Jill Weinberg Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: My name is Rosalind Hinton. I'm the research fellow for the Women Who Dared project. I'm in the home of Jill Weinberg, who will be my interviewee for today, and today is January 31st, 2005. And Jill, would you please say your family name?

Jill Weinberg: Jill Weinberg – W-E-I-N-B-E-R-G.

RH: And, why don't you give me your mother's name?

JW: My mother's name is Elaine Weinberg – W-E-I-N-B-E-R-G.

RH: OK. Now. (laughter) I can't guarantee what happened, but we're going. OK? I have the name, is what we got, so we just need to start --

JW: From the beginning? Oh, God.

RH: No, just – well, let's start from where you were born, and maybe this time we'll go into your siblings, and family history a little bit. And then we'll head back to where we were in a little while. And I apologize for this.

JW: OK. Well, do you want to just start a little bit, and then check it, to make sure that it is working?

RH: Well, it's running now. So it was totally off, and I can hear our voices right in here, too.

JW: All right. My name is --

RH: Well, I've got your name. So just tell me about your childhood -- where you were born, and --

JW: OK. Well I'm going to tell you that I am the oldest, and the only daughter. I have two younger brothers, Lee and Mark, and one brother is two years younger, and the other brother is seven years younger. And, we're all in the Chicago area, so that makes us all hardcore Chicagoans. And my mother and father were also born and bred in Chicago, so we grew up with a lot of Chicago history, and my mother actually ran a business that took out-of-towners on tours of Chicago. So we had a house full of Chicago history, and books on Chicago, and architecture, and art, and a lot of Chicago folk (inaudible). Hopefully, I've developed that love of Chicago that will get my kids back here, and get them to move back to Chicago one day, too (laughter). So, that's always the challenge.

RH: How did your family get here, do you know -- from your mother's side, or your father's side?

JW: Yeah. Actually, we have a lot of family genealogy -- my husband's very into genealogy, so he can really tell you. But, all four grandparents were, you know, first-generation. And two were from Russia, and one was from Poland, and one was from the Austria-Poland border -- it was Austria then, I think it's Poland now. And, we always heard this story about how my grandmother came in at Ellis Island, and the long boat ride, and she had eaten bananas for thirteen days, and then she came to this country and never ate a banana again. And then after my grandmother died, we thought it would be really moving in her memory to go to New York, and visit some relatives who lived in New York, and so my mother, and my mother had a sister, Carol, who she's very close too, and she had a daughter, Nancy, who I'm very close to, and neither one of us -- my cousin Nancy nor I, had sisters, so we not only served as cousins, but as sisters, as friends. So the four of us, the two mothers and the two daughters went to New York, and

when we were at Ellis Island, my mother and aunt decided to tell us that just a few years before, they had found in my grandmother's materials that in fact she hadn't come in at Ellis Island (laughter), she had come in at Baltimore. And the whole dream of (laughter) the family arriving at Ellis Island is a little bit skewed. (laughter) But I'm sure there's a lot of stories like that.

RH: And so, you knew back to your grandparents?

JW: Yes, I actually was very fortunate to have all four grandparents, and for a lot of years, and have them all in Chicago.

RH: Did you all live in the same area?

JW: Actually, my grandparents lived in the same building as each other. So when I was very young, and when my parents married, just coincidentally -- they hadn't known each other growing up, and they didn't live in the same area growing up, but their parents had both moved into 5000 North Marine Drive, and so when we would go to visit one grandparent, we went up one elevator bank, and then we would come down, and visit the other grandparents in the other elevator bank. And that lasted for a long time, and my parents had both grown up in the city, and moving to the suburbs when I was just a little girl was the first time that they had ever lived in a house -- they had always lived in an apartment building, and my parents moved into this new neighborhood where absolutely everybody was owning their first house, and planting trees. So, it was very much a whole community of apartment dwellers moving out to the suburbs for the first time.

RH: So, were you here with lots of other kids?

JW: Well, I wasn't here (laughter), but I was in another suburb at that time, and yeah, I mean, it was a community where pretty much all the adults were the same age, and they were all having children at the same time. One of my closest friends was a woman who I was wheeled in the baby carriages together with, in those years, and as a result of that,

you know, there was just some really nice generational friendships, where the parents knew each other, and the kids all knew each other, and now our kids all know each other, and, you know, some very nice connections through the years, and those were -- the ideal kind of suburban community scene. And, you know, none of the moms were working in those days, and the kind of time and energy that they could put into getting to know the neighbors, and having quality time with the kids, and doing all this fun stuff, was really very special.

RH: Just checking it, yeah. (laughter) Well, they're asking about family class status -- it seems like you were fairly middle-class.

JW: I would say we were fairly middle-class, and remained fairly middle-class -- you know, these were really small homes, but they were --

RH: Tell me the neighborhood again?

JW: It was Northbrook, it was what they called the old section of Northbrook, where, you know, my father planted every tree on the street, and not only for himself, and our house, but, he was an outdoorsy kind of guy, and planted all the trees down the whole street, and now here it is fifty years later, and it's a beautiful neighborhood with fabulous trees, and beautiful grass, and, you know, very, very modest homes.

RH: What'd your father do?

JW: My father was a trader at the Chicago Board of Trade, as was his father, and his brother, and now one of my brothers is also there, so there's a long family history at the Chicago Board of Trade.

RH: And, your mother -- did she have activist inclinations?

JW: She did. She did. She had activist inclinations even before we knew what those words meant. And, she was a real doer, and she was involved in the schools, she was involved in the neighborhood, and ultimately went on to start her own business, and have a couple of decades as a career woman. But even when she was a career woman, was very much a community activist during those times, and through her work in the Jewish community, and the secular community.

RH: So, do you want to tell me a little bit about what some of her work was?

JW: She started out as a teacher, was her career, and she worked as a teacher before she got married, and before she had children, and then when we were little, she became a substitute teacher, and worked a lot in the schools in the neighborhoods where we lived, and she became very well-known to all the kids in the neighborhood. She never forgot a kid's name, and because she taught in a lot of different schools, and a lot of different ages, really learned a lot of these kids really, really well. And, never forgot them. To this day, she can still remember, and they still remember her, and she was a Cub Scout leader, and a Boy Scout leader, and... my father was very involved with the scouting movement, and my brothers started out, but didn't continue with it. My father really continued with it, even though he didn't have children who were involved. And they were both really involved with the Israeli Scout movement -- it was really something that was very important to my father, because both of my parents loved Israel, and my father loved Boy Scouts, so this was a way to bridge two of his passions, with the Israeli Scout movement.

RH: Can you tell me a little about that?

JW: Yeah. There was a caravan that came from Israel throughout the United States every summer, and it was called the Israeli Friendship Caravan, and it was made up of about twelve extraordinarily gifted, in every way, Israeli kids, who had been part of the Boy and Girl Scout movement, the Tzofim, in Israel. And in order to be selected for this

program, you had to have amazing personal skills, because you were representing the State of Israel, and you were traveling for twelve weeks across America, and living in different homes, and you had to pass all these, probably psychological tests, and musical talent tests, and you sang, and danced... but most importantly, you were representing the country, and so it was really all about one's personal skills and the ability to really show Israel in the way that the sponsors of this program wanted to be. And you couldn't help but fall in love with each one of these kids -- I mean, they were just unbelievably adorable. And my father really started this program in the Chicago area, bringing them here, and was involved for decades with this organization, and I always said that one of my father's proudest moments was when I was adult enough to have the Israeli scouts here for my kids, when in fact it was transferring to the second generation, because here was a kid I had -- you know, he had brought these scouts into our lives, and it had been such a really wonderful experience to meet these kids, to have those connections with Israel. We've kept in touch with a number of them. One of the young women who had been one of our scouts, when my kids were little, actually came back last summer as the caravan leader, and so to track her ten years later, and to see her go from a sixteen-year-old to a twenty-six-year-old, was really fantastic also. And we had seen her in Israel, between that time, and, it's also that each one of these kids -- so, say you have, whatever it was, twelve Israeli kids who are coming here, six boys and six girls -- they all stay with families, in the Chicago area, Memphis area, New Orleans -- you know, they were all over the place. And so it's this very intense week, where all the families are getting together every night, and spending this incredible quality time with these kids, when the kids are going to perform at camps, and school groups, and old folks' homes, and JCC's, and federations, and city halls, where they do this really beautiful program of singing and dancing, to bring to the public a side of Israel that hopefully warms them to it in a way that you can't get it reading the front page of the newspapers (laughter) -- humanizes it in a really special way. So, that was something that both my parents were very involved with, but specifically my father, and my mother's interests were really quite

