

PL: So what does “sister city” mean?

BN: I set up the first trip to Shanghai and I insisted on taking two students with me, a boy and a girl from college, and the boy after he traveled with Philip he decided he was going into medicine and he did. He went into the field of medicine. We showed them procedures that they were bungling terribly. But you don’t have, they don’t have the know-how, they don’t have the material. They’re getting there. One thing we learned from them – and I hope we learn from them – they take care of their elderly so beautifully. Families are predominant. When they took us around to meet elderly people, the men were all by themselves and they were being taken care of by the Red Cross. That was considered family. They had no family of their own so the Red Cross was the family. They fed them, they cared for them, they don’t have to go hungry.

PL: So was this sort of the crown jewel of your work with the American Red Cross?

BN: I think so. I think so. And it was because of setting up that relationship that the Harriman Award was given to me.

PL: You were also given an award by the United Nations, correct?

BN: Yes.

PL: What was that?

BN: Well that was practically for the same thing.

PL: In the same year?

BN: No, later. A couple of years later. Yes.

PL: So can you identify or can you put your finger on any special talents that you have that have made you a success doing this kind of work? I mean as a woman traveling to Shanghai and you just went without the channels and sat down. What is it about you, Blanche, that has made you a leader in that way?

BN: Well, when I'm dedicated to something, as I am dedicated to the Red Cross because I made a vow, unto myself, not to anybody else, that always as long as I live I am going to do whatever I can to help the Red Cross because they helped so many people and to try to make people understand there's so many people who have said to me, "The Red Cross?" Oh no. Jewish people. I have stood up before a chapter of Hadassah, trying to explain what Red Cross is all about because all their lives they felt "cross" is in there. And the American Red Cross, on their stationery, they do have the Muslim insignia. They also have the Hebrew insignia. But the American Red Cross is the only Red Cross worldwide that does that. The American Red Cross does.

PL: Is that something that in all of your experience, the letterhead, is that a gesture that is a recent gesture or has the American Red Cross always tried to be a sort of inclusive, non-sectarian? Was it always that?

BN: I think in fairness, I think they try to be fair. It doesn't hurt to bring a little pressure.

PL: What about when Mrs. Dole was the head of the Red Cross. What were your experiences, politically or not?

BN: That was very personal, between the two of us. Nothing was ever brought up about anything Jewish or Christian or anything like that. It was always on a Red Cross level.

PL: So you've met her.

BN: What?

PL: You met her?

BN: Oh, we became very good friends.

PL: Can you talk a little bit about that? I didn't know that.

BN: She's really a very fine person, and just between the two of us – of course this goes on the tape too – between the two of them, she and her husband, she is the brains. And another thing that impressed me about—[break in tape].

[END OF CD 3]

PL: Continuing with the oral history interview of Blanche Gordon Narodick, this is minidisk #4. So you were saying about Elizabeth Dole, that she's "the brains."

BN: Well, I don't mean to insinuate that he's not smart because I think the man has a good brain, but I think she's smarter. And despite the appearance that she gives, she really has tremendous heart. I was with her, she called her Mother every single day from Seattle. She was here for a week and she told me her mother was 90 some-odd years. Every day she said, "Blanche, where's the nearest phone. Come on, we have to call my Mother." Can't be anything fundamentally wrong with a person like that. I mean I developed affection for her.

PL: In what situations did the two of you create a friendship? When she came here visiting, were you part of luncheons or were you personally—the two of you would go off and go sightseeing together.

BN: Yes, we did sightseeing and then she came up when we had large dinners or luncheons. She'd say, "May I sit at your table?" And I'd say, "May I sit at your table?" And this happened every single, every function, and the opening function. I had Rabbi Starr for the invocation and I took him over and I said, "Come on, I want you to meet

somebody." And here was Rabbi Starr and here was Elizabeth Dole and I think they were both very much impressed with each other – both of them. Because you no, I make no bones about it: I'm Jewish, you know. So I'm proud of it. So, I'm just telling you, right, that's all. But when she left here, she called me from the bus, went down the way to the airport, but I haven't heard from her in more than a year now. Not a word. And it could be, I don't mean to sound cynical, I'm of no more use to her. Sure. She's political.

