Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Deborah Calderon

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SUMMARY

Deborah Calderon reflects on her childhood in Tacoma, where her mother's illness led her to spend much of her early years at the temple, which became both a playground and a central place of comfort and community. She describes her father's role as a rabbi and how his dedication shaped their family life, offering both deep involvement in congregational responsibilities and meaningful personal support. Calderon also discusses the complexities of growing up as a rabbi's daughter, including public scrutiny, community expectations, and navigating occasional prejudice as a Jewish girl in a predominantly non-Jewish environment. She concludes by reflecting on her family's diverse background and expressing hope that future generations in Tacoma will experience strong, supportive rabbinic leadership and close-knit community ties.

Eleonora Anedda: Okay, so today is the 5th of November 2021. My name is Eleonora Anedda, and I'm interviewing Debbie Calderon on behalf of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. So, Debbie, how are you?

Deborah Calderon: I'm just fine. [laughs]

Eleonora Anedda: All right, so just to start, would you like to tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Deborah Calderon: Sure. Um, I'm from Tacoma, obviously. Um, I was, I, I had a fun childhood. I mean, my brother and my older brother and I, um, would hang at the temple with my dad. My mom, when my youngest, my mom was pregnant with my younger brother, she got sick. She had hepatitis. At that time, they didn't know what hepatitis was. So she was, um, couldn't take care of herself during her pregnancy. She had a tough time and after she had my younger brother. So my older brother and I spent a lot of time at the temple, which was the temple that was right across from Rights Park. It was a brick. I remember it being a brick. Building is gone now. It's now a parking lot, and we used to walk through Rights Park and my brother David, my older brother and I, my dad would give us money and we'd buy candy and come back and we'd hang out at temple was like a playground for us, and we'd explore the whole building and we would, um, I just remember going into a secretary's office and playing with the adding machine had this- you push all the buttons and you would, um, there was a lever and you'd play with it, and it it was a fun time for me, you know, during those years, and but, I was very lucky because at that time my dad worked a lot. and so we were able to hang out there and so that was, you know, I, I have fond memories of that. As we got older, my mom, you know, after my younger brother was born, we spent more time at the house and dad was in and out a lot because he, the temple was really important to him. Not that we didn't get attention from him. He was a great dad. But the temple got a lot of attention, more than you know. It was different. So I was very, I felt very lucky in the early years and he used to drive me. I took ballet and he would drive me to ballet every, on my days. I had, he'd pick me up from kindergarten. I remember him taking me to ballet, buy me a doughnut and doing that. And I mean, it was an easy- it was an easy and tough childhood because when you're a rabbi's kid, they, um, anything you do is, you know, especially in a small city, everybody knows. And you're- we all went there, all lived in the north end of Tacoma. My friends. Anyway. Yeah. In our younger years. And so we did everything together. And someone was bound, some parents got bound, you know, if you did something right or wrong. And the rule in our house was, whatever you did, we're not going to scream and yell at you. We may not be happy with you, but please, I don't want to hear it from someone else. So it was it was fun. It was crazy. But also, you were also always under a microscope. And I'm sure any clergy kid would probably tell you that.