across the board. She most recently was very involved with a program called Working in the Schools, where she did a lot of tutoring in the schools with children who did not have the ability to read. She'd been very involved with literacy since we were little kids -- I always said she was interested in literacy before Barbara Bush, to put it on the map. And you know, when we were home, and she wanted to be home, she would have adult learners who had not mastered their reading skills coming into the house, where she would be working with them for hours, and hours, and hours, and, if you think about that Jewish phrase "If you save one life, you save a whole nation," I mean, she really, really empowered these individuals to learn when they thought that it was something that they would never be able to do, to master reading. And it's amazing how you can go through an entire school system, and just be overlooked, because they didn't have the teachers who could give you the attention, or you weren't a troublemaker, so you weren't picked out, and... you know, really, really interesting, fascinating situation. So she did that. She was very involved with Jewish Federation, and from a very young age, I attribute a lot of what I am today to her alerting me to interesting opportunities. When I was a junior in college, I was studying in Europe, and I knew I needed to come home for the summer, but I didn't have an opportunity to look for a job from Italy, where I was at the time, and she sent me -- she had gone to a Federation women's meeting, and she had heard about a summer intern program in Jewish communal service, and she sent me information about it, and said, "You know, you can actually apply for this internship from where you are, and then they'll just interview you when you get home, and assuming that the interview goes OK, you know, this could be your summer job," and it was like, "OK, fine!" And it really was because of her eyes and ears that I was able to participate in that summer intern program, and that is truly the turning point in terms of my life, because I had never dreamed that someone could have a career in Jewish communal service, and that really, that summer opened my eyes to people working in the Jewish community, and I had had such a fantastic experience doing that, that my original intention after college was to just go on to graduate school, but I realized that actually I'd like to come

back and work for the agency in Chicago that I worked at for that summer, and I was able to get a job, and then that became --

RH: What was the agency?

JW: The agency was Hillel. It was called College HU Services at that time, in Chicago, and then that merged with Hillel. And I worked that summer, during my internship, at a project called Elijah's Cup, which unfortunately no longer exists, but was a coffeehouse for college-age students, and it was really ahead of its time -- and Debbie Friedman, if you know who she is, Debbie Friedman played there that summer, and [Gene Susko?]... I mean, these are all before these people had any name recognition whatsoever, and just a really, really interesting place for people from all over Chicago to gather, and connect, and there were Jewish issues, there were secular issues, but...

RH: What kind of things were you doing?

JW: I was publicizing the programming that we were having, I was working there and staffing the place, so that meant opening the doors, closing the doors, running the kitchen, cleaning the floors, putting out the publicity...everything you could think of to make the place a success, and it was really, really a fascinating experience for me. We did Jewish programming -- we had a Tisha B'Av program, where I had never even been a part of a Tisha B'Av program -- I couldn't even have told you at the time what that was. We did Shabbat programming, and we did Jewish music, and we did Jewish films, and we ran a disco, (laughter) its own little nightclub of sorts. It was a wonderful place, and unfortunately, didn't last, but... and then, when I came back to take a real job with the College HU Services, and Hillel, then I was working with college students, but specifically with graduate students at all the different campuses around Chicago, so I worked with law students and medical students at University of Chicago, and Loyola, and DePaul, and Northwestern --

RH: In what capacity -- did you work as a mentor, of sorts... ?

JW: Through Hillel, of trying to put together... at that time, there was no graduate student programming through Hillel, it was strictly undergraduate, so we were trying to reach out and bring these kids from the graduate schools, either into Hillel programming, or because there was always a resistance to coming into Hillel programming, trying to do some Jewish programming for law students, or for medical students, that was of interest to them, that would bring some Jewish identity into their lives, and not necessarily through the formulaic approach that Hillel, at the time, was looking at.

RH: Which was... ?

JW: You know, sometimes there was that image, that Hillel's not cool, so if we didn't go through Hillel, but we actually were Hillel, but we tried to just do -- you know, if it was law students, look at some kinds of legal issues that might be of interest to Jewish students -- bring in a professor from the law school who might be interested in addressing some of these issues... so we did a lot of educational programs on campus, and social programs, trying to just get them to meet each other, and some of that was just having challah and grape juice on a Friday afternoon. And, it was a really interesting, novel approach to... you know, you'd have to, just like anything that you try to do -- you try to find some leadership at each one of these schools who would spearhead it, who would try to designate the Jewish students, and one by one, try to get them to connect to each other, and see what kind of programming they might want. And it was very successful. (laughter)

RH: OK. Well, let's go back one more time again, and talk another minute about -- you said you went to summer camp, and... was it a Jewish camp?

JW: No.

RH: It was up in Wisconsin --

JW: Right, mm-hm. At the time -- I know there was Jewish camping when I was a kid, but it wasn't in the consciousness of my parents to send me to Jewish camp, and I don't think it was as much in the con -- just like day schools, like Jewish day schools weren't nearly as much in the consciousness of my parents' generation as they are now. So, no, it was not a Jewish camp. It was a very Wisconsin camp (laughter).

RH: What kind of things did you do there?

JW: We had teams, and we did singing, and song competitions, and a lot of kind of leadership activities, and a lot of outdoor activities -- sailing, and skiing, and swimming, and archery, and riflery, and... and just, lived in cabins and, I think the most single aspect of camp was just hanging with your friends, and having that kind of independence, and camp camaraderie, that probably does not exist anywhere else in life. The next best thing is college campuses (laughter).

RH: Right, right (laughter)... which you've spent a lot of time in!

JW: Exactly, right. Both of which I admire greatly (laughter). But then I actually was able to have great success with one of my kids with Jewish summer camp, and felt that... I'm sorry I didn't have that experience as a kid myself, because I saw how much I truly loved camp, and if you can integrate the love of camp with the love of Judaism, and if I was singing great songs in camp, and yet I go to see my kid at camp, and she's singing great camp songs and great Jewish songs, how really special is that? And you know, all the studies kind of show you that two single most significant aspects for giving your kid a positive Jewish education are summer camp, and Israel, and I felt at least that summer camp worked well for one kid. It didn't work well for the other one, but (laughter) you can't have everything.

RH: So, tell me again about your experience, when you went over -- tell me about the program, you went over to Israel, when you were younger? The early 70s, is what I

(inaudible) -- ’71.

JW: I had two important trips -- so, I think it was ’71 and ’73, that I was in Israel. And, those were two incredibly important summers of my life. And the first summer was really, really important, because it was the first trip to Israel, and there was just nothing like a first trip to Israel, especially when you’re 16, and you’re on your own, and you’re with a bunch of other kids who are also experiencing it for the first time. And as I was explaining to you, just the whole lifestyle was so totally different. I came from a suburban environment, all of a sudden, now I was on a kibbutz, in a very agricultural type of environment. I was in a situation where people got on trains and went to work in downtown Chicago, all of a sudden I was in a situation where people... you walked five minutes out to their orchards to go to work, and we all got up, and we all picked fruit together -- the Israelis, and the Europeans, and the Americans, and the South Africans, and everybody was just connecting in this really beautiful, spiritual way of wanting to help the land of Israel, and learning so much in that agricultural process, of picking apples, and peaches, and pears, and apricots, and eating fruit and discussing politics, and discussing languages.

RH: It must have been sweet fruit?

JW: It was great fruit (laughter). It was wonderful fruit. And, when you even just talk about the food -- I mean, the food was so different, and the way in which the food was served, and eating this primarily vegetarian way, and all these vegetables that was grown on the property... that if you wanted to eat, you worked in the kitchen to eat, and if you wanted to have food, you picked the fruit. And we all did these wonderful assignments, and basically we got up at 4:00 in the morning, and we worked until noon, because after that it was too hot, and everybody stopped working, and you hung out at the pool all afternoon, and that’s what the lifestyle was there. And it was just so interesting and so different... it’s not your typical Israeli experience, because, you know, such a small

element of Israeli society live on the kibbutz, but the kibbutz experience was so fascinating. And then we traveled around Israel also, and had the regular tourist experiences. But it was absolutely, for me, the kibbutz experience which was the true highlight, of feeling like I've just experienced something so unbelievably intense and fascinating.

RH: And you were there for eight weeks?

JW: I was there for eight weeks, and then, after my freshman year in college, was the '73 war. And I was very... torn about being on this idyllic college campus when this had happened, and I decided that summer to go back to Israel, and see if I could play whatever small role I could play at that time. And there were a lot of other folks that were doing exactly the same thing, because it's very hard to be here, and feel connected to that country, and not do something. And that was also a really wonderful experience, and my connections with Israel have been very strong since then, and I was actually very fortunate when I worked at the Jewish Federation, where I worked for eleven years, to have many different jobs, but one of the jobs that I had was to be the Missions Director, which means to run all of the trips to Israel. And so I got to go on a lot of trips to Israel during those years too, and besides just going on a lot of trips to Israel at that time, I also was instrumental in putting together trips for other people to go on, so you really got to live vicariously through all these people, many of whom were experiencing it for their first time, and...