PL: Was she a political or a controversial leader?

BN: She was a very able leader of the Red Cross. See, she was a national leader. She was very able, she raised a lot of money, she's very smart, and she's very beautiful. And I got such a kick out of her because she very wisely always dressed down. She'd come to some of these fancy affairs and I'd look at her and think, "Oh my god am I overdressed?" Look like a housedress. I mean there's such a thing as dressing down but you don't have to dress that down, down. But she was very careful always to be in something very unassuming. Now whether that had to do because it was Red Cross, I don't know if she did that always. But she's a wise woman I would have liked to—see, she could have done very well politically.

PL: Would you have voted for her?

BN: Huh?

PL: Would you have voted for her?

BN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I had one dinner party, I included my son and my daughter-in-law. I wanted them to meet her. And when he called me on the phone when I got home and he said, "Mother, despite the fact that she's female, I'd have to vote for her."

PL: Not that she's Republican or Democrat.

BN: No, no, he didn't mention that. And she is Republican, of course, and he's not. But he said, "I'd have to vote for her." See, she's captivating.

PL: So, before we end with the arc of your experience with the American Red Cross, have we missed anything that's been significant in all of your workings with the American Red Cross?

BN: Well, do you have anything specific that you think I have missed?

PL: Well, since we're talking about women role models, I think my next question was to ask – and this can be from any era of your experience – were there other women that were role models to you – Jewish, not Jewish? Besides, it sounds like Elizabeth Dole was somewhat of a role model for a lot of people, maybe not for you, but I was wondering whether or not there are other women, historically speaking, that stand out?

BN: Well, of course, Gertrude Levitt. No other Jewish friends at all. And she would have a big, big beautiful party – maybe 100 people there – and then come up to me during the evening and say, "Do you know how I feel at your parties? How do you feel here?" And I said, "How am I supposed to feel?" She said, "Well, you're the only Jew here." And I said, "I see what you mean: you're the only non-Jew at my party." She said, "I wondered if you knew what I was talking about." I said, "I never thought about it."

PL: Do you think that your experiences were parallel? Because you're in the minority in the—

BN: Well, she felt she was in the minority when she would come to my house. But you see, it didn't bother her because we were such close friends. Very close friends. And the fact that we adhered to different religions – because she was not particularly a religious person. I don't consider myself too religious because difference in religion doesn't mean that much to me. It's the human being himself.

PL: Is there something about her in particular that makes her a role model?

BN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Her devotion to husband and family, her abilities to—I never knew anybody who could socialize better than Gertrude, who had a more open, congenial, pleasant personality. She was a beautiful woman and she loved to dress beautifully. She was constantly changing her home: adding a room here, changing a room. Constant. She'd look at me and she'd say, "You just don't do anything." See? But that was her avocation. She was a wonderful mother. She was beautiful. Lovely girl. She still calls me. She's not a girl anymore. But Gertrude, I really loved very, very dearly and I would consider her among my closest friends along with the two Jewish women who were really my closest friends. When the men were overseas and her husband was overseas with Phil, when I lost the baby she was in my home every single morning at 8 o'clock in the morning. She'd take her daughter to school and then she would come all the way to my house and spend the rest of the day with me, which, I'm sorry to say, none of my Jewish friends did.

PL: To extrapolate to the friendships that you have—

BN: Pardon?

PL: To talk more generally about the friendships that you've had with women, how do you feel that your life has been shaped by relationships with women and I'm curious to talk about how it is that over the years that you've witnessed women in different situations of their lives, women who have grown through feminism and the women's movement and the civil rights movement, how have you seen or what are your attitudes towards women and what they've done with themselves. Is that too much of a confusing question? Let me rephrase.

BN: Well it's too generalized.

PL: Too generalized. I guess I'm maybe compared to – you mentioned your daughter-in-law – the choices that you had versus the choices that she had and as someone who has witnessed—

BN: Oh, there's no comparison. Her choices are a hundred-fold what my choices were. And our educations are pretty much on a parallel. No, she has two Master's degrees so she's ahead of me. She's ahead of me anyhow. She's undoubtedly one of the most brilliant people I've ever known, men or women, and she had a heart of gold. She's just too busy, that's all. But the daughter-in-law has been quite an influence on me and I love her dearly. If she were my own flesh and blood I don't think I could love her any more dearly, which is saying a lot for an in-law. She has treated me the same way.

