# Rebecca Chernin Transcript

ELISE BRENNER: I have to start all over again. This is Elise Brenner here to interview Rebecca Chernin in Sharon, Massachusetts on December 19th. Rebecca is our 2004 Women Who Dared nominee. Rebecca, if you would be so kind as to tell us a little bit about your childhood and upbringing?

REBECCA CHERNIN: Sure. I was born in Arizona and my family lived out there only until I was about three. So I don't remember it too much. And moved to Sharon, Massachusetts, where I lived growing up. When I was in third grade I was diagnosed with dyslexia. So I attended the Carroll School in Lincoln for six years, third grade through eighth grade. And then I went to the New Jewish High School in Waltham for high school. And now I'm at Clark University. So my childhood -- nice little quiet town. I didn't go to Hebrew school, but I had friends from Maimonides because I'd gone there first and second grade before I was diagnosed.

EB: So the relationship between not going to Hebrew school and being in an Orthodox household is the dyslexia challenge I assume, that's the factor?

RC: Yes.

EB: Tell me about your parents, your grandparents, your siblings.

RC: OK. My parents both work. My dad's a radiologist and my mom's an early childhood educator. They are going away soon. They're going to Costa Rica. They like to travel. I love traveling also.

EB: Are they going to take you?

RC: No. Not this trip.

EB: You're staying in the cold.

RC: Yeah, I'm staying in the cold. My brother who's here, Eli, he's a student at Bryant University. And it's in Rhode Island. He's going for business management. And then I have a third brother who's married and lives in Israel, actually. So I don't see him too much. We usually go out there and visit him about once a year.

EB: He made aliyah?

RC: He made aliyah.

EB: At a young age?

RC: No, after he was married, so about like six years ago. So they're very happy out there. They're in Ramat Bet Shemesh. So that's my nuclear family. I'm very lucky. I have all four grandparents alive. My mom's parents, my mother's mother, she's a Holocaust survivor. So we talk a lot about that with her. Sweet lady. She's a great lady. And then my mother's father is very smart. They live out in LA. That's where most of my family is. On the West Coast still. And then my dad's parents: his father is a World War II veteran, I guess, and so he got a Purple Heart because he was injured in battle. So we hear all his war stories and hear all the Holocaust stories.

EB: Must be brutal, and a little heroism in there I'm sure.

RC: Oh, yeah. And then his wife, my dad's mother is very sweet too. Great cook. We go out every summer. We have a family reunion out in California. Rent out a condo in San Diego and all the cousins and aunts and uncles. Yeah, it's really really nice. I've been doing that since I was born, we've been doing that since forever.

EB: Sounds great. But it is pretty spread out.

RC: Yeah, almost everyone's either in Arizona or California, aside from us.

EB: Now, you can't help but notice right away that your family is strongly identified as Jews.

RC: Yes.

EB: In what ways did your family identify as Jews? Tell me about synagogue and Shabbos celebrations, obviously. You're already for tonight.

RC: We're all ready for Shabbos. We've always gone to -- we've always been part of basically all the Orthodox temples, shuls in town. Right now there are two. One was a break-off. So we're part of both. My parents like going to one that's smaller and little older people. I like going to the bigger one that has more kids at it. But ever since I can remember we've gone to shul and I used to sit on my dad's lap and play with his tallis and braid it. And then I was bat mitzvahed of course, and my brothers were bar mitzvahed. And then we always did -- my dad would like to go to Friday night services, but we didn't want to go. Cold, we didn't want to walk. So we started doing services here, just as a family. So we do a Kabbalat Shabbat here, which is nice.

EB: Just for the little -- your brothers, you, your mom.

RC: Yeah, and then usually me and Eli have a friend over. So just do a little short half-hour Kabbalat Shabbat, singing, it's nice, it's fun. We always light candles. I've done that ever since I can remember, also. And we do the whole Kiddush, hamotzi, all of that. Actually, one thing that bothers me about Hamotzi is that my dad, he takes the bread first. I don't know, that's always bothered me. And then Saturday we get up and we go to shul, and we come home, very often we have a bunch of company over or we go to someone's house. And my mom makes a tremendous amount of food. We eat all of Shabbos. And then we make Havdala. And all the holidays have always been big. We still do stuff for Hanukkah, make latkes tonight, and getting out our menorahs and everything. So that's always been something, and also since I went to a private school

that wasn't Jewish, there was always something. Like kids were always asking questions. Or, like, when you have those birthdays, I would always bring my own doughnuts or cupcakes or whatever and keep them in the freezer at school because I wouldn't eat their stuff because of Kashrut.

EB: So you were always answering questions?

RC: I was always answering questions. Can I bless your food? If I bless your food then can you eat it? I'm like, no, it doesn't work that way.

EB: Did it make you self-conscious? Did it make you proud? Or a little of each?

RC: A little of both, I guess. I don't really think it ever made me that uncomfortable. Sometimes it was kind of funny because people really thought they could bless my food and then I could eat it. But they were all -- I knew them all since third grade. And third grade isn't such a discriminatory age. At least not at the school I was at. It was a private school, very small, close-knit classes. There were like six people in each class. So we were all too good of friends for them to really care too much that I was different religion.

EB: Also, maybe all the children there already felt different?

RC: Yeah, that's a good point.

EB: Because you had to all overcome difficult challenges, work harder than everyone else. Did your dyslexia play a big part in who you are today?

RC: I don't think so. It was six years when I definitely developed there. Those were important six years of my life. But I don't want to go into early childhood education or anything like that.

EB: Or special education?

RC: Or special ed, yeah.

EB: During the summers, would you go to summer camps that were Jewish at all?

RC: Yeah.  I always went to Mesorah and Moshava.  So I did Mesorah I think for five summers in New York, and then I did Moshava in Wisconsin for one summer.

EB: Those are Orthodox camps?

RC: Yes.

EB: Is Moshava also Zionist or not?

RC: I don't know.  I don't think so.

EB: Just Orthodox.

RC: Yeah, just Orthodox.

EB: Your family is kosher and Shomer Shabbos?

RC: Yes.

EB: 100%?

RC: 100% Shomer Shabbos.

EB: And [is] your family Zionist in terms of connections to Israel?

RC: Oh yeah.

EB: Very strong?

RC: Very very strong.  Yeah, my parents went out there this -- I think in November for about three weeks.  Yeah, that's the first place they go every year.  And we usually go out there for Pesach is what we've been doing recently.