RH: So, for someone -- if you were going to plan a trip, what would it look like? What do people need to know?

JW: Well you have to have a first-timer on your trip, no matter what. Even if you've been to Israel twenty times, you still have to make sure that somebody who is with you is a first-timer. It's not always the easiest thing to do.

RH: So you can see it through their eyes.

JW: Exactly. You have to see it through their eyes. It just sparks all of your initial connections, and just as a reminder of what it's all about. But you never get jaded, and every trip is very, very different. My last trip to Israel was through the Wexner Foundation, when I went with people who -- maybe there was somebody on that trip who had never been to Israel before, but I doubt it, and yet, there wasn't one person among us who didn't feel it was the most fantastic trip, and it was because we were just seeing things that we had never, ever seen before. And the trip was very much geared toward repeaters, so that you really did have a different view of things. And one of my daughters went to Israel last summer -- we've taken the kids to Israel before, that was actually her third trip -- but she went on Birthright. And so she got to go with a lot of first-timers (laughter). And then my other daughter's planning to go to Israel this summer on Birthright, and we hope that we'll meet the kids there, and get to Israel again this summer.

RH: So you said it was important, when you first went, to suddenly see these people from other nationalities who were Jewish. Can you talk about that a little bit?

JW: Yeah, I think that really formed a perspective on Judaism for me that has continued to be very, very important, and that is that, you know, I think it's very easy when you live in a community, and you belong to a synagogue, to see Judaism in your most insulated way, and to see Judaism in such an international perspective, to meet Jews from every country around the globe, who look different, who speak different languages, who are all connecting with each other because they're Jewish, was one of the most profound experiences that I've ever had. And it happened, first, through Israel, first through this trip to Israel, and my other experiences in Israel, but I would say that it has also been very much a part of all my consciousness with my work with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, because you can't deal with the subject matter of the Holocaust

without understanding that as well, and understanding it from a very tragic perspective, that the way in which Hitler went about annihilating all Jews in Europe sent them fleeing to every country in this universe -- and we always were across the globe, but certainly the Holocaust forced a fleeing across the globe, that forced people to learn new languages, pick up new cultures, even against their wills. I mean, there were always Jews in Brazil and Argentina, but the vast majority of the Jews in Brazil and Argentina were as a result of having to flee the Holocaust, or the Jews that ended up in Shanghai, and, you know, these kinds of additional experiences are also a perspective on world Jewry. So we know it from so many different angles, and then we learn, you know, having lived through the fleeing of Jews from Ethiopia, or the Soviet Jewry movement, or now Argentina, and the exodus of Jews from Argentina -- I mean, there's so much of the international Jewish experience that I was not in touch with at all during my early years, and it really was that first trip to Israel that helped me to understand that in a very global, and really important perspective for me.

RH: It sounds like you really discovered you were part of something much bigger than yourself.

JW: Very much so, and really connected that Jewish piece of me in a much more profound way with all these other people, really understood what we shared, that you can't read about it in a book -- you have to physically, mentally experience it yourself. And certainly, I know how meaningful that was for me, and I've heard other kids talk about their first trip to Israel when they were sixteen, and what it meant for them, and you just want to make sure that whatever age somebody is at, that somehow they get that, they get that experience. I mean, some people may be able to grasp it from a book, but I think it's rare.

RH: Right, right. It also seems like there's a kind of resilience -- I mean, there's a tragedy, but there's also an amazing resilience that you can connect to.

JW: Yeah. And there's a vibrancy of all these different lives, and the celebration of being Jewish in all these multicultures, that is so beautiful, and that you want to learn from, and you want to embrace, and you know, whether it's Jewish food or Jewish music... there's obviously, we live this very Jewish life, and we don't go anywhere, whether it's Morocco or Vienna, it doesn't really matter, you know? We're just out there searching for those Jews to connect with, what their lives are like, and knowing that we share this incredible bond. And I think that, you know, maybe my parents told me that, but it really was something that I had to experience firsthand myself, in order to understand what it meant. And I think that for me, the way in which I learn and I feel, is very much on the experiential level. So in addition to going to Israel when I was sixteen, when I graduated high school when I was seventeen, and I went to live with the Indians in Ponca City, Oklahoma -- the fact that these people had never met somebody Jewish, and they would look at me, and they would say, "Are you Italian? Are you Greek, or what?" And... in some ways, that was one of my greatest learning experiences about being Jewish, because it was the counter-balance to the Israel experience of all of us being Jewish, and of all of us connecting on our inner Judaism, and that really strong link that we shared that I didn't even understand I shared. And then here was, in a sense, the antithesis, and equally important experience, of being the sole Jew in this world that had never even heard of Jews, and having to explain to people what this meant -- who was I? And in order to explain, who was I, I had to figure out, who was I. And so, this line of, "Are you Italian? Are you Greek, or what?" -- hearing, when I was seventeen years old, is something that clearly has stayed with me, and helped me to really try to figure that out.

RH: How did you get to that Indian reservation?

JW: When I was in high school, I had done some volunteer work here in the Chicago area with the American Indian Settlement House in Chicago. And when I was thinking about graduating early, I was in touch with the guidance counselor at Highland Park High School, Jim Alexander, and we had talked about some options for me, and he asked me,

you know, what were some of the things that I enjoyed doing, and I talked about this volunteer work that I had done. And he had said, well, he actually knew somebody in Washington D.C. who worked for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunities, which at that time was part of OEO, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and this was kind of like a new organization, and he knew somebody that was there, and he said, "You know, would you like to see if I could get you settled with this works, and you could so this?" And I went, "Yeah. Let's see what we can come up with." So we contacted this guy, and he said that he was actually working with a community in Ponca City, Oklahoma, and they were looking for some volunteers, and if I was interested, maybe he could find me a family to live with... and to make a very long story short, it did work out, and I went to live with this family in Ponca City, Oklahoma. She was a Ponca Indian, and he was a Cherokee -- they were husband and wife, and they were kind of, I would say the leadership of this community. I lived with them, and I worked in this Indian daycare center, and the cultural center, and we worked a lot with trying to get young people involved, and reconnected with their Jewish heritage, teaching them crafts... and this woman and I -- I was like, her helper. But I was the young person to connect with the kids. And it was this extraordinary experience for me, and of course, I learned so much, and they taught me so much, and hopefully I helped them with some of the activities that they were trying to do. And this was kind of a time when there was a renewal of interest in their roots. And this was when, you may remember, Marlon Brando won the Academy Award, and he had this Indian woman go up and accept the award on his behalf, because he was very interested in bringing attention to all the wrongs that had been done to the American Indian population. So there was like a lot of energy about the American Indian movement at that time -- unfortunately, I'm not sure it's lasted, but... So, among the Indians, there was like this renewal of trying to bring their culture back to life. And, you know, we still see that -- I mean, the American Indian Museum just opened in Washington, D.C. this last year -- you know, they're still struggling. But, once again, for me, I was witnessing them trying to get in touch with their identity, and of course, it was a

challenge for me to continue to try to get in touch with my identity, and sometimes it's best done when you're witnessing other people struggling with theirs.

RH: Right. Right, when you're away from where the center of your universe is, everything Jewish makes you really kind of define yourself.

JW: Very much so.

RH: So, you've talked a little about your children, so I think we should officially -- tell me how many children you have (laughter), and tell me their names (laughter).

JW: I have two. One's name is Perri -- P-E-R-R-I, and she's a sophomore in college, and Julia, and she's a freshman in college.

RH: OK. And where are they at school?

JW: Perri spent her first year at George Washington University, in Washington D.C., and transferred to Colorado College --

RH: To your roots.

JW: To my roots, and now to her roots -- she owns it much bigger than I ever did (laughter). And Julia's at Pomona, in California. And they're very happy, they should remain that way.

RH: What do you feel like you've tried to give them, of your family history?

JW: I have -- I've been more than successful, I've been like scary successful, at making them independent. It's totally, totally backfiring on me (laughter) -- It has totally backfired on me. When Julia graduated high school last year, she wanted to graduate early, and she wanted to go to India for a number of months, and of course, I was horrified at the thought that my little girl wanted to go to India. And, of course, she threw back at me,

that, “Mom, you graduated high school early. Your parents let you go and live on an Indian reservation, and you should allow me the same kind of independence that they allowed you.” And of course, I’m like, “Julia, I went to Oklahoma. (laughter) Not India. Not across the world.” But, she went, and it was an extraordinarily successful trip for her. And I have created these (laughter) very, very independent children, which is every mother’s nightmare (laughter).