PL: In addition to these two important women in your life, are there any other cultural heroines that you've had over the years?

BN: Well, I wouldn't say culturally but there was one woman in Tacoma: [Phreda] Warnick. She's the mother-in-law of Angela who is the Korean rabbi. Of course, she's gone but—we met the day that we entered the University of Washington. She was 17, I was 16 the day that we entered. And from that day until the day she died, no two people could have been closer. No two people could have felt more like—we're closer than sisters. She had one sister, who was unfortunately mentally disturbed, and so she took me on, and I had no sisters or brothers. And we were as different as two people could possibly be. It was interesting because I went on and had a career and she left school after her freshman year, got married and had four kids one right after another. So she always felt that she was cheated and that she didn't broaden herself the way I was able to broaden myself. And her two eldest boys, the two that she had very quickly after she was married, Alan and Jack. There was a comic strip in those days called "Flash Gordon," so that's what they called me. They didn't call me "Auntie Blanche," they called me "Flash Gordon." Alan died. Jack is still alive and we keep in contact. Every once in a

while he telephone calls me or comes and we have lunch. Phreda had an influence on me. She was very loving. She was very protective. When I had eye surgery, she came in from Tacoma and she said, “I’m going to stay with you for a little while.” And after the third day I said, “Phreda, go home.” I couldn’t take it anymore. I loved her dearly. She was cooking constantly, trying to take care of me, and there was nothing wrong with me. It’s the simplest surgery in the world. This was a loving, loving person. A very close friend for so many years. And it was very difficult to watch her die. Very difficult.

PL: In your family, you talked about your mother was very ill when you were young and you were just talking about a good friend. I’m wondering in what ways did women play – and you’ve talked about a lot of women who have cared for each other in this interview – and I’m wondering for you as you’ve gotten older and you watched your husband get older, how did you or your family members know how to care for each other? How did you learn how to care for your husband when he became ill? When did he pass away?

BN: I think it’s 12 years ago. I did not have him for a long time. He died suddenly, very suddenly. We were up at our cabin. I shouldn’t feel that way but I made a remark to a doctor in Seattle after Philip died, “If this had happened to him in Seattle he could still be alive” because I called 911 up in—came out of Mount Vernon I think. And I don’t think they knew as much about taking care of him as I did. Maybe so. Maybe I’m being unfair. But he died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital in Mount Vernon.

PL: Did he die of a heart attack? Or was it a—

BN: Yes, presumably, as far as I know. And they were heartless about it. I walked into the hospital. Oh, on the way going there, the neighbor across the street when she saw me pull out in the car, she said, “Blanche, here, let me go with you” And I said, “Sure, come on, get in the car. We’ll follow the ambulance. He’s in the ambulance.” And when we got to Mount Vernon there was an ambulance stopped in the middle of [a] downtown street, and I said, “That’s the ambulance Philip was in.” And she said, “Oh, no, Blanche,

that's a different ambulance entirely." So we got to the hospital and I walked in and the woman at the desk sits me down and for a half hour takes a complete history of Philip. He's already dead. They don't tell me this. They sit me there for a half an hour taking a complete history of Philip and then a half an hour later a doctor walks down the hall and he says, "Mrs. Narodick, I'm awfully sorry, he didn't make it." I said, "What do you mean he didn't make it?" He didn't make it. So, if ever I had a difficult thing to do. I'm in Mount Vernon, my son is in Seattle in his office. I have to call him and tell him. And those two were so close. So close. And all I said was, "Kit, Dad—" He said, "I'll be right there." He knew from my voice. And he told me he went over a hundred miles an hour in his car. He has a siren on top of his car.PL: What is your son?

BN: Nobody ever stopped him.

PL: Why does your son have a siren on his car?

BN: I don't know. [laughter]

PL: He's not a police officer?