And that was really, really tough at times. So that- but in a nutshell, it was fun. We were very tight. We were very we had fun. My dad was the type of man who, because he was young, he was. He loved playing with, he loved the kids, he loved the families, he did camps and he loved to sing. He was totally I mean, I'm tone deaf. My dad was worse than me. Um, he loved to sing. Um, if you ever- I don't know if you've ever interviewed Julie Morrell. She was the cantor at our temple, Rabbi Morrell's wife in Tacoma. Uh, he was the Seattle rabbi. And she sang at our temple, and she she would just smile and my dad would sing with her because he was so tone deaf. And she had such a gorgeous voice. It was very funny to hear, but he just, you know, he just loved being a rabbi. And, um, we and for us, we didn't know any different because we're in a small city that until I got into BBYO and stuff like that, I didn't know that, I mean, I was always Debbie Rosenthal, Rabbi Rosenthal's daughter. All of a sudden, as I came into Seattle, that was probably the hardest for me because I wasn't Rabbi Rosenthal's daughter. I was one of other people who had fathers who were rabbis, too. I was not- It was different, but it was hard, um, being in Tacoma. The hard part was, is there were very few Jews there. You know, we all are. All my friends were Jewish until I got into school. And then once I was in school, my friends were all over the place, and then I was the Jewish girl and the Rabbi's Daughter and among many kids were, um, Young Life, which is a Christian organization, was very provident. And, um, my family got phone calls that at that time in Tacoma, there was a lot of prejudice against Jews and probably, I'm sure, the blacks and blocks and everything else at that time too, but I wasn't as aware of that as I was the Jews and my parents, you know, was before caller ID it was before, um, you know, you didn't know who was calling into the house. You just got a phone call and we got threats. You know, I remember answering the phone, we're going to kill you. We're going to come get you, and my dad was a Holocaust survivor so at that I was well aware of that. And it was scary. And I remember my parents looking at me knowing one of these phone calls came in, I was fairly young and saying, hey, just hang up the phone, just hang up the phone. And those, you know, we got those calls and, you know, it was scary at that time. And it was strange in school, these kids that were my friends through elementary and junior high, all of a sudden in high school become very active in Young Life. And they were doing their activity, which I wasn't part of because you just didn't- I wasn't I was Jewish and I wouldn't want to be, but also it was them and us, you know, at that time and it was hard to be the different person at that time trying to fit in, you know, high school, junior high to fit in but not fit in. That was really tough. In fact, I talked to my friends who I'm still friends with from those days, the non-Jewish ones. And we've talked about it because they understand a little bit more about me now as a, you know, because we can talk as adults. We're not a bunch of kids anymore. That was really hard. That's where I'm sure my brothers would probably say the same thing. That was hard to be that different kid. And each of us, um, did different things through junior high and high school to either act out or or try and fit in during that time, which was a tough time because it's still a small, it's now it's a bigger city. But that time it was a big city but it's it was a small city. And and we were even smaller community among those because Tacoma wasn't a huge city at that time. But I had a- I mean, I had an easy childhood and a tough childhood, I should say, because of that. And I'd be surprised if any other, unless they were maybe Orthodox, it was a little different because a lot of them, the Orthodox community went to the Orthodox, you know, the Jewish schools and stuff. We didn't have that in Tacoma, you know, so it was different. And, um, it was hard being different. You're trying to fit in and that was really hard. But my parents always made us feel like we were important. We were loved. We were, um, part, you know, they made sure we are part of something. Like I did ballet all the way through. That was my thing. I was extremely shy as a little kid. My mom decided I needed something and I danced all the way through college, so that was something I did and that was who I was. And if you talk to any of my friends, they'd say Debbie was a dancer. You know, that was who I was. My older brother was an incredible writer and and he had that, he did that. I think my younger brother was just wild. I mean, my for anyone that said Bob Rosenthal, they'd say he was fun, he was crazy, and to the day he died, he was just a fun, crazy, wild kid. Adult- as an adult, too. He took a lot of chances and had a great time, loved life and lived it to its fullest. So each of us had different things and each of us took a part of my parents and, um, I, I, I can see things my older brother does and his kids do, and even my younger brother's kids, and I see them and my in my parents in who they are as an adult now. So it, but as a child, you know Tacoma is a unique unit. Another thing is it's very unique. We as a Jewish community, they they kept us involved. You know, after we went through Sunday school together, many of us lived in the north end of Tacoma. Some lived in Lakewood area. As time went on, but we did things together. Our parents were tight. So we did a lot of family stuff. High holidays, my parents- another thing is my parents were from the Northwest. My dad came from Germany to London to New York and ended up in Shreveport, Louisiana, and that's where. And he went to school. He met my mom in Missouri. My mom's from Rockford, Illinois, and went to Stephens College, and it was an all girls school in Missouri. They met, got married and ended up in Tacoma, Washington, which I didn't even know where Tacoma was when my dad took that pulpit. They didn't even understand and did never expect it to stay all those years in Tacoma. And so we didn't have family there. So our family was the Tacoma community. And we we had High Holidays where, um, people who were part of the community who I called aunt and uncle, but were really my aunt and uncle. They were my adopted aunts and uncles. So when we did Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, we, um, and Passover, any Jewish holiday, we'd have, uh, 30 people in this little house. My parents did not have a big house full, it was wall to wall of people who were adopted by my parents, who didn't, you know, that didn't have other family. And so we we had all these adopted people who had become very close to to this day, I, I still talk to them like our aunt and uncle, even though they're not. And they were my adopted family, so I didn't know what it was like to have family near me. And so the that was my family, and that's what Tacoma was. And my parents adopted, and I think they were very happy there. And so we we grew up in this community where these kids that I went to Sunday