RH: Right. Actually, I was just hearing Larry Gordon today on the radio talk about it. She’s a writer, and she said, you know, she could do all the little things for babies, but the hardest thing for her was to see her children go off on her own.

JW: Yeah. I mean, you love it and you hate it. And unfortunately, I’ve imbued them with this love of travel, and so they’re constantly off somewhere. We used to joke that, “We can travel, we’re into travel, but you guys are not allowed to go anywhere we haven’t been.” Well, unfortunately we gave that up a long time ago. Perri’s been to Tibet, and (laughter)... so, yeah. They’re very into the exotic, you know? Like, the most --

RH: Are they looking at some of the religious traditions there, too?

JW: They have... the Judaism is very much in their consciousness. I think it’s also a challenge for them, as it is for all of us, of where does that integrate into your life. Now, I will say that, I think they’re farther along and more developed in their Jewish upbringing, at their stage of life, than I was, and that hopefully they have a stronger Jewish knowledge than I did. I think I had a very strong Jewish connection, but not necessarily the knowledge that they have. And I would say, we were more observant as a family -- you know, my husband and I are more observant as a family in terms of Jewish traditions than we were growing up, but I think that’s also a sign of the times. I think that there is reversal back to observing Shabbat, and ritual, and celebrating holidays -- you know, holidays that I never even heard of as a kid. And we’ve really tried to bring joy to a lot of the holidays. As a family, we do a huge Sukkoth party, and invite all of our friends, and

family, and neighbors, and have hundreds of people here to celebrate Sukkoth every year, and do a big deal for Shabbat, and all of the holidays, as much as we can. I don't think that was nearly in my parents' consciousness as much it is in this generation. And I think that's been a really big deal to my kids. I mean, there were points where they resented it, you know -- "What do you mean we have to be home for Shabbat?" But I think for the most part, they really love the fact that they could invite their friends here for Shabbat at any time they wanted, and know that they were always welcome, and that --

RH: And it was always here.

JW: And it was always here. Exactly. And as much as they might have moaned and groaned from time to time, I think the vast majority of the time, they really liked it and appreciated it.

RH: Well, we're moving into -- we've already been in Jewish identity, which is the next section (laughter), but, you're talking about ways your family's identifying with being Jewish, and I don't know if you have anything else you want to add to that.

JW: Well, I would say that my own Jewish identity has been a continuous and wonderful growth, and development, and I have felt very lucky to be able to explore it in a very free and creative way -- that a lot of it was offered to me, yet it was up to me to really choose the paths to go with. And a lot of my Jewish identity came from early experiences with Israel, with Ponca City, but a lot of my Jewish identities came on the job, of this first introduction to the Jewish community through my internship, and then, now, through over 25 years of work in the Jewish community. After a couple of years of working for Hillel, I decided that in fact this was a field that I was really interested in, and then I went to graduate school at Yeshiva University, which was a far cry from Colorado College, and ended up getting my Masters in Social Work and my Masters in Jewish Communal Service, and continued my Jewish education by being fortunate enough to participate in this Wexner Leadership Training Program, and... you know, grew up in a Reform

congregation, joined a Conservative congregation, have joined a second (laughter), more interesting congregation, in addition to that --

RH: Today?

JW: Yeah, to belong to this Aitz Hayim, and to Beth El, here. And, just look for creative, new approaches, for my own development, and my family. And I think that we're all exploring, at all times, and I think that's a great place for me to be at, and I really hope that I have given that to my kids as well, that it's not static -- it's constantly evolving, and that you might step in and out of whatever forms of Judaism you're experiencing at any time, but there's always the next interesting, creative avenue to go to. And I saw this very much with my parents too, that they didn't have nearly as many choices, in terms of creative ways to engage with Judaism, but they found whatever ones they had, and certainly, the scouts was a very creative way to get involved, and my mother ended up getting involved not only with Federation, with the Professional Women's Group at Federation, but then with this Jewish Women's Foundation, which is the organization that is going to be honoring me, and is working with the Jewish Women's Archives. So it's really a lot of evolution on all of our parts, and we're very, very fortunate to live in a community that has so many resources that we can take advantage of, and whether that's through the synagogue, or through lectures series, or through friendships that you develop that you can really grow from -- that has been really a very, very lucky part for me.

RH: Can you spell the two synagogues that you belong to?

JW: Absolutely. I belong to North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, which is B-E-T-H, E-L. And I belong to Aitz Hayim, which is A-I-T-Z, H-A-Y-I-M. And I grew up at North Shore Congregation Israel, and my husband grew up in a Reform synagogue in Springfield, Missouri, and we were married at a Reform synagogue, and we still have great feelings for that place. My daughter, who had the most extraordinary summer camp experience,

was at a Reform camp. So, I think the part of Judaism that I most admire for people is when they do partake in all that's offered, and not just in one small segment of the religion, but really allow themselves to experience a lot of different things -- I mean, I went to Yeshiva University, an Orthodox institution, for graduate school, and had just an amazing, amazing educational and personal experience in that venue.

RH: So, why the two synagogues? What do they each give you?

JW: Well, when we first were shopping for a synagogue -- and we took that shopping very seriously, we looked at all the different options in the community, and felt that Beth El was probably going to give our kids the best education there was. And both of our kids were bat mitzvahed there. And at the time, Aitz Hayim did not exist. But Aitz Hayim was an experiment that a couple of really creative people in the community conceptualized, and ran with, and due to their efforts, it has become quite an interesting place. And we have participated -- not in a hugely intense way, but from time to time, in a lot of their creative efforts: their Shabbat dinners, their lectures, the high holidays, and most recently, they are the ones who did my mother's funeral, that my mother -- we had joined Aitz Hayim, and then brought my mother to see how she would feel about it, and she liked it so much that she actually embraced it more than we did, because my husband's always been resistant to it, it's not really his style. So I was always kind of caught between my wanting to embrace it more than he did, and you know, all those family dynamics (laughter).

RH: Is it a Conservative, or Orthodox --

JW: It's a Conservative, but they, I think call themselves "post-denominational," or something. So they really have a lot of people from lots of different backgrounds, but they do use a Conservative prayer book.

RH: When you say "backgrounds," you mean other rel --

JW: Like there's a lot of Reform Jews who have, either belonged to Reform synagogues, or, you know, still belong to Reform synagogues, yet are choosing to be there, because it's a really alive, unusual creative approach. They don't have a building, they just hold their services in either the community house, or hotels, and -- so they put their finances, their resources, into great speakers, instead of building funds. And it's very lay-led, they don't have a permanent rabbi -- they have rabbis that they bring in from time to time for different events, and there's a lot of lay leadership that really believes -- like, for example, with my mother's funeral, there was no rabbi who officiated, and it was all pretty much done by the family. And as a result of that, you had a much warmer, and personal, and I think, appropriate funeral -- certainly for my mother, than you would have had if there was that formality of, you know, what we're used to, in that traditional funeral.

RH: So, both of your daughters were bat mitzvahed?

JW: Mm-hm. And, together.

RH: Together? Oh, really? (laughter)

JW: Yep.

RH: What a great experience!

JW: Oh, it was! When I figured out that we could actually do this -- because when you're a girl, you can be bat mitzvahed at either twelve or thirteen. With a boy, you have to be thirteen. With a girl, you can do it either way, so we had one who was twelve, and we had one who was thirteen, and so ritually, it worked, to have them be together, and for the family, it was just fantastic, because what a double mitzvah to be able to celebrate, and how wonderful not to have to do a rerun, a year later (laughter).

RH: The next year. (laughter)

JW: Exactly. So it was really, really fantastic. It was truly a highlight to be able to do that. They were not convinced of it when I first suggested it. My kids were not convinced of it, but I think, undoubtedly in retrospect, they think it was the right thing to do.

RH: I would think, just, the support for each other --

JW: Now if we could pull off the marriages together (laughter) --

RH: Yeah. (laughter) Was your family Zionist?

JW: I would say, absolutely, although they did not call themselves Zionist. They knew they were in love with Israel, they knew they cared deeply about Israel, but it wasn't what you would consider a traditional Zionist family, in terms of, you know, generations being Zionist. It was really my parents who were the ones who brought Judaism into the family. They, I think, for all of their parents, they were so busy adapting to this country that, while they all belonged to synagogues, it was not a significant part of their upbringing, so they really had to find it for themselves, and then, I would say, passed that on, and we've all done our job of trying to figure it out in each generation. So, yeah, there's a history of caring about Jewish issues, but I wouldn't say it was a deeply Zionist family for generations.