BN: No, he's not a police officer. And I don't know that it's a siren, it's a light that revolves. But he came up there and here I'm at the hospital and I have the car that I drove to the hospital because Philip was driven there in an ambulance. It's a brand new Lincoln Continental, brand new. First time I had driven it. And Kit said, "All right, we'll leave my car here and I'll drive the car back to Seattle. We'll go back." And I said, "No way. We'll go back to the cabin and I'll load this car with perishables and stuff, and I'll drive this car back to Seattle." He said, "Mother." My husband just died. "No, you can't do that." And I have no feeling whatever. I'm just one cold piece of steel. I said, "We're going back to the cabin." And we left the body of course in the hospital because I then called the rabbi and told him to send out—

PL: Which rabbi did you call?

BN: Starr. We went to the cabin and we loaded it up, and I drove back to Seattle. Kit followed me in his car. And I drove to the house and Sally said, “Mother, we’re going to stay with you.” I said, “No way. You stay home. You belong home and I belong home.” I stayed by myself.

PL: Why? What was driving you?

BN: I just wanted to be alone. I had mourning to do and I couldn’t cry in front of them.

PL: Where did you learn that you needed to mourn alone from?

BN: I knew that I was a very private person. I had always been. I’d steel myself about crying in front of other people. Once in a while I’d break down, but I knew that I had to mourn by myself. This wasn’t anything I could share with anybody, not even with my son. That’s the way it works.

PL: Was it similar when your Mother died? Did you mourn by yourself or did you mourn with other family members or rabbis or support? Was there any time when you mourned publicly?

BN: Oh, we said kaddish for Mother. We said kaddish for my Father. Of course, the rest of the family was around and her mother has sisters in Seattle, Aunt Tillie and Aunt Sarah. Aunt Sarah, her son has seven children. So the family was there. But no matter how much family, when it’s someone like that that’s close to you, you’re not sharing it with anybody else. You’re mourning by yourself.

PL: Where was your husband buried?

BN: In the temple—what do they call the private edifice there?

PL: The bes olem [cemetery].

BN: The mausoleum.

PL: The mausoleum.

BN: Yes.

PL: Is it Hills of Eternity, the Temple de Hirsh—

BN: Yes, and my spot is right alongside of him. And Kit has bought two spots right below those two spots for himself and Sally.

PL: When you look back at your life and you see yourself aging, what do you think? What do you think when you look in the mirror and you say, “This is me, this is my age.” How have you witnessed yourself age? Because you look gorgeous, you’re moving around, you’re independent. So how has aging been for you?

BN: Pretty horrible. [laughter] Pretty horrible. It’s no fun but you accept it. I mean, this is the way of life. Every life has to die. But I don’t think about dying. I think about all the things I still have to do, all the things I still have to learn. Since I was a little tiny tot, my father used to say, “You never stop learning.” You keep studying your whole life long and I’ve never forgotten it.

PL: So what’s your next step?

BN: Oh, my next step is joining this Melton School. I think that’s going to be marvelous. The Florence Melton [Adult Mini-School] schedule. They are going to have the lectures here at The Summit with Rivy Poupko Kletenik [Director of Jewish Education Services, Jewish Education Council]. I’m looking forward to that.

PL: Living in The Summit, do people talk about aging often? Is that a topic for discussion? I mean, people complain, but do you talk about your aches and pains and the things that are—treatments?

BN: Well, at our table, at our family table, a few of us kvetch [complain] once in a while. Yes, we kvetch, but you learn to talk about the positive things. There's still so much in life to learn and there's still so much that I feel each of us can give. And you should give. Interestingly, a cousin of mine in Beverly Hills – her husband was my first cousin – she calls me every once in a while. Beautiful woman. She's 77 years old. Never without a boyfriend. He was my first cousin. He was one of the Rickles brothers. She calls me and tells me about all the fun that she's having, and I think that's wonderful. I think that's great, and I said to her, "Still the same boyfriend?" "Yes, still the same boyfriend." She talked about Rena, this dear young cousin of mine. Young, she's 55 now.

PL: Can you spell Rena?

BN: To me that's young. She's the one in Oakland, the attorney.

PL: How do you spell her name?