EB: Because of your brother?

RC: Because of my brother.  But definitely there's always discussion.  Eli wants to make aliyah now.  My mom wants to go to Israel for a year and work with Ethiopian immigrants.  There's always discussion of Israel.  I've been there probably five or six times in the past just like three years.

EB: Did any of your trips to Israel occur without your parents?  Youth group?

RC: Yes.  Yeah, senior year at New Jew [New Jewish High School] you have an option second half of the year to go to Israel or to do an internship.  So what I actually did was I did a month in Israel and then I did an internship when I came back.  So I came back a few weeks before the big group came back.

EB: Was your month in Israel, I assume it wasn't just touring?

RC: No, I think there was 11 or 17 of us that went.  And we go with a program called N'siah.  It's based in Israel.  And we're with Israeli students who are there.  And first we hiked through the Negev for two weeks, which was my favorite place in the entire world.  And actually before we went to Israel we went to Poland and saw the concentration camps and everything and then we went to Prague for a weekend, cooled off there a little bit.  And then we went to Israel.  So that was really powerful especially because my grandmother on my mom's side, to see all that, and then to go to Israel right after seeing all that was amazing.  And some of the group, there was probably like 30 of us that went to the Poland part, and then a bunch of people came back home and didn't go to Israel, and they had a much harder time dealing with everything they had seen in Poland, because when you go to Israel afterwards and you see that the Jews are still thriving and

they're doing great, and it's very calming. When we just arrived there everyone just felt so much more settled about what we had seen.

EB: Makes sense.

RC: So and then we worked at some kibbutzes, worked with some kids. And mainly the program was a group program. We traveled around, did all sorts of group bonding activities and theater stuff, reading the Talmud, acting it out, reading the Tanach, all different things like that. It was a really really fun program.

EB: Sounds wonderful. At Clark are they involved with Hillel?

RC: Yeah. They have actually a pretty good Hillel even though it's a small school. Like we have Pesach seders, we had a sukkah, they have Friday night services, they have dinners often. So it's actually pretty active, even though it's not big. And I don't know if it's my class that has a lot of Jews, but like half of my class I think is Jewish. Which is --

EB: That's outrageous. Wow. Do you take an active role at Hillel, or you just participating?

RC: I just participate more. I've led services before with a couple friends a few times, but it's not a regular thing for me.

EB: Are you a freshman?

RC: No, I'm a sophomore.

EB: You're a sophomore. Now you're young. So I know your relationship to Judaism, I'm sure it's gone through changes. But it'll go through many more, trust me. So how has your relationship to Judaism changed over time given that you're 19 or 20 years old?

RC: Right. I'd say when I was younger, very young, I was more religious. And then -- I don't really think it was private school so much, it was more my parents were pressuring me and my brothers so much to be more religious that he really rebelled the most, he was older than me, and he went completely opposite, like he would go out and eat cheeseburgers and come back and be like, I had the best cheeseburger, just to make them upset. So he took it all the way to the extreme. Then that definitely caused me to be like, Why am I doing this stuff, why do I have to keep kosher? So I went through a period of that. And then in high school, since New Jew is pluralistic -- I didn't really know about the Orthodox movements or the Reform or Reconstructionist, because my parents always tried to keep us within the Orthodox. So I learned a lot more about that and I guess now I would identify more as Conservative because I have trouble identifying as Orthodox, just because of all the women suppression I guess, repression, not really sure what the word is, but just they don't really count in a minyan, and they're not supposed to make Kiddush, and they can't lead the mezumin, things like that. So because of those issues I can't identify as Orthodox. And how in shul they have to sit in the back and sit behind things. And just all those things really bother me. And then going to Israel, you know, and a lot of people in Israel aren't Orthodox also. So that made me think that the Jews who are living in Israel aren't -- obviously there's a reason for that. So I think that I would identify now as Conservative and I don't really ever see myself identifying as Orthodox just because of those roles --

EB: The restrictions on women.

RC: Yeah, restrictions.

EB: Well, that's a pretty important transformation and realization. We are on the cusp of talking about your activism, but not quite yet. This is going to be tougher, because before I asked you to just talk about your experiences. Doesn't have to be your personal experiences, but your activism with combating teen violence and battered women in the

Jewish community, how are Jewish values reflected or incorporated into your activism?

RC: OK, my parents have always ingrained in me that, Do unto others as you'd want done unto you. So ever since we were little we've had tzedakah boxes. And after a year, I think Rosh Hashanah time, we'll count it all out. Me and my brother will get to pick a place we want to send the tzedakah money to. So there's always been a big overtone of charity and helping others and volunteering.

EB: Your family then, your parents, were role models for g'milut chasadim [acts of loving-kindness] and tzedakah.

RC: Yes, and tzedakah.

EB: What specific things did they involve in and involve you in when you were young in terms of g'milut chasadim, let's say?

RC: They put me in a program Panim el Panim. I don't know if you've heard of that. So I did that in high school, which is a Jewish leadership training program. You go to Washington. So they were involved with things in the shul. My dad was the president -- he was president in Arizona of a shul, and then here he's been on the board numerous times. And my mom was always doing different tzedakah projects at work, because she works for the BJE. So they're always doing --

EB: What's her first name?

RC: Naomi.

EB: I know who she is.

RC: Oh really? That's funny. So she's always doing projects and things like that. And they've just always -- if you see someone who isn't as wealthy, they'll always talk to me about it. They've always been very vocal and talked about other countries and what's

wrong there and they'll cut out articles and read them to us, and about what needs to change in this country and that country and America. And my grandparents too have always encouraged us to give charity and to volunteer. My mom really wants me to go to Israel and volunteer over the summer or something. So I might do that one summer.

EB: With Ethiopian Jews?

RC: She doesn't want me to do it; she wants me to actually do it in a domestic violence shelter since that's what I'm interested in. So she said she could find me the connections down there, because she's down there so much. So it's always been a big part of my family. It's always been a very much talked about issue, helping others, tzedakah, all that. So that had been engraved in me to do that.

EB: And they lived it. They weren't just preaching, which is really important.

RC: No, they definitely lived it.

EB: And you lived it.

RC: Yeah.

EB: In terms of your role models then, I'm guessing you could say your parents? I'm wondering are there any other role models, Jewish, non-Jewish, women, men, I'm open.