RH: It sounds like, to me, that the earlier generations struggled to be American so that you guys could be Jewish in America.

JW: That's right. They escaped from their past, and you know, never understood why we wanted to go back to Europe, never understood why we wanted to go back to Russia. I remember the first time when my husband and I went to what's now the former Soviet Union, and went to do our refusenik thing -- in fact, that's how I know Marilyn and Pam, is because we went through Chicago action to work with the Soviet Jews, and take in care packages, and bring out letters, and all those things --

RH: Contraband books? (laughter)

JW: All that good stuff, exactly, and we were briefed by Marillyn, a couple of times -- she was clearly the source on all of that, and she set up all of our appointments for us, and told us who we were going to see, and what they needed, and, you know, she was so incredible, and knowledgeable, and so dedicated to this field. But of course, I remember, the funniest thing my grandmother said was, "I don't understand why you would want to go there. I did my best to get out of there, and I have absolutely no desire to ever go back there." And she didn't. And I remember, the only positive things that she could ever say about Russia was that she remembered the black bread, and she remembered the black bread fondly, and we arrived in Moscow, as our first stop, and food is not something that you talk a lot about in Russia, and, oh, we sat down at the first meal, and there was the black bread, and it was like, "Oh, my God, Nana! I'm with ya!" (laughter) And we've always been bread eaters -- my grandmother... if all food disappeared from the face of the Earth, all she needed was a piece of bread, and a cup of tea, and I'm exactly the same way. It's like I have to start every day with my bread and my tea, and of course, I think of her every single day. But you're absolutely right, that they were much more interested in escaping from their past and becoming American, and they lived very modest lives here, and worked every day of their lives -- my grandfather worked for sixty years at Hart Schaffner & Marx, starting as a sweeper of floors and becoming an administrator in his later years, and never worked anywhere except at the same company. You know, those are the great old stories you don't hear about... sometimes I think I'm following in his footsteps, though, of, you know, how now people always change jobs every few years, and here I am at the Holocaust Museum for 16 years, I was at the Federation for 11 years... it's like, oh my God, this is so unheard of! I say, "Oh, no, no, it's genetic."

RH: So, when we get into your activism, are we following the path here? I mean, Hillel, the Jewish Federation --?

JW: Yeah. I mean, and I think the women's movement also...

RH: Tell me about that.

JW: I think that my mother was a feminist before we even knew that such a word existed. So, she had a very independent mind. She was very comfortable formulating her own thoughts and own opinions, and trusted her own judgment in a way that just made that very natural for me to emulate. And, I probably didn't realize until much, much, much... as an adult, how difficult it was for people to make decisions, and for people to value their own judgments, because it was so natural for me. It was very much the way in which both my parents -- and equally so, so that... and yet, my mother was very much a victim of her generation as well. I always teased her that I couldn't believe that as smart as she was, and as thoughtful as she was, that she insisted that my brothers be bar mitzvahed, but never, ever even considered my going to Hebrew school or my being bat mitzvahed -- it was just not even in her thought process. And she was so sorry about that -- she regretted that so much. And of course, I teased her about it incessantly. She said, you know, "I was so wrong, that was such a mistake," so that even here, when she was, you know, probably much more free-spirited innately, it wasn't that she was taught it, but it was just really in her character to be this way, but even she was a victim of her environment, and that was just one example of it. But, she was a wonderful role model in many ways, of just balancing a lot of things in life, and just taking it for granted that women can balance a lot of things in life. She valued her friends, and took friendship very, very, very seriously. And I would say that I've always worked, and I've always worked full-time, but I've always tried to make sure that the friends get the time, and... a lot of people say to me, "I don't understand. Why do you have to see all these people? Why can't you just give yourself a break?" I'm like, "Why do you I have to see these people? I want to see people. That's incredibly important to me." It is incredibly important for me to make sure I do do things, besides work all day long, and with any job, especially a job like this, you know, that it's very, very, very demanding, and

what little time is left, it's very easy to just, you know, whatever, because that's it. But, I'm staying in touch with people, and having long-term -- I mean, my mother had every friend from her childhood still in her life. If she had gone to kindergarten with you... still her closest friends were from kindergarten. And I don't think that I ever questioned that that was the way it was supposed to be. It was just inherent, that if you made a friend, you kept them. You didn't just lose them, and let them disappear from your life, you just made the efforts to make sure... and that was before e-mail. (laughter) And you know, it's hard. And I haven't been successful in every way. And I'm sure she would say that she wasn't successful in every way. But she was extraordinarily (laughter) successful at it, and that was also a wonderful role model, and certainly she took me to my first anti-war movement, and she -- I don't know if you know Gerda Klein, she's a Holocaust survivor, but when I was ten years old, my mother took me to hear her speak, and I had never heard a Holocaust survivor speak before that, and it had such an impact on me. And I also attribute a lot of what I do today to that firsthand experience, and as it turns out, in my years at Federation, I ended up having Gerda as a speaker many times, and then since my work at the Holocaust Museum, I've also worked very, very closely with Gerda through the years. And the fact that I can track all of that to my mother taking me to hear her when I was ten years old, is just such a beautiful connection through the stages of how my mother influenced me, how she introduced me to these subject matters that -- you know, there weren't a lot of parents at that time that were taking their ten-year-olds to listen to Holocaust survivors. And at that time also, it was a fundraiser for Federation, and I ended up giving my first gift to the Federation --

RH: Oh, at ten?

JW: -- at ten. And when Federation started this organization called the Silver Circle, many years ago now, and they started recognizing people who had been giving to Federation for twenty-five years or more, it ended up that, I believe I was the youngest person that had been giving to Federation for twenty-five years or more. And actually I

have a picture of the event where they showed me as like the youngest, and this other guy is like the oldest, who were at this Silver Circle event. Yeah, and it was also due to this. So, that was...

RH: That's a great story.

JW: Yeah. So, you know --

RH: So your parents were politically active.

JW: Yes, but not in like a, "I have to have a title" way. But just more, I would say, in a caring, community, thoughtful way. And, "I'm not afraid to take on issues," and not afraid to speak their minds.

RH: So, you do have memories of going to anti-war --

JW: I do. All the kids were dragged, in front of the Highland Park library, to a tent of anti-war rallies, and to free Soviet Jewry rallies, and those are great early memories, they really are. And, at my mom's funeral, a friend of hers told some great stories about schlepping all of us kids to these things, and they did it together, and then, also, how we spent one winter vacation going to twenty-sixth and California, which is the criminal court system, and going every day to watch this criminal court trial, because my mother thought it would be a really good experience for us to learn how the legal system worked (laughter).

RH: (laughter) Wow.

JW: That is great. It was a wonderful memory... and they all -- this friend of my mother's, and my parents, when I was in Ponca City, they all drove down to visit me on the Indian Reservation... you know, they were very -- my mother was extremely supportive, even though I'm sure she was very nervous to send me to a place that she had never been,

and had not seen, and yet, you know, she did it. And when I think of how kids go to college now, you know, you drive your kid to college, your parents are with you -- I mean, college? I got on a plane, and I was by myself, and I went to college the first time, having never seen the school before, but... things were just a little different then. So, and luckily, my parents didn't second-guess all of those things for themselves, or for me. So I have some high models to try to keep up.

RH: It sounds like it. And that you're passing on, too. (laughter)

JW: Trying, trying, trying, but oh, it's... (laughter).

RH: So, are there any other Federation jobs that you want to talk about, or any other kind of formative moments, before we --?

JW: Well, I was very fortunate, in my years with Federation, to have a number of different jobs there, and started out with Hillel [Kays?], and then ran a program called Dialogues in Jewish Life, and then went on to be the Missions Director, and ended up being the director of a program called Continuum. And these were all incredibly important experiences for me, and great growth and development experiences for me. And it was also wonderful to work in the same organization, and be able to learn so many different segments of it. And I owe a great deal to those years, and that learning experience, and the kind of lay leadership that I worked with, that many of them are still very involved with Federation, and have gone on to many other projects as well, but, working --

RH: Is there something that tied them together for you?

JW: Well, I would say the most meaningful pieces of those years for me, was the Dialogues in Jewish Life program, where I would be working with adults who were trying for the first time to do -- this was basically a Jewish adult education two-year program, where once a month, couples would meet to discuss different Jewish issues. And one of

the really wonderful things -- the connections with Marilyn Tallman, is that Marilyn, at the time, was one of the few Jewish educators in the Chicago area, and I would have Marilyn teaching at almost every single one of these first classes. So when I heard that Marilyn was one of the other honorees, it was like, “Great.” Flashbacks to two really important parts of my life that Marilyn was a part of -- one was this Dialogues in Jewish Life program, and the second one was our trip to the former Soviet Union. But the Dialogues program was working with different groups, and about twenty couples in each group, with a different subject matter each month, and all these people, as adults, learning to look at Judaism with fresh eyes... and you know, having adults learn about Judaism without the baggage of being forced to do it as children, is a very different experience, and so you would see their excitement, you would see their energy, and then the program not only had this once-a-month aspect to it, but then you’d have this retreat up at Camp Chi in Wisconsin, where we’d bring in fascinating scholars, and we’d do Jewish workshops, and then the end of the two-year program culminated in a trip to Israel.