BN: Rena? R-E-N-A Rickles. R-I-C-K-L-E-S. In the first place, she emails me at least three times a day. She knows because I'm debilitated a bit I don't walk well, I can't shop. She does a lot of shopping for me. I've needed it like I need a hole in the head, but she sent me—she loves red, so she figured it would give me a lift—a whole set of dishes in red and the tableware to go with it in red [clanks the dish]. Now, who would ever think of things like this? She said, "I've got two lovely outfits in there" that she sent to me that are just perfect.

PL: Getting back to you and to try to maybe wrap this interview up, I'm curious then, since you yourself have been quite a giver in your life, I'm wondering how do you give advice then to Jewish women as a grandmother, as a mother, as a Seattleite, to other Jewish women who are bringing up their children? What advice do you have from all of the experience that you've garnered in your lifetime that you would want me or other women to walk away with?

BN: Well, my greatest achievement, I think, are my grandchildren. My grandson never says goodbye to me personally or over the phone without saying, always saying to me, “Nana, I love you.” No one has told him to say this. I suppose my retort should be, “Philip I love you” but I don’t always say that. My advice—if I have any advice—is, for example, when Lisa was 13 or 14—

PL: Lisa is your granddaughter?

BN: My granddaughter. Her bedroom was right across the hall from her brother’s bedroom and they shared the same bathroom. So downstairs in their home is a lovely bedroom and a bathroom, but it’s downstairs and just reserved for guests or for family who might come to town. So,, she said to her parents, “I’d like to move down there.” And she called me on the phone and she said, “Nana, I suggested to my parents that I move down there and they said, ‘Forget it! We want you up here with us.’” And I said, “Oh, why do you want to go down there?” “Well, I’d like a little privacy, privacy from my brother.” After all, she was 14, he was 4 or 5 – a nuisance to her. So I called Sally. I said, “Sally, what excuse do you have not permitting your daughter to go downstairs.” Well, she said, “She belongs—she’s only 14 years old.” “I said don’t you trust her?” I said, “Didn’t your mother trust you at 14?” Well, but she says, “I slept on the same floor.” I said, “That’s not the kind of trust I’m talking about.” “I don’t see any reason why that child shouldn’t have some privacy if she wants it. That’s my personal opinion. You’re going to do what you damn please anyhow.” The next day, Lisa called me: “Nana, thank you so much. I’m calling from downstairs.” That’s my advice to grandparents. Listen to your grandchildren. Sometimes they’re too close in a relationship to their parents and the parents don’t realize the children – sure they’re children. They’re still children, but they’re human beings and if they ask you for something that’s perfectly reasonable they’re not asking for the moon. Perfectly reasonable, why not. Making them happy, doesn’t that make you happy?

PL: Well, then I think my last question for you is a much broader one but taking off on what you just said, as someone who has witnessed a large part of the twentieth century – and now moving into the twenty-first – I guess I'm wondering then what significant things in your life have shaped that philosophy. Are there things about having lived in Seattle, about privacy and trust, are there things about the experiences that you've had, are there events that have made you recognize that that's an important thing to endow in your personal life?

BN: Well, I've always lived with the feeling that you don't let little things clutter up your life. You want to live ethically, morally. You want to be able to give others the benefit of the doubt. I feel sometimes in my lifetime ¬– in my younger lifetime – I was too critical of other people. I expected too much. And as I grow older, I've lost that. Don't expect too much, you won't be disappointed. And another thing, don't clutter up your life with regrets. That's over with. Stop worrying about it, don't regret it, don't live in the past, live in the present and look to the future. You've only got a short time here and you might as well make the best of it. So give: give as much as you can in any way that you're able to give.

PL: Is there any other comment or any last thing?

BN: There is not one Jewish charity in Seattle to which I do not contribute, financially and in other ways if I can, if I'm asked. I think sometimes we should wait to be asked because there is such a thing as overstepping a boundary.

PL: I'm not sure I know what you're talking about.

BN: Well, I think there are times when I feel, "Gee, I could improve upon that position that they're taking. I think they need to be organized a little differently." But you learn to keep your mouth shut. Wait until you're asked. Because eventually they'll arrive at the correct decision and it's wrong to try to put your head on someone else's shoulders.

Everybody thinks differently and you have a right to think differently. As I told this one woman, I respect your attitude, but please, respect mine.

PL: Thank you very much, Blanche. This has been a wonderful interview.

BN: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]