Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Paulette Becker

SUMMARY

Paulette Becker shares stories from her deep friendship with Jewish community members Robert and Sonia Hemberger. She explores the importance of embracing diversity and understanding that differences among people are natural.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Could you state your name, please?

Paulette Becker: I'm Paulette Becker.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: And can I have your consent to record this interview?

Paulette Becker: You absolutely can.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thank you. What is your connection to the Jewish community or to Fiddler on the Roof?

Paulette Becker: Well, I would say I. When I was a young woman, I was married to a Navy pilot who later gave flying lessons. And we had a opportunity to meet Robert and Sonia Hemberger Robert was a prominent doctor in San Diego, where I grew up, and he ended up having an accident on a small plane in the flying club that we were members of in Costa Rica. And my husband at the time volunteered to fly down with him and I going down to Costa Rica to pick up this airplane, a small aircraft. That was the beginning of our relationship with Bob and Sonia Hemberger who later became very, very dear friends. Very dear friends. And um, when we had our first child, which was a boy, um, we were doing a lot of flying at the time. And, um, I had asked Bob and Sonia Hemberger if my husband and I were killed together, would they take our babies? At that time, I just had one and they readily said, yes. We'd love to have your children, if that's what you want. So we said yes. Absolutely. Um. They remained dear, dear friends of my husband and I for all the time that they were alive. Doctor Hemberger was a prominent pediatrician who was working on a cure for anaphylactic shock in children. He was lecturing all over the world, and my husband and I visited them in Spain when he was in Madrid, when he was on a sabbatical. Our connection stayed strong throughout our life, even though my husband and I are not Jewish, but we love them so much.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Oh how lovely.

Paulette Becker: I get teary-eyed thinking about it because not only did we have that connection, but later on, um, I wanted to apply for graduate school in nursing, and Doctor Hemberger's sister was my professor and a mentor to me all the way through graduate school at University of San Diego. And so our relationship was lifelong until they all passed. And I still remember the joy of all of those people in my life. So I just want to honor them. They were great people.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thank you so much for sharing that.

Paulette Becker: You're welcome.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Is this your first time seeing Fiddler?

Paulette Becker: Well, other than the movie. Yes. Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Do you remember seeing the movie the first time?

Paulette Becker: Yes.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: What was the first time you saw it?

Paulette Becker: Oh, gosh. It was probably, I graduated from high school in 1960. I don't know when it came out. It seemed like a lot of musicals were coming out. Probably when it first came out, would that be 62 or 63?

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: I feel like I should know, but I don't [Laughs].

Paulette Becker: I think, you know, because we were getting West Side Story and South Pacific and, uh, you know, East West Side Story and all that was coming. They seemed to be coming, um, quite close together. So I don't, I don't really remember, but I remember I was a young woman. I'm 82 now. It was years ago. But I love the music. The music is captivating. I have the record of, you know, the one of the original records. Now that people are record collecting again, which is great. Um, but yeah, the music is wonderful. And yeah, I feel very sad that there's so much people in the world that don't understand that this hatred of people of different beliefs or religion is, we're all human, you know? And if you get to know people, you realize that. And I spent part of my nursing career in Saudi Arabia. And, um, you know, I got to appreciate Muslims. And when that whole group was, you know, after 9/11, there was so much hatred for that. I think the same thing now is recurring with the Jewish population. And I'm just very sad about that. In my lifetime, to see that kind of hatred grow up again. We need to be aware that people can be different. It's all okay. It really is. It doesn't have to be that all of us are the same. You know, I'm. I grew up in California, and I thank God I did, because that is a very liberal state, and I never grew up with a lot of prejudice, which is great. And I knew enough people, uh, in my nursing career too. We work with all kinds of people and they're all okay. And that's what I want people to understand. As long as people don't shove their ideas onto you or create harm or hurt you, then just enjoy differences. That's what I would say.

Ruth Kodish-Eskind: Thank you so much for sharing that.

Paulette Becker: You're welcome.