RH: So you finally did create a Jewish camp.

JW: We did, in a sense we did -- we created our own little Jewish camp and little Jewish communes (laughter). And the way in which these couples would get to know each other -- it was like a little havurah. And some of these groups worked really, really well, and stayed together for years, and some of them, you know, didn’t work quite so well, but, the kinds of connections, and the relationships that were established, really went on to become unbelievable leadership for the Federation, and great peer models for each other. And a lot of these people are still very much in my life, and I owe that, I attribute that to the kind of intense learning and growing up that we all did together. And a lot of these people are ten years older than I am, because that was the stage of life that they were at when they entered this program. And so I always joke that I was so young to them -- of course, I’m not young anymore, but I was (laughter) so young to them. But, these are people who we’ve really tracked a lot of years with, and ended up... you know,

some of these people went through dialogues together with, went on these retreats together, went to Israel together with, and two of these couples, we ended up going to the former Soviet Union with also -- after being in Israel, really wanted to continue to do wonderful things, so I was able to do that as a professional and as a layperson, and really bridge both of those roles.

RH: Fascinating.

JW: Good stuff. Really, really great years. Really great years.

RH: So -- are we ready? How do we move into what you're doing now? How did you do that?

JW: Well, how we do that is that I had eleven plus amazing years at the Federation, and was not at all looking for a new opportunity -- actually, not only did I have eleven amazing years at the Federation, but during those years, got married, had two kids, and just moved to the suburbs, with a two-year-old and a three-year-old.

RH: When did you get married?

JW: I got married (pause) --

RH: (laughter) That happens to me too.

JW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm not good on my years (laughter). I got married twenty-four years ago, so whatever that was -- 1981, is that? Yeah. Maybe 1981, 1980? Yeah, 1981 -- this is 2005. OK.

RH: Tell me your husband's name.

JW: His name is Bernard Kramer. And, he was one of those graduate students in those Hillel programs. (laughter) That was a cute story.

RH: You want to tell it? (laughter)

JW: Just, through my work at Hillel, I was invited to this party by some of the law students that I worked with, and walked in, and knew everybody in the entire group, and thought, “Oh God, this is like work -- what do I need to be here, these are all the people that I (laughter) work with, I don’t need to be here on my weekend!” But, you know, of course was happy to see everybody. And then, towards the end of the evening, realized that actually there was one kind of cute guy that I didn’t know, and he was coming towards me -- I didn’t realize that he had asked to meet me, I wasn’t aware of that at that point. And he told me that he was in law school at the University of Chicago, and I said, “Well, you know I work with law students. Maybe you would be interested in coming to one of the programs that we do,” and he said, “I don’t think so, that doesn’t really sound like anything I’d be interested in.” (laughter) And he tells me he’s not from Chicago, and he’s from Springfield, Missouri -- so I said, “Well, I’m a Chicagoan, you know, maybe I can show you around.” He goes, “Well, you know, I know my way around pretty well.” (laughter)

RH: Oh my gosh!

[END OF PART 1]

RH: OK. I think we should be (inaudible) to go forward.

JW: OK, ready?

RH: Yeah.

JW: All right (vacuuming noise). OK. [Solidad?], if you can come in here, because we’re trying to do an interview, so if you can come in and vacuum, and just be done, that would be really helpful. Thank you. (vacuuming noise) Think it’s working?

RH: Yeah. I think we're recording now... two of two. Two of two.

JW: Should I close the door?

RH: Yeah. You're a good sport (laughter). I appreciate it.

JW: I'm a multi-tasker, is what I am. (laughter)

RH: The other women are going to be benefiting from your --

JW: That's right, for being the guinea pig with the machine, great (laughter).

RH: Yeah, you're one of the first here, on this machine. So, we were getting into -- talk a little more, because you were just talking about your husband, and kind of the journey you two have taken together here.

JW: Yeah. I think that -- you know, we both came from Reform Jewish backgrounds, and we were both searching, and I think we both had very positive Jewish identities, and that positive Jewish identity also recognized that we wanted more than what we had. And, so, that has become, I would say, really a lifelong search -- that has meant an individual search for each one of us, and then a joint search, for our children, and now, I would say, has resulted in their own individual searches, with each other. And I think Bernard and I both share a passion for Judaism. I don't think we both see it the same way. I don't think it's been a path that has necessarily resulted in wanting to do exactly the same thing at any given time, but I think truly it's been a shared passion for Judaism.

RH: Mm-hm. Nice. (laughter) So, why don't we move on to your work today -- how you got involved --

JW: In the Holocaust museum, right. I think I started to tell you that I had had eleven great years at Federation, during which I had learned so much about the field of Jewish communal service, about what it meant to actually be a Jewish professional, the role of

lay people, the role of staff people, learned the ins and outs of the Chicago Jewish community, and all of that was mixed with an incredible chapter of personal growth, of getting married, and having two kids, and it was right after we had moved to the suburbs, and I had a two-year-old and a three-year-old, that one of my associates who I had worked with at Federation -- his name was Ralph Grunewald, and he had worked at Federation in Washington, D.C. when I had worked at Federation, and he had been the director of Missions Program in Washington when I was the director of the Missions Program in Chicago. And we had done a lot of work together, because not only did I do trips to Israel for the Federation, but I also did trips to Washington, and I did trips to New York, and I did trips to Eastern Europe, and basically, you know, wherever there would be interesting opportunities for people to travel, I was the staff person who coordinated all of those efforts. And Ralph had left his position with Missions, and had gone to work for the Holocaust Museum. And, he was a child of survivors, and he was aware of the process and the progress of the Holocaust Museum, and he knew that they wanted to open up five regional offices in the country, one of which was going to be in the Chicago area. And he contacted me and said that he thought I'd be a really good person to open up the office for the Holocaust Museum in Chicago. And I asked him a little bit about it, he told me a little about it, and I told him, "You know, Ralph. This sounds amazing. But I have two little kids -- I have a two-year-old and a three-year-old, I just moved to the suburbs, I'm working for the Federation. My plate is so full that it's just not the right time for me." And he said, "Well, before you make that decision, I think you should come to Washington, and I think you should see what this project is about, and hear about it, and then make that decision." And I thought about it, and I figured, well, why not? I mean, I'd love to see what they're doing -- I had heard a little about it, I knew that Ellie Wiesel was the chairman of the project, I knew that it had happened under President Carter -- I mean, I had heard little bits about it, but I really didn't know much, and I was interested. So I went to Washington, and really the rest is history. Once I saw what this project was about, and the fact that we were only going to be build a museum -- the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum was only going to be built once, and we were the generation that was going to build it. And I was either going to be a person who was going to be right in on it, or I was going to be looking at it from the sidelines, and as much as the timing was definitely not right for me, and as difficult as it was to balance all of these things that I was balancing, I realized that, this was it! This was going to happen once, it was either going to be me, or it was going to be someone else, and I did not want to regret my decision. And it has just been an extraordinary sixteen years, and the museum's been open now for eleven years, and some of the most incredible times were those five years before we even had a museum, when we were truly investing people in a dream, and I was one of those people who really, really became invested in that dream.