RC: OK, certainly my parents, just because I grew up with them and they had very strong values and morals of how you treat people on the small level in your community and also nationally how you treat people, internationally. But definitely I think there are a few teachers that were role models at New Jew. Actually my favorite teacher Mr. Grossman, he left unfortunately. But he was certainly one of my role models. He came from a family like mine, became Conservative for similar reasons, some other reasons too, but for similar ones. We would just have great conversations. So he was certainly a role

model. There were a couple of teachers at New Jew that were like that. Since it was a small school, you had a very close relationship with your teachers. I'd also say probably at camp, some of my counselors were. I started going so young. You always look up to your counselors anyway, and they were always young Jewish girls. So they were certainly role models too.

EB: For activism or for just being a decent human being?

RC: I think just for being a decent human being. We would do like a project in the summer, raise funds or gather clothes, things like that. So we'd have little camp projects. So that definitely also set a precedent in my life. We even do it at camp.

EB: I don't think there's been a moment in your life that you haven't been involved, it sounds like, winter, summer, young child, wow, wonderful. All right. Here we go. If you can just tell your story in terms of your experiences in getting involved with antiviolence work?

RC: OK. I guess it all goes back to eighth grade. I started dating a boy. I dated him eighth grade through the end of 12th grade, so five years. And in eighth grade he was fine. We went to school together and things were pretty good. We were really, really young. And then when high school came he stayed at the school and went to the Carroll School through high school, and I left and went to New Jew. And that's when I started noticing problems because he didn't want me to make new friends, he didn't want me to talk to the boys. All those issues started coming up. He wanted me to spend all my time with him. Then in tenth grade things progressed some more and he stopped letting me take the bus to school, because there are boys on the bus. So he would pick me up at school and pick me up at my house and drive me basically every day. And he started also doing my clothing shopping because he didn't want me wearing revealing clothing or clothing that anyone else would like. So I had clothing at his house in his room that I was allowed to wear when I was dressed with him, like my normal clothing, and then I had my

whole other wardrobe of what he wanted me to wear, like, to school. So that became an issue and as time went on he isolated me more and more from my friends, from my family. He got me a cell phone, and at first it was really sweet. He wanted to be able to talk to me. And it became just like a leash, like I had to call him on the hour. If I didn't pick up it was a huge fight. I would have to leave class in the middle. I had to call him multiple times a day so I'd have to leave class and call him and just be like, Hi I'm at school, OK bye, have a good day. And just always had to be checking in with him. And I really stopped doing anything with friends. He made me stop participating in the school plays -- which I had been acting since third grade -- because it was taking up too much time and he didn't like that I was backstage with other boys. So this just went on and on and on. The calling, and he would get very angry, we would get into fights about if I was ten minutes late coming from somewhere, anything. He never became physically violent towards me but he became very physically intimidating towards me, like we'd get in fights and he'd punch holes in the wall right behind my head so it wasn't punching me but it was like, Take one more step and it'll be you. So he used definitely physical intimidation a lot and the main thing was starting in 11th grade probably, whenever I threatened to break up with him he would threaten suicide. So basically the second half of 11th grade and first half of 12th grade, every other night I'd be driving down to where he lived because his house -- it's like his house, his yard, and then there's train tracks. So he would call me up and be sitting on the train tracks and he'd say, Unless you come down here I'm waiting for the next train. So basically every night I would break up with him, tell him I didn't want to talk to him anymore, and then an hour later end up down in his town. So he had this great little cycle that he got me into of I was just too afraid that he was really going to do it. And then senior year I was always in peer leaders during high school, so we arranged different -- you had drug awareness week, alcohol, we had AIDS, we had all different weeks. And I knew that I was in a bad relationship but my friends, I only had probably like three or four best friends who were still even trying to hang out with me because I never could go out, and the few times I did he would go with me, and we would

just be fighting and no one could talk to me, if a guy looked at me he would go off on them. And so I really just had a couple friends that I'd known my whole life who were sticking by me. And I'd come into school every morning crying half asleep because I had spent the night in his town talking to him, trying to get him off the train tracks. And so they'd always be like the bad times outweigh the good times, you need to break up with him. And so I'd always be trying, but I never could follow through because of his suicide threats. So finally in 12th grade I brought up to the peer leaders that we should do teen dating violence awareness. And I knew that there was some other stuff going on in school that I had seen, that weren't good relationships either. So we started educating ourselves and that's when we called the Support Committee for Battered Women, which is now known as REACH. They just changed their name. And they came in and they trained the 20 of us as peer leaders on warning signs and the resources and what to do, how to help a friend, how to make an awareness week, everything like that. And during the training just everything, all the warning signs, isolation, jealousy, possessiveness, all the things were just oh that's me, that's me too, oh that's me too, wait, that's also me. So then senior year that's why I decided to do my internship with them. I wanted to go and work with them and learn more about it and kind of figure out what was going on, and since I've always helped people I thought that that would help me, too, to help them. So we ended up, peer leaders made a whole awareness week at school. We had statistics up, posters, we brought the Support Committee in. They did some discussion groups. They did a dating game which was supposed to show you dangers and things like that. That's just set up as a game so it's more interactive. And we got actually a pretty good response from the school. A lot of kids that you didn't think, because they're in Jewish school and everything, and no one thinks it happens there, but talking about it, bringing us questions. We made a little question box. You could drop them off anonymously and we'd answer them either through the school publications or just have -- we had Bet Midrash every Wednesday. So people made announcements or there was little discussion groups. So we would answer people's questions like that. Just is this right, I