school with and I went to youth group with became my family. So when we went beyond Tacoma, a lot most many of us went to University of Washington and um, we still kept that closeness. And people would say to us like, "I was an '85, my brothers were in the fraternity and sororities," And they say, "I don't get it. How you Tacoma people always seem to find each other?" And we could be at a party and you'd see a circle of Tacoma kids together, and it was like or some would say, "How do you know him?" Oh, he's from Tacoma. You know, they don't even. And to this day, you know, all these years later, someone will say to me, "Well, how do you know him and her?" And I'll go, "Well, I grew up with him. He's from Tacoma." And oh, well, that's it. It's the Tacoma you know, thing. And it's that generation. It's kind of funny. It's I don't know why we have that unique relationship. Um, uh, my brother's group, my older brother group, David's group. Um, he's 64, 65-ish, and his group, the guys that are two classes above his and the guys that are one class below him, there's got to be like 15 of them that go to Vegas once a year. It's all these guys that grew up- and they live all over the world. So not everybody lives in- most don't live in Seattle and couple live, you know, on the East Coast couple. One guy lives in Europe, but they find a way to do this, and most of them come. And we as girls, we all talk and we see each other different. I'm a younger group. My younger brother who passed away, his group of friends from ZBT and the boys grew up with including a couple non-Jewish get together on the anniversary date of his death and do a drink at his, I mean, it's it makes me it just warms my heart. They they do something he would have love, and they go out to this little elaborate dinner because that's what he loved, you know, was being with his friends. And, um, I don't know, it's just, it choked me up, but, um, it's, um, just a unique group of people, and we're very warm, and we all care about each other a lot, so, most of us are still around, and if someone comes to town, we call each other and say, hey, let's get together and we get all of us together again. It's just amazing. I just feel really lucky, you know, to have these people in my life. Many of my friends don't have that. And it's- I don't know if it was my dad, um, who felt it was important to to all of us to be close. He did these little Tacoma camps for the high school that he, him, and another person would, um, take all this group of kids to one of the camps around. Um, they would rent a camp and do all these fun activities and sometimes the Seattle kids, you could sign up if there is room and a couple Seattle kids would come. And we spent a full weekend of these, these ninth, I think it was ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th graders with my dad and one other adult, which I can't believe. And, um, we would have a blast. I mean, it wasn't really religious stuff we did, we just hung out and did things, and that was important for him to see Jewish youth getting together and just having fun and and this companionship and I think that really and he because he was part of that, he always made sure he was there. I mean, he gave up a lot of stuff to be there that I think that brought us all close so that I have this unique, these unique memories of that. So that was really fun. But on this, like I said, on the tough side, was being the rabbi's kid. I was on a microscope and I wasn't always perfect. [laughs] And, um, my I, my mom would go, okay, what did you do? So and so called. And basically it was if my daughter did what your daughter did, you know, that kind of stuff. And my mom, I'd have to say, you know, say, well, you know, you know, and it was a time when, you know, there there was a lot of drugs and drinking, you know, and stuff like that going on and I wasn't perfect and I used to say my, my young older brother was Mr. Clean Jeans. He was the perfect one, and my younger brother obviously wasn't. So I was lucky I, I did the grounds that my parents, anything my brother did, I was like, oh, I, you know, it was fine. Um, but David made it easy. My older brother made it easy. I could go to a lot of parties. All I had to say is, "Oh, David's going to be there," because he was always perfect, whether he stayed for five minutes or not, and left because he probably didn't stay very long. I could always say, "Well, David was there." which helped. And my friends would say, "Rabbi, Rabbi said Debbie could go", and so my friend Betsy, her parents would always say, "Well, if Debbie's there, then you can go." It was very funny. It's like it was funny that my two of my friends would, um, it never mattered that as long as I was there, my parents said yes. Okay, Debbie can do it. We. Who knows what went on? I mean, it was crazy, but, um, especially the Seattle parties, because we drive to Seattle, go to a party and drive back, um, or we'd stay at one of the girls houses. But it was a, you know, it was. It was a different time. It was easy. It was easier in those days, I think, than I watch what my kids went through and stuff. But he also we also, um, just took things for granted. So I, you know, but I can say growing up the temple was it was my playground. I mean, I spent a lot of time there in the afternoons because, um, we taught as soon as you were confirmed, you were teaching Sunday school or teaching Hebrew, and we made a dollar a lesson. And I used to say, "You're so cheap, dad." But, you know, we all did it because we had fun together. We didn't care. You know, we'd go after school and we'd go do Hebrew lessons, and then we'd go to the local Herfy's, the hamburger joint together or whatever, or go for a drive. Um, and that's what we did. All of us group, we get in a car and we'd go places and do things or go to the local fun places in high school and even my proms, I, I went with a guy from Seattle, Jewish guy, and, um, my best friend went with another Jewish guy from Seattle, and we went to prom together at our prom, and everybody knew the Jewish girls were going with, you know, that's the way it was, and we went to parties afterwards with our friends, our friends houses and introduced the guys that we were with to these girls and are these kids that we hung out with in high school, a whole different group. That's just how it is. You never thought any different until I came to, you know, college, um, where things were a little bit different. It was really, uh, the group I hung out with were my mostly my Jewish friends and a small group of my non-Jewish friends. But I was the Jewish girl. It was always the Jewish girl. And that that was, I think, back now as an adult, because I sent my kids to Jewish schools. Um, that was weird. When I think back about it and I see what's going on, some of it and I see comments people make, and I want to say, you guys don't know what it was like being different, even though I don't look different, I think different. And you guys did think of me as different. That part was hard because it was, I was still different from a lot of most kids. I mean, I graduated with 800 students. Three of us. Betsy. Dena. Yeah. Three of us were Jewish. In my whole class. So that's my- and this was a high school that had the