RH: So, tell me a little about what you did when you first were there, and what you do now, and maybe it's the same thing, or --

JW: It's very much the same. The past sixteen years have been all about... helping people to connect with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and helping to raise the funds that the museum in the early years needed to build the building, to house the exhibits, to collect the artifacts, to put on the traveling exhibits, to take the museum beyond the walls, to do the lectures, to build the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies... there are so many aspects to the museum, and it is all about trying to make people connect with what this is all about, so that they become invested in it, and they become the supporters of it, and that means the financial supporters, and that means the emotional supports, and that means the leadership that we need today, and that means the leadership that we need tomorrow. And, you know, we are an extraordinarily lucky generation -- we are the last generation that will know firsthand Holocaust survivors, and as we all know, those numbers are shrinking daily, and certainly the attention that there has been this week to the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz highlighted that once again for all of us, and, you know, for most Holocaust survivors, they never believed that there would be a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum built on the

most priceless piece of land that this country has to offer. They never believed that their stories would be told in this most amazing way, through the American -- you know, that it has the same status as all the museums in the Smithsonian complex, and they never believed that, now close to ninety percent of the visitors would not be Jewish, that the interest in this subject matter would be so, so, so vast that one of the things that most heads of state do when they come to this country is visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I mean, it has become truly, truly, truly a symbol, and it has become most importantly a very important educational center. And, it's not simply a memorial -- it truly is a museum. And its lessons are very much for the past, but unfortunately its lessons are very much for the present, and the museum's been dealing with a lot of really tough subject matters, of looking at early warning signs of other genocides, most recently on the Sudan, and... so, it's been an extraordinary learning process for me. It's been very similar to my work at the Federation, in terms of being lucky to have been able to start a lot of projects from scratch, and really see them build in amazing ways, but, you know, there was no regional office for the Holocaust Museum before I got here, and my association with it is extremely important to me, and possibly, probably one of the most significant pieces of my life, and the legacy that I will leave is what I have been lucky enough to be a part of here, and the way in which this community has been extraordinarily responsive. Right now, we have the single largest event in the entire country in Chicago each year, we have the single most effective support anywhere in the country, in the Chicago area, and I'm very proud of having played some role in that, since the beginning.

RH: Some role -- I think I read you raised seventy million dollars, is that correct?

JW: So, that's what this organization -- you know, that's what this incredible museum has been able to motivate in people. And the most important thing we have to do now is to help people to understand that just because there is this amazing museum does not mean that our job is done; that the real work was not building the museum, the real work

is the work that now has to take place once this museum is built.

RH: So you've really had to move people along from the moment of the building, and now to another phase of a vision.

JW: That's right. And we've all had to move through that. We've all, who have been involved with the beginning, realized, not only were we building a building, but we were building a building that really had a future. And, you know, it's just like... I say to myself, "We gave birth to this incredible baby, but it's really watching it grow, and seeing its possibilities, that is the most challenging." And we didn't just want to build a building, we didn't want to just give the birth -- we really want to see what the potential of this museum is, and I think that it has become so much greater than any of us could have ever anticipated. And for those people who invested early in this museum, I would say that every single one of them, and every single one of us, believes we got far more than we could have ever imagined we would have gotten. So it's been a great return on our investment.

RH: You mentioned your children were small at the time -- they've grown up --

JW: Yeah. Here they are, at the opening of the Holocaust Museum -- there they are (laughter). And now they're nineteen and twenty, right. And those two women that are pictured in that picture with me at the opening of the Holocaust Museum -- and you might remember, it was a very cold day in April -- those two women still work with me. Bonnie Miller, and Marsha Ross, and they're still very much involved and committed to the Holocaust Museum, so I've been very, very, very fortunate in that way as well, having really long-term, committed associates here in the Chicago area. And that absolutely is one of the reasons why we have been able to have the long-term lay involvement, is because of the long-term staff involvement.

RH: Do you attribute that to anything?

JW: I attribute that to a passion that we all bring to this opportunity. I attribute that to the extraordinarily continuous challenges that the museum offers to us, how none of us have tired of it over the years -- it continues to challenge us, both professionally and personally, and that we've been very fortunate to be innately involved in every way. So, those are some extraordinary opportunities that we've had.

RH: Can you tell me what one of the greatest challenges of this job is, that you have?

JW: Yeah. I would say one of the greatest challenges of this job has been to take a museum that is located in Washington, D.C., and make it so pivotal in people's lives throughout the country, and that it really speaks to the strength of the museum that it is able to do that -- that you don't have to visit this museum every single day in order to understand how important it is to you, how important it is to this country, and how important it is to this world. And I think that for all of us who have been a part of it, whether it was from the beginning, or just got involved most recently, we realize that we are truly leaving a legacy to the next generation. And there is a permanence to this project that you don't get in many other projects. The fact that the museum in Washington -- the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum -- will stand for as long as this country stands, is truly extraordinary, and I can't even think of anything comparable, in terms of that kind of longevity and permanence, that we ourselves are able to be a part of contributing to society, the world, the future. Now, certainly the museum is going to evolve, and change, but it will always be the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, dedicated to this unbelievable chapter in our history.

RH: How about the people you've met?

JW: The people I have met, as are decorating these walls here, have impacted me so greatly, and by working daily with Holocaust survivors, it has put all of life's challenges in perspective. That the small details that can rock your boat in life, daily, have to be rethought in terms of the very difficult subject matter that we deal with all the time, in

terms of the Holocaust. For me to learn from people who have been dealt the greatest of human tragedies, is just remarkable. For me to see the resilience of life -- people who came here without a penny in their pocket, without a family member, and built lives, and go on to have, not only successful careers, but incredibly joyous families, and who never forget where they came from -- is a remarkable lesson, and I learn every single day from the people that I work with. And the Holocaust survivors have really, really, really taught me so much in particular, but I've also been very fortunate to work with incredible children of survivors. I've been very fortunate to work with a really strong and motivated staff, both at the Holocaust Museum, and at the Jewish Federation, and as I mentioned, you know, just my own staff here -- to have staff that I've worked with for sixteen years, some of them... our just incredibly intense (laughter) experiences. You've spent far more time with the people in the office, during your waking hours, than you do with your own family. And, you know, those have been very, very productive and important personal and professional experiences for me.

RH: Are there any, in particular, role models from this work that stand out?

JW: I would say that I have been really fortunate to meet so many, many people that... I would say there are two Holocaust survivors who have touched me the most, and one is Gerda Klein, because she has touched my life at so many different stages, and to meet her and be impacted on her at that young age, during adolescence, of ten years old... and then to reacquaint myself with her during my entire twenties when I ran the Dialogue in Jewish Life program, and be able to introduce Gerda to hundreds of other adults who were learning about the Holocaust as adults for the first time, and who never, ever, ever forgot the first time they met Gerda Klein, and then to again work with her in my work with the Holocaust Museum, bringing her to Chicago to speak at a number of different events here, and work with her in Washington, and work with her dear husband Kurt, and get to know both of them in so many important ways, has just been a gift that I feel I've been given of knowing very, very special people like that. And the local survivor who I'm just

so grateful to -- and there are many, but if I had to pick one, it's Fritzie Fritchall, who has given her time selflessly for the Holocaust Museum, who has balanced her personal and professional and familial commitments in really role model ways, and who is just the loveliest, loveliest, loveliest person, and who didn't speak about the Holocaust for most of her childhood and adulthood, and it was only in her recent years that she started dealing with her past, and as a survivor of Auschwitz, has begun to tell her story in such a moving and profound way that she is making up for all the years when she didn't talk (laughter).

RH: It was incubating inside her, I guess (laughter). So how have you managed personal, professional, familial commitments, and the balance of that?

JW: Every day is a challenge, every single day. I've often said that I make no judgments as to whether people work, or don't work, whether they have children, or no children, whether they have ten children, or one children, whether they're married or divorced. The only thing I relate to in people is if they are conflicted and challenged at all moments (laughter) about what their choices are. So, there hasn't been a day that hasn't been challenging. But I have not regretted my choices.

RH: Well, part of it -- you've had role models for, (laughter) you know.

JW: I do. I really always had incredibly, incredibly supportive parents, but particularly a mother who was so there for me and my children in every single way, and it would have been doubly, if not triply or quadruply difficult for me to have done what I have done, if she was not available to me at every given moment, and she was available to me at every given moment, if that meant an hour to take care of my kids, or a week, or two weeks, or a month. And my children are blessed to have had a grandmother like they had, and she has had an incredible, incredible role in their lives, as well as in mine.

RH: Well, that's a blessing.

JW: It is, it is, it is, and that I miss her every single day is only a tribute to how lucky I was to have had such a role model in my life, and such a presence in my life, literally every day.

RH: When the children were younger, how did you explain what you were doing to them?

JW: Well, as you can see, we're in the house (laughter). So there was very little (laughter) separation. There was very little separation. They lived and breathed the Holocaust Museum daily as well, and they can tell you, there were some very good aspects to that, and some very challenging aspects to that also. But I would say that it is going to be very interesting, and only time will tell how it really plays out with them, because I think it was too close to them for a long time, and they felt quite smothered by the subject matter, and by the working parent (laughter) -- working parents. And I think a little distance is a very healthy thing in their situation, and I think that a little perspective will also -- we will see what kind of choices they make, and I know that, you know, we've tried to expose them to a lot of interesting... you know, here they were at the opening of the Holocaust Museum, they've been back to the Holocaust Museum since then, but we also went to Berlin as a family, and spent a lot of time at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, and went to -- you know, Berlin is just loaded with memories of the Holocaust, and certainly our trips to Israel, and other experiences, and being aware and exposed to Holocaust survivors, is going to have very important lasting impact on them. And I think it's only when they step away from it that they can get their own perspective on it, and have -- they have to own it themselves, it can't just be what their mom does. And I think I'm already seeing that process happening.