don't know if this is right, it sounds like what you were talking about, things like that. So I went to the Support Committee, or REACH, I still call it that. I started working with them. I went through the 100-hour training program that they have so that I could start working in their shelter. The Support Committee has a 90-day emergency shelter. It has a 24-hour hot line. And then it has the outreach part of it and has all the office stuff too separate from the shelter. So first I started working in the office and I shadowed a couple people who were doing outreach. So we would go into schools, into camps, boys and girls clubs, anything like that, and do presentations to them about -- basically what they had come and done for me at peer leaders, about the dangers, the warning signs, what to do, all that. And just in every presentation I would leave and just cry to the people that I worked with, because I'd be giving examples. I'd be like, Well let's say this could be an example of jealousy. And then I would be giving a real example from me and it was just ringing way too clearly for me, keep presenting like that. And my coworkers recognized right away that I was in a bad relationship because my cell phone at work would be ringing every ten minutes. They're like, Who's that? I'm like, My boyfriend. Who's that? My boyfriend. So they'd figured it out within the first week. I was talking to them about it and talking about how I could get out of it. So I promised myself basically that I wasn't going to let myself continue to pretend that I knew what to do and everything and tell all these people what to do, and I was still in this relationship. So, but while I was there it bothered me that we never went into any shuls. We would go into churches, we would talk to the clergy members. We never went and talked to the rabbis. We never went and talked to the Jewish schools. We never went and talked to anything like that. So I started a huge outreach, I guess, to the Jewish community and I contacted all 50 synagogues in our service area sending them letters, sending them pamphlets, sending them resources, sending them posters, sending them more letters, calling them, just harassing them basically like, Listen, there's a problem. And I was so upset at the responses I got. Almost all of them the rabbis were like, It's not a problem here, it's not a problem here, thank you, it's nice that you're doing that but it's not a problem here, we'll

call you if something comes up, thank you.  And basically probably 47 out of the 50, that was the response.

EB: This is the last few years?

RC: Yes, this was my senior year, so that's two years ago.  You know: 'That's not a problem here.  Oh yeah, we know what domestic violence is.  No, it doesn't happen here.  No.  Thank you, though.  Keep up the good work, but it doesn't happen here.'  So I sent out more letters harassing them and everything.  And finally I got a bunch of them to start posting our hot line number.  And within weeks our hot line was bombarded with Jewish women calling.  I go to this synagogue, I go to this synagogue, I saw the sign, finally – blah, blah, blah.  And half of them would call up and they'd say, I went to my rabbi and he told me to just go home and work it out.  It's something that, you just need to keep the family.  And so then I would talk to these rabbis and they'd be like, It doesn't happen here, and I'm like, Well you know what, actually, our hot line is ringing off the hook with people calling from the synagogues that have the posters up.  And they still didn't really want it and some places were like, Well maybe we'll do a little education program but we don't want to make a big fuss about it, because then it'll seem like it's a big issue here.  And just a lot of resistance.  So I ended up continuing my internship from the end of senior year through that summer.  I kept working there and I worked in the shelter and I answered hot lines and I kept going with the shuls, and I contacted the Jewish youth groups, NCSY, USY, NFTY, what are the other ones, BBYO, contacted all of them to try to get programs in there.  And we ended up doing a couple mother-daughter Sunday events for shuls, which was good.  It wasn't the biggest turnout. Probably just 15 people, which was very good considering all the resistance that was put up.  Then freshman year I wasn't too involved with them because I was away at school. And during break I went back over last winter break and worked at the shelter and worked in the office some more.  Sent out more letters to the shuls, reminding them to contact us for more outreach.  I've gone to a couple more and done some programs.

And then last summer, the summer after my freshman year in college, I worked there again and I became actually staff, rather than just volunteer. So I had more responsibilities at the shelter and working with the women, and I started doing individual one-on-one counseling for people that weren't living in the shelter but that were living in our service area. And it just turned out that three of the women I was counseling were Jewish -- just randomly, they were Jewish. And so that became more obvious to me that it really is -- I knew it was a problem in the Jewish community, because I had been there. But it was just these rabbis, when they would tell me it wasn't a problem, I was so frustrated, I can't tell them who I'm working with, obviously, because it's all confidential. But some of the rabbis that I knew were their rabbis would be like, It's really not an issue here, we really don't need to bring it up and make a big deal about it at our shul. But you do and you don't -- and the rabbis didn't even understand it. And these women would come back and be like, He just told me to go home and think about it and not to break up the family peace, shalom bayit, everything like that. And so I'd always stress to them that the husband had broken the shalom bayit well before and filing for the divorce and everything like that they couldn't even do. First of all they can't have the get, they can't get the get, but that it wasn't wrong. And that was a huge thing to talk about with the women, the three women that were Jewish, because they had so much guilt in terms of breaking the marriage contract. And so I did the one-on-one counseling, which I loved, because I'm a psych major and so I want to do the counseling aspect too. And then that summer I also started working in the courts. We have an advocacy program and I would go into -- I think we're in Waltham, Woburn and Concord courts. So I worked in the Waltham courts three days a week for the morning, from like 9:00 to 1:00, and that's when all the emergency restraining orders come in. So I worked out of the DA's office as a victim advocate. Yeah, it was a very eye-opening experience, but I worked Monday, Wednesday, Friday mornings. And Monday mornings are always crazy because all the emergency ones from the weekend get put over into Monday, so you get the regular Monday morning ones plus all the emergency ones that are done by the police over the

weekend. And the office was just always flooded. I was always talking to multiple women at once, even guys. I realized how much more it's an issue for guys as well, how many guys came in saying their girlfriend or their wife did this. And sometimes it was even nastier stuff that the women would do, but it just became more real that it does actually happen to guys as well. Since I was in Waltham I got a bunch of Jewish people too who would come in, ask if there was a Jewish hot line they could call. And I worked with Kol Isha so I'd give them that hot line. I'd worked with Nicole Lesser. That's how I met her. So just working in the courts first I would sit down with them, talk to them, figure out what was going on, help them fill out all the papers to get the order. Then I'd go with them before the judge and they'd talk but I'd stand behind them and coach them, prep them before they go into the courtroom, what they're going to ask, what they need to tell, what's important, what to write on the affidavit, everything like that. And then the judge would ask me questions, what do I recommend, what do I see this as, things like that, so it's like this is clearly domestic violence, X, Y and Z, he needs to have no contact, no abuse, no whatever the order was going to be. So I'd help these people get these orders and they would always come in so frazzled looking, and by the time they'd left they just seemed much more calm. They had a court order for this person to stop. And it became really hard because I started noticing people coming in repeatedly. Like they would go home and the husband or boyfriend would call and they'd apologize, I'm sorry, I love you, I'll never do that again. And they would drop the restraining order. A week later they'd come back and say, 'He did it again.' So I was like, I know he did it again, this is a cycle, that's what's going to happen. And so I'd have to sit down with them again and talk them through it. And we had a whole resource book; there with diagrams of the cycle and the ways of abuse and the apologies and the remorse and how it builds back up and everything. And we'd give them our hot line number, obviously, and just help them through the whole process. So doing that definitely got me very involved very quickly into the field. And I love that work. I want to do victim advocacy work. I'm hopefully planning to go to law school to do that kind of work. Because I had a counseling piece in the office