RH: It seems like that's a part of your success also, as a fundraiser, is that people become -- they own it, themselves.

JW: It is something that I really believe in. I do believe that is the greatest impact that I can have as a professional, is to make it that people own it, and that people want to own it, and that is what will make for a successful organization, that no one person can do it alone -- it is really a question of building a base of support, and believers, and people who care as deeply in this as I do, in order for it to have its longevity, and I would say that the fact that we have twenty-three hundred people who show up one day in Chicago to show their support for the Holocaust Museum, is extraordinary, and that's not the only thing that they do, and that's not the only sign of support that they have, but that is just such a statement of caring. And that we have hundreds of people in the Chicago area who have hosted events in their house, and brought their family, and their friends, and their business associates, and that the first trip that we had to the Holocaust Museum was led by Mayor Daley, and we had to close it off at eight hundred people, because we just couldn't accommodate any more. And to build that kind of caring, and commitment, and, you know, when people say "I'm a charter member of the museum," and they're so proud of that, because they've been giving from the beginning, that is true ownership, and that is really the kind of commitment and connection to this museum that we really, really, really hope for, and when we hear it and see it, it's showing that all the hard work has really meant something to all these people.

RH: What are the different activities you oversee?

JW: Well, we oversee a lot of different things here in this regional office. We're responsible for the Chicago area, but we're also responsible for the entire Midwest, and that's kind of this undefined area somewhere from Colorado to Detroit, and everything in between. And so, our bottom line is to raise the funds that are necessary to ensure the success of this museum, and that's... it's very costly to run a museum like this, because there's no charge for admission, so it is extremely dependent upon private funding, and government funding. And that is the joint partnership that the museum was built with -- it was built as a public / private partnership, where the land was given by Congress, with

the stipulation that all dollars had to be raised from private sources. Now, the land has been given, and not all dollars have to be raised from private sources, but now a great deal of the money still has to be raised from private sources in addition to the government allocation. So, we do a lot of fundraising, but fundraising can only happen successfully if you do have people who are invested in the museum, so you do a lot of education, you do a lot of trying to keep people updated on what's happening with the museum, taking people to the museum -- just this last weekend, we had a group of young families with thirteen-year-old boys who had just celebrated their bar mitzvah, and the parents all took their thirteen-year-old boys to the museum. And talk about taking it to the next generation -- you not only have young parents that are now invested in this museum, but you have thirteen-year-old boys, that ultimately will be able to take their children, and say, "When my parents took me when I was thirteen, I heard this Holocaust survivor, I did this, I did that," and knowing that that is really taking the leaps to every single generation. So, the museum also does a lot of traveling exhibits, so we'll be bringing exhibits here in Spertus -- we're bring out a Hidden Children exhibit to Spertus starting this year, and across the country there's a number of other different exhibits, and so, I do a lot of different kinds of programming. We're going to be planning -- we've done a couple of trips to Eastern Europe, showing the kind of work that the museum does in Europe, in terms of collection of artifacts, in terms of preservation of artifacts. We work with a lot of other museums, in helping them to preserve. We work with the Auschwitz museum. We work with [Majdanek?], in terms of showing them how the museum has developed an expertise in the preservation of artifacts, and helping them to make sure that theirs are preserved properly too. We partner with a lot of other educational institutions, around lectures, and public programs, and... I could go on and on, but (laughter) --

RH: I'll put you on my blackboard. My students -- I have to go to the website for tomorrow.

JW: Oh, yeah (laughter).

RH: So, at least twenty-five more are going to be looking at it.

JW: The website is fantastic. It is an extraordinary website for the Holocaust Museum, and for your students, it's great, because they can really interact with the website -- ask questions, ask historical questions, look at the exhibits that are there now as if they were walking through them themselves, and... yeah.

RH: Yeah. It's pretty amazing.

JW: Yeah, it really is.

RH: I think we've covered a lot of territory.

JW: Great!

RH: They ask a couple of questions -- you mentioned briefly about the impact of the women's movement. Can you say any more about that?

JW: Yeah. I think I was pretty fortunate to grow up taking a lot of it for granted. And certainly, feminism was a real positive word, and remains a positive word in my vocabulary. And when I was in college, in graduate school, Women's Studies was emerging as a very serious subject, and I was fortunate to be at a college where I -- I mean, my bookshelves are still loaded with my Women's Studies books, and you know, it was an emerging field then, and a great deal of interest and excitement associated with it, and we didn't have to be the revolutionaries, we just had to be the embracers. And that was just a wonderful opportunity to just embrace it, and just learn from it, and learn from those who did have to be the revolutionaries, and I would say that I've been lucky to be able to take it for granted, that this field of interest, and my own desire to have the independent voice that I have had, has been natural, and sure it's been questioned

(laughter), but... you know --

RH: Have there been any challenges to being a woman, working within Jewish community?

JW: I think that there are always challenges to moving up the ladder as a woman in the field. There are less challenges to entering the field as a woman, but there are always more challenges to moving ahead in one's career, and then I think there are just so many personal challenges to balance the personal and professional lifestyles that one embraces. And I have worked with so many, many, many talented women over the years, and have seen many, many stay in the field, but have seen so many leave the field, and have always wondered what I could do, and what we could do, to not have that loss be so great, and to not have women be so challenged, and I unfortunately believe that this really continues to this day, where the choices they make in terms of keeping career and family is such a difficult balance, and choice, and continues to be. And I know my kids will face that also, and, you know, we've made a lot of progress, but we've got a long way to go.

RH: Yeah. That's for sure. I just had a thought, and it just left my mind. (pause) I can't remember it (laughter).

JW: Call me. (laughter)

RH: Any other political activity, that you're engaged in? I can't imagine that you have another minute in your day (laughter), but, it was on the list, so I thought I would (laughter) -- I'm watching you move into rights for childcare, and (laughter)...

JW: Yeah, I haven't gone to that one, actually. I don't know. I think you got enough material to work with, don't you? (laughter)

RH: Yeah, yeah I do. I do.

JW: But, I do believe in valuing all choices that people make, and it is equally hard for me to see how conflicted professional women have been about their challenges of being mothers and professional women, as it is for me to see how challenged professional volunteers have been about their roles, and how those have not been as valued in recent years as I feel they should be. And those are incredibly, incredibly, incredibly important choices that women and men make, and I have great respect for that, and I think that we have a lot of work to do in that area as well, to make sure that we really recognize and value professional volunteers, because we need them badly.

RH: You're right. (laughter) One of my first jobs was as a volunteer coordinator for a (inaudible) center, so -- it's how I learned, was putting them together, and making it meaningful. So, I think you're right. You work with a lot of volunteers?

JW: I do. I work with a lot of volunteers, dedicated volunteers, who volunteer here, and volunteer for many other things as well, and that is just such a valued, valued, valued use of time, and energy, and intelligence, and I personally want to recognize that in every way that I can.

RH: Do you have an organization of volunteers, is it a formal --?

JW: We do, and they work in lots of different ways. People can come into the office every day, who volunteer in one way or another. We have people who come in once a week, on a regular basis. But mostly, when we do this huge event, we have just a huge cadre of volunteers that make this event that we do work, and that is from, you know, the day of the event, to months in advance, of working in every way, on every planning level, and that is just an incredible, incredible commitment that people make, and we couldn't do it without them, and that is men and women, and that is people who are working full-time, and people who have retired, and people who have chosen to volunteer the majority of their time -- I mean, every layer and every level of commitment, and every piece of that is important and every part of that is valued, and we couldn't do it without

them. And it's been one of my challenges to make sure that we message that properly at all times.

RH: I feel like we're about to wrap up here. What do you think is the most important thing that you want to pass on, to your children, to your grandchildren, to future generations, from the work that you're doing right now?

JW: I would say that I have been very fortunate to have had incredible opportunities that have become passions, and that to be passionate about one's work is a gift, and I have had work opportunities that have allowed me great creative growth and great educational learning, and those are one of life's greatest challenges, to continue to learn every day, and think creatively every day. And to be able to make one's life work within the Jewish community, where I hopefully have had a impact on the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community, and the world at large through my work here, is a source of great satisfaction to me. And I trust that all of those efforts will continue to live on long past my ability [break in tape] and if I have played any role in allowing that to happen, it will be extremely satisfying and gratifying. So, yeah -- all that good stuff. (laughter)

RH: OK. I think that's enough.

JW: I think that's pretty good. (laughter)

RH: How's your machine?

JW: Thank you. It's still going, thank goodness!

[END OF INTERVIEW]