before they went into the courtroom as well as in the courtroom, talking to the judge, helping them. And also a lot of the cases the abuser would come to the courthouse too, because they have the right to be there, and stand up there on the other stand, which is only ten feet away from the victim, and say that this is lies, that she does this to me, this and that, going on and on and on. And so that can be very hard for the victim. So I stand between them, and then the court officer stands between them also. But that's always extremely upsetting. The guy will start crying on the stand, talking to the woman, 'I'm sorry sweetie, I love you, I love you.' And I just have to keep being like, 'Remember what he did to you this weekend, remember what he did to you, remember what he did last week, remember what he did two weeks ago,' and just keep coaching them so that he can't get to her. I keep saying 'he' and 'she,' but there certainly were numerous, numerous men that came in, probably every other day there was a man, which I did not expect at all. I thought it was mainly going to be women. So there were many more males. And the judges were pretty good. They're used to our program being in there because it's part of the Support Committee's program. So they're used to the domestic violence advocates that come in, and they understand it pretty well, understand the cycle and everything like that and the dangers of it. So most of the judges were pretty good with their rulings and pretty understanding of the patterns and everything. And so that summer also I continued my outreach to the shuls, sent out more letters. I started actually making appointments to talk to people. I was like, Well, let me just come in and show you our material. They didn't really want me to but I started anyway, pushing myself in and going and talking to the youth coordinators at the shul, things like that. So we got a couple programs going, which was great. Going in there, and the first couple times the kids were very quiet about it and I noticed this also in some of the private schools, that they don't really want to talk about it. When we go into the city, into Boston, they're all raising their hands, [saying] 'My father,' yelling out stuff. And they know what's going on. They're ready to talk about it. They live in close quarters. But when you go into the Jewish community or the very private upper class community it's very closed

doors, very hush-hush, don't talk about it. But by the end of every training, I haven't done a single one yet where I haven't had people come up afterwards and make disclosures, this happens, my friend, my cousin, my boyfriend, me, my mom, whoever it was. And we got just as many by the end in the Jewish communities and the private schools as we did in the city. It took them a lot more time. And during the training they normally just sat there, really shocked that someone was actually talking to them about this, because they weren't used to that.

EB: It's a taboo. It's a stigma.

RC: Oh, it's very taboo. They're not supposed to talk about it. They're not supposed to know about it. So I think that summer -- since I had been out of my relationship then for about a year -- I started using my story in the training. So we do our whole 101 basically, teen dating violence, what it consists of, warning signs, factors, everything like this. And then I'd ask, 'So is this real, does this happen?' and a lot of times they'd be like, 'No, or it happens every now and then to stupid people or whatever,' and I'd be like, 'Let me tell you something, I'm a Jewish girl, I went to a private school,' and tell my story, then they're all like -- you just look around the room and they're all just totally shocked that this young girl is up there just being like, 'Well, this happened to me, so what are you going to say now?' And that was definitely a very effective tool. And people come up and it just created more dialogue. People would ask more questions about it. It was just easier I guess for them to talk about a specific incident, too. That makes it easier. And in the Jewish community it helped that I was Jewish, that I had done NCSY, that I had gone to Maimonides, and that I go to shul and I'm Orthodox. And it just brought it home to them that it does actually happen in the Jewish community and that the Jewish mothers -- when we go to the shuls for the mother-daughter thing -- would just be in awe that a Jewish girl was talking about this. They'd be like, 'This happened,' be whispering this happened to my niece. And it was so hush-hush.

EB: These weren't all Orthodox?

RC: These weren't all Orthodox, no, the whole spectrum. But just the way the disclosures came in, too, was different, that it was just -- it was very secretive. It was like, I have to talk to you in the corner and I have to talk quietly, no one can hear me. But when we went to the inner city it was yelling out in the middle of the thing, My boyfriend does this and my best friend's boyfriend does that, whatever. So just the way those came in even you could see that it's just extremely closed door. It's not talked about, it's not brought up, it's not OK to be brought up. So that was very impactful to tell my story. That opened up a lot more. And then over break this break I'm going to be going back and working there. I'm starting Sunday. I'm going to work in the shelter. I'm going to be contacting all the shuls again and trying to get some more programs in there, set things up for the summer. So we're going to try, I think this summer I'm going to work there also and I'm going to try to get into some of the Jewish schools and set up programs. Excuse me. I had started trying to contact them. They were a bit more receptive actually than the shuls because they'll bring in an alcoholic or something so they can do it under the thing of social problems. So that was getting in more with the schools so hopefully this summer I'll make some headway with that.

EB: But it's you alone doing this outreach to synagogues?

RC: Yeah, it's me and the office. I'm the one that's doing it. People that are doing outreach help me do the presentations and help me do all that. But I'm the one writing all the letters and calling them and harassing them and going to talk to them, because it's my project, basically, that I head.

EB: I still have to ask you. This happens to people all the time, and it happens, and then they move on. But for some reason there's something inside you that impelled you to take this out there and help other people. And I'm wondering if you can at all put your finger on what that is, what motivated this path for you?

RC: OK. I think it's a couple things. One is just that it's always been ingrained in me that when you want something changed, you change it. When there's a problem, you do something about it. My mother, even though she does the whole Orthodox woman thing, has my dad do Hamotzi and everything like that, she's a very strong woman, and when something's wrong she gets on the phone and she's the one who talks to them and convinces them and gets her way. So always seen my mother that when something's the matter, Dad doesn't need to take care of it, she can do it herself. And she's very strong and very outspoken, very well-spoken. So that was definitely always -- if you want something changed, you need to do it, because no one else is going to. And also just that during my whole five years people, the kids I was with didn't get it. They didn't understand because they just hadn't had the education. They knew that it wasn't right. They were like, But you're not happy. And I was like, I know I'm not happy. But they didn't know what to say, what to do or what it meant or what was really involved in it. And so they couldn't really help. And so that's why I want these kids to be educated so that when it happens to them or to their friends they can be more active. I had my couple, like three good friends who I called them every night, they'd be like, Call me when you get back, I know you're going to his house, call me, I just want to know you're OK. And that was great, but they didn't really -- that was the extent of what they could do, just because they didn't really understand the issue. It was never talked about. It was never brought to their attention before. And my mom definitely didn't like him. My parents hated him.

EB: They saw you driven to --

RC: Right. They saw it and they didn't like him at all. My mom would always -- when he would call me and I'd be cooking with her in the kitchen or something, and she could hear him just screaming at me about nothing, that I didn't call him, I was five minutes late calling him, whatever it was, the stupidest things. So she could hear him. She'd always be like, He has a really bad temper, you don't seem too happy. I was very moody for the last couple years of it and very -- and I would take it out on my parents, because either I

was with him or at my house when I'd be going to sleep. I couldn't be anywhere else. So I'd come home. They'd ask me a question. I'd be like, *I don't know!*, just because I'd just been with him for five hours and been yelled at. So they noticed a huge change in just my personality, because normally I'm very laid back and very calm and respectful and I just wasn't--. I was very edgy and very, just easily agitated. And so they would try to talk to me about it but I would just deny it to them. I'd be like, Leave me alone, I don't want to talk to you about it, it has nothing to do with you, stay out of it. My dad didn't really get involved in it too much but my mom was always like, I don't like him, he has a really bad temper. She would wait up for me whenever I'd go over to his house, and she lost a lot of hours of sleep over that, I know that. And she always just looked so worried when I came home and I would just be like, I'm fine, I'm going to bed. Now I feel really bad because --

EB: You're seeing on my face, being the mother of a teenager. Sorry about this.

RC: Oh no that's fine. And I know that it was hurting her the most of anyone in my family. Because she was trying. She knew that it wasn't right and she knew that I was a different person, that I wasn't happy, and since she was the one that was really harassing me about it, she was the one that I was the meanest to about it, I guess. I was more like, Just leave me alone, it's not your issue. Even though she'd wait up for me every night and try to talk to me I would just like go in my room, slam my door, get in my bed and just not want to have anything to do with her. And maybe if she had had more education she could have been a little more vocal, like, 'This is a warning sign,' and maybe brought it to my attention earlier. Because I knew it was a problem but I didn't know there was a name for it, or there were actual categories of jealousy, possessiveness, that his actions fit under. And the peer leaders, had they been educated maybe when I was freshman, maybe that would have helped cut it down by four years because I would have known all the warning signs, I would have had all that information. So I guess my main motive was just that the people around me when I was going through it didn't know what it was or

what to do or couldn't really help. My main support that I had to finally get out of it was at my job, because they knew about it. They're all educated in it and they could sit down with me and be like, ‘He did this, right,’ and I'd be like, ‘yeah,’ and they're like, ‘OK, this fits under this, do you see how that plays into this?’ And they could piece it all together for me, and I could see it all. So just having these other students that I can train and show them and give them actually an example that they can piece it all together for them when they had my story, they can place all the labels and the patterns we’re showing to them. When we do the DV101, I hope that they're going to be able to be more active when someone near them is being affected. I guess that's my main motivation.

EB: Thank you. That was really, really a great answer. You're doing wonderfully with these answers. I just want you to know. It's not easy. This next one's a real doozy. What role does your work play in how you define yourself, how you see yourself?

RC: Definitely see myself as an activist and very headstrong, very determined, very persistent. This field has always been pushed back by every community and finally some are being more open to it. And I guess I've always taken on challenges and I like challenges. So that might be part of the reason I've taken on the Jewish community, because it's such a challenge. I'm involved in it also. So that affects me. But I definitely would see myself as very active and very strong, equality for men and women, that's my biggest pet peeve. Couples, even if it's a healthy relationship, but the guy does all certain stereotyped roles and the girl does all the things. It bothers me. I have friends who, their boyfriend will sit there and watch football game and drink beer and we'll go do his laundry and cook him dinner. And I'm like, Aah! Make him get up and do something, you're not his servant! So I definitely see myself as, I guess, a feminist. I don't believe that women are higher than men, as sometimes in the feminist field that gets confused. But definitely just equal roles and equal rights. And just respect between your partner, your friend or whoever. So my work has definitely made me just more conscious of everyone. I analyze every relationship I see. And at school I work with a professor and I

do couples research with him, and so just coming from my field I can recognize all the manipulations and the mind games of the guys that are probably abusers. We code videotapes of couples' interactions and stuff. So it's made me just very aware and very active. When I just see someone, like one of the people that works in our cafeteria who swipes your card, I don't know what her name would be, the cashier basically, she one day came into work and she had a big black eye, and I saw her, and most people don't just get black eyes from nowhere. So all my friends kept telling me, they're like, Do you see that lady? Because everyone at my school knows me because I've spoken at my school and freshman year people would -- half my dorm ended up coming to me at some point, just talking to me. And so people would come up to me and just -- is it over? [re: the tape] Oh, OK. People kept coming up to me. 'Do you see that lady that's working in the cafeteria, look at her eye,' before I had seen her. And finally I saw her. I went up and talked to her. And I was like, 'You don't have to tell me anything, I just want to tell you that I noticed this, I have a hot line card, I always have them on me from my work.' I gave her a hot line card. I was like, I do this work. I've been in your situation, obviously. I didn't get a black eye, but if you want someone to talk to call the hot line, talk to me, feel free to. She talked to me a couple times. She called the hot line. And her boyfriend's in jail right now and he had gotten out and that's when she had gotten the black eye, but he's back in jail now and so I'm known as someone who knows this topic. My friends will come up to me and say, My aunt never comes to see us and her husband doesn't let her. Or there was an article published in the *Sharon Advocate* about when I was honored by the Celtics and I got people in Sharon, random people I didn't know, calling my house to talk to me that were just like, 'Hi, I have this daughter who's going through this, I understand you went through it,' or whatever. Just random people in Sharon who have never had someone who lives in Sharon who's a teenage girl, who's from a nice family, if they live in Sharon. I've gotten many calls, many many many calls just from that one article that was published, people being like -- some people just asking about it, but mainly people that were like, 'Yeah, this is going on with my daughter, it sounds similar, it

sounds similar to my mother,' whatever it is.

EB: With these phone calls, how do you respond, typically?

RC: I respond to them as if I would to the hot line, basically: give them resources, talk to them, counsel them, tell them what their options are, help them piece together that it's domestic violence, the different aspects of it, the cycle, everything like that. Give them the hot line number, tell them that I'm happy to talk to them or they can call this 24-hour, every day of the year, every second, there's someone there to answer their call. Tell them about shelters if they want to go into that, tell them about restraining orders if they want that. I take it like it's a hot line call, tell them all their options, tell them what they can do.

EB: Aside from the resistance from the Jewish community, what have been some of the greatest challenges for you?

RC: I think even though the article in Sharon was a blessing, because so many people were calling and asking about it, it was definitely hard for my parents, because it became so public and it was like, 'How did you let this go on in your house?' And they were happy that it was published, but I could definitely tell that they were embarrassed or ashamed or whatever it was that everyone knew then that this had been going on underneath their roof for five years. So I'd say that was the hardest thing just that I could tell that they didn't feel good about it.

EB: What about ever feeling hopeless? There's not less calls coming in, you know what I mean? The calls just seem to stay the same, I bet. Do you ever deal with hopelessness?

RC: Not really.

EB: Sorry I mentioned it.

RC: There are times when you're just like, ‘This is never going to end.’ But when I look at the women I work with individually and I see the progress they make, that gives me hope. And when I see the women in the shelters who then after the shelter get their own housing and get their kids back in school and get their new life back on track, that gives me hope. But there are definitely times when you have the repeat callers that are on the hot line or things like that, that you're just like, I don't know what else to do. Yeah, so that can be very frustrating but I just have to keep reminding myself look at the people that you have affected, you have gotten these hot line calls and these people have moved into shelters and these people have started their life over again, just trying to remind myself of that. But it's hard. There's definitely times when you're just like, I don't know what else to say to you, just leave, I don't know what else to tell you. And so it can be very frustrating.

EB: I'm sure you acknowledge the courage it takes to leave. And not everyone has it. Ultimately you can't force somebody to get help and get out. So they're self-responsible in the end.

RC: They certainly are.

EB: So the most rewarding part, I imagine that relates a little bit to what you said when, woman by woman, they get their life back on track. Could you talk a little bit more about rewards, what has been the most rewarding for you?

RC: Sure. Definitely the individual working that I've done, whether it's been the in court, like at the end of the day when I'm like I got ten restraining orders done today, ten women hopefully won't be contacted, won't be abused for at least the next year, whatever, they can renew their restraining order after a year. And I can go home and just be like, Whew, I know there's still millions of women out there, but I've helped ten today. And definitely my work that I met every week with these women for three months for the whole summer, May, June, July, August, to see their progress was just so rewarding that they'd come in

and some of them would come in and they'd just be so at wit's end, they didn't know what's going on or what to do or anything, and by the end just how much calmer they were and how they had a better understanding of it, and they were helping their kids understand it, and just that it's just so rewarding when you see people that really get it and that you've really affected. Two of the women filed for divorce and went through with their divorce, got the divorce. We got restraining orders for them and protective orders for their kids. And so that's a reward when you see these families that you actually got through to and who actually understood the cycle and understood and you could actually help them make that change and that movement, and also the women in the shelter obviously is extremely rewarding to work with them. Because they're the most desperate. They've left. They've gone into hiding, basically. It's a confidential location. They can't be contacted basically by anybody. So these are the ones that have the most volatile husbands or relationships. And just working with the kids, these two-year-olds who know what abuse is. Two-year-olds that if you slam the door jump and look around. And just seeing that, even infants that we've had in there, they'll start crying or you'll see their eyes darting around, and they can't even talk yet. And if someone raises their voice, they start crying. And we have a child specialist that works with them, the kids. And sometimes I would work with them, just to play with them, and they act out a lot of it in their play and just by the end of their – so they stay there usually for three months, 90 days, that they understand it more and they're like, 'Daddy did that, but not everyone does that.' And we have one male volunteer. It's mainly females that work there but just seeing him by the end --. At the beginning, most of them won't talk to him. They're very scared of him. By the end they can identify, 'Daddy did this but he's not going to do this just because he's a man,' or whatever. And just seeing people, I guess, understand what they're going through and have it pieced together for them is really really really rewarding when I can see that. The children are really hard. Yeah, that's the hardest part to watch.

EB: I think I understand how your work has affected others. Is there anything that you don't think you have said about the impact of your work on others?

RC: I don't think so. I just really think that it's trying to raise awareness for the people that aren't involved so that they can help people when they see it, and then to help the people that are in it get out of it, restart their life. I guess that would be the impact on people.

EB: How has being female affected your path toward activism? You did talk a little bit about being a feminist. So obviously the feminist movement, the women's movement has affected you, even though it was before your time in a sense that the women's movement began. Basically anything that you feel about being a female, because we understand males and females can be victims here. But you were a female victim. So there's something there.

RC: The prevalence is much higher that it's a male abusing a female. So I think that was just partially why I was targeted. That society stereotypes you as being the passive, do what the guy says, when he wants you to call him call him, when he wants you to wear something else wear what he wants you to wear, when he wants you to make dinner, make dinner. So definitely just the guys come into court and it's just as real for the guys, but it just happens much more to the females, it's just much more frequent. I think it's like one in five teenage girls by the time they're 18 will be in an abusive relationship. So just being a female puts you out there. One in five, think of your five closest friends, and then think of your bigger circle. There's probably 15 of you, so that's three of you. And it's not true for the males. It happens, but not nearly as often. And I just think that society sets that up for the abusers that this is OK, these women are supposed to respond to you, these women are supposed to do what you want when you want, be under your control, under your demand, and that that's OK.

EB: Men dominate women because they can and they can get away with it, usually.

RC: In society that's OK. And then it leads to this, and it's not OK. So I think that would be the biggest part of me being female is just that they're targeted most because that's

what they're set up to be. They're set up to be easy targets who aren't supposed to fight back, who aren't supposed to have their own opinion, want to do it their own way, want to have their freedom. They're supposed to depend on the man and listen to the man's orders. And that targeted group.

EB: Let's say a 14- or 15-year-old who's not a victim of abuse, isn't even in a relationship, they want to be an activist in any field—what advice would you give a person, male or female really, who wants to make a difference like you have? And what advice would you give, coming from what you've been through as an activist? What advice would you give to somebody?

RC: I would tell them first to get very educated in what they want to be an activist about from as many different angles as they can, from the people that are the professionals, the people that are in whatever they're trying to be an activist about, from the political standpoint, from the government, from their community, just try and get as much knowledge, I guess, about what they're trying to be an activist towards or for. And then just, I don't think you can be an activist in something you're not passionate about. I don't think it would be nearly as effective. You could try, but I don't think that you'd get your point across the same way. So choose something that you can either relate to from a friend or family or that you've seen so much that you're affected by it, something like that. Or if there's something in another country that you want to be an activist about, go there and be there and see the actual issue, don't just understand it from the newspaper and just make your activism on that, because what the people there have to say about it is going to be different than what the media here says about it. And I'm going to Nicaragua to do a community program this spring. And we're going there to build houses with this program Bridges to Community. And from here you can send them money, you can send them stuff, but going there I think is going to be a lot different to actually immerse yourself in the problem. So get the education and then actually get into it, get the ugly stuff basically. Go actually see it so you know what you're -- you have more of a

motive then. You have more of a passion when you've actually gone and experienced it.

EB: That's beautiful, perfect. We are coming to the end. Sometimes I don't hit all the right questions. So I always like to ask if there's something that you feel we haven't covered that captures something about you and your activism and the fact that you've taken risks on behalf of others. And it really hasn't been said yet.

RC: OK. So could you just ask it again?

EB: Yeah. I might not have elicited all the responses that you have wanted to offer. Is there anything else you'd like to say about what you have done, basically taking a risk on behalf of others? That's what you've done. Is there anything else that you'd like to say that you feel you haven't said yet?

RC: I guess just basically summing up what I've said, just that you have to take those risks for others because people didn't take them for me, basically. And they didn't know how. They didn't really know what risks to take. And I feel like now I know what my risk options would be, what paths I can help guide people down, and because I've come from it I can see it from their point of view and I can understand when they're scared or they don't want to do that because I'm like, 'I totally understand that, I wouldn't have wanted to either, so let's talk about this option, would you be more comfortable with this?' So I just really think that you have to take those risks, because hopefully those people once they're out of the situation will be able to look back and people around me didn't know enough, I want them to know more, and hopefully they'll educate people. And it'll keep spreading, have a ripple effect. I came from there, I turned around, I'm helping you because people didn't help me. You're going to get better, turn around, help people because people didn't help you. [phone rings] My brother will get it, I hope. So I guess just you have to take the risks if you're going to have that ripple effect and that's what I think you need to have to really try and resolve an issue. I don't think I'm going to end domestic violence in my lifetime or anything like that, but just if I can spread it out to my

community.  That's why I've targeted the Jewish community so much.

EB: Something in there.  I have a follow-up question actually.  Let's say someone who has not been involved with domestic abuse or teen violence, intimidation of any kind, they've had smooth relationships, they've had no relationships, who knows, can they be as effective as you in the same work?

RC: I think they could.  There's definitely a certain power in being able to tell my story and use that as a tool.  But again I think that if they get involved and they go work in a shelter and they actually get down and see the people that are in the relationships that they could be as effective.

EB: The other women at REACH for example, are 100% of them people who've been through similar experiences to the people they're counseling?

RC: No.  I'd say in the 90 percentile you'll have been affected in some way, whether it's been a sister, friend or cousin, they've seen it somewhere basically.  And I think in this field almost everyone can think of some relationship that they can try and use as an example.  And I think really to be effective that you just have to get into it, you have to go and actually work in the shelter and really see what they're trying to advocate for.

EB: You know how some people actually think well unless you've been this, this, this, this, this you can't help someone who's been this, this.  Well how many people have all those five things, you're gay and you're black and you've been abused and in a wheelchair or whatever the case may be?

RC: I don't think you need to personally live it but I think you need to live it in a sense that you go and you're among the people that are personally living it.

EB: Yet the credibility factor might be greater for someone who has been there.  I would have to agree with that actually.  I couldn't say it's not true.  Your future, you've got the

psychology, you've got the law, you've got this activism, you continuing?

RC: Oh yeah.

EB: There's only one direction now, that's just more.

RC: Yeah. I hope to go to law school and probably do some sort of counseling program also. I guess my ideal job type prospect would be kind of like what I did this summer, doing one-on-one counseling with domestic violence victims and then helping them through their court case. I don't know if I want to actually be an attorney but more of a victim counselor or victim advocate. So not just doing restraining orders but taking on a full case and being the caseworker more.

EB: This is off the record in a way. Ever consider becoming a judge or becoming someone in the legislature who makes and amends and maybe makes the laws even better than they are to protect women and other victims? Have you ever thought of that end of the system?

RC: Yeah, I've thought about it. I don't think I could ever be a judge because I'm way too biased. I would be way too biased. So I wouldn't do that. But I'd certainly love to get involved with the laws, because the laws aren't nearly where they should be. They're not developed to any degree. They're as basic as they can possibly be, as they can possibly get away with. There are so many loopholes. It's so basic. Most people don't even get in trouble for this. They have written on their record they've had a restraining order against them. That's it. And I don't know that much about politics and how all the legislature works, I've had the classes and I've gone to Washington but that's definitely something that interests me that I would like to work on -- I don't know if I'd want to be in the legislature, but more of an activist to them proposing things to them. Like I proposed to my high school the summer after I graduated when I was working at the Support Committee. I proposed to them a new part of their code of conduct to include teen dating

violence and specific repercussions and things like that because the school didn't have that. And there was a couple in the school that had had problems and the school just didn't really respond. And I responded because the school didn't respond. But to get that. And they didn't want to put it in. I had written a long proposal and a long -- exactly what the procedures would be and everything, and they didn't accept that. They were like, 'It makes it seem like there's a big issue here.' It's a Jewish school. It's a private school. That whole thing again. But they did put a little clause in about it, so just --

EB: It's a beginning. Because often from my point of view as an anthropologist and an older person, there's changing people's ideas through education and contact with them, and then there's changing systems. And obviously you have to change victims' ideas. You have to change their friends' ideas, and I understand that. But if the system doesn't back that up, it's kind of an uphill battle forever. And that's why this is off the record, but I can't help but respond as a person, there's both. You have to work here or here, wherever it is, and you have to work in the system. But the system is big, and in the meantime, if you wait for the system, then you have women dying. And I'm wondering about that too, if you ever had at REACH or anything else it get so bad that you've had deaths?

RC: There has been a fatality, and it's more in the courts that I've seen it. There was I think one person this summer that was killed. They got the restraining order and then took it off for whatever reason. [Whispers] So the system definitely needs work.

EB: So that might be you.

RC: Yeah, I might go that path as well.

EB: Well, I'm ready to wrap this up. I do have to take a picture and maybe talk about some of your artifacts. But I'll turn this off.