majority of the Jewish kids. So you can see how small group we really were compared to the whole the whole city. Tacoma didn't- I think there are 500 families in Tacoma, Jewish families when it's a pretty good size. And now there's even less. So at least less that are active in the Jewish community. As far as I know, I'm not as I get the their newsletters, but I'm not as active. But, you know, those days were different. It was a whole different world.

Eleonora Anedda: Thank you for sharing all of this. It's-

Deborah Calderon: -It was I think I was all over the place. I'm sorry.

Eleonora Anedda: Oh, no. I was following you. Um, so, um. What what was your, um. I actually, I have two questions. First one is, um, what do you think makes the community in Tacoma so special? Um, and then the other thing is, what was your neighborhood like?

Deborah Calderon: Okay. My, uh, the reason it made us, I think, so special is, um, if there's only one Jewish community in Tacoma at that time, you- well, the second one was at Fort Lewis, there was usually an orthodox or conservative rabbi in Fort Lewis. And so but that's a whole, that's the military and then there was our temple. There was nothing else in Tacoma. So if you wanted to be- raise your children Jewish or be part of a community, you had to join this temple. So that was unique because we had people. My dad had in this early '60s, taken a two, two different synagogues and merged them together, and I want to say conservative and I know reform. So you had two communities that never talked to each other and but neither could afford a rabbi on their own, and they had to merge, and somehow he did it. He was raised reformed as a child, but when he lived in Shreveport, became very close to an Orthodox rabbi. So he was more religious than your typical reform rabbi to begin with. So and he because his first language was German, he learned English as a child and then he moved to England and had to learn it and beyond. He could pick up languages very easily, and he self taught himself Russian when the Russian families came, he Hebrew was- his Hebrew- when I talked to Rabbi Kornfeld, who's the one of the Hasidic rabbis here, he used to tell me that, "Your father, I loved studying with her father because he was so he just knew so much and as a reform rabbi, it was very unusual." Which I didn't take it as an insult, which it could have been, but to a lot of reform rabbis. But they were very tight. And he, he did have he had a lot of respect of the other rabbis because he was so intelligent and he always wanted to learn. So he took that intelligence and all that, that stuff he wanted to learn and and his compassion and brought it into the temple as a group. And I think, um, as a community, his warmth and his, he was just a soft spoken, warm person and everybody thought he was their best friend. I mean, if when you talk to Harold, Harold will tell you that, um, these are people that were more my, you know, Harold's like, between my parents and me, he's maybe ten years younger than my mom, and he felt like he was part of our family. Harold was raised by his mom and grandma, and my dad would go over there and sit with his grandma and eat all the crap that she would make, whether he liked it or not, and he ate it and smiled, you know, and that's who he was. He never complained. He never. I mean, even as a child, as if we were bad, he once in a blue moon would yell at us. But he really, really I mean, my- a good example is my brother Bob would love to be the, you know, the devil's advocate. And I remember when, um, Nixon was running for president and he decided that he was a Republican and he loved Nixon, and my dad would just sit and argue with him and listen to him and my brother would just argue and argue just for the faith, just to argue with my dad. And my dad would just smile, you know, and he'd he'd have these conversations, or if we have a fight at the table, you know, he'd get mad for a minute, you go downstairs with his plate and he'd come back up and we'd all be laughing. You know, it's because it just didn't make sense. That's who he was, you know, a nd we still things like that, he just smiled at all of us. And he did that with people. I mean, we every kid has the bad, you know, in Sunday school or anything else or in school. You always had the the kids that were always bad or always good and he would take the kids that were always bad and put them and wrap them around his finger and work with them and he never, there were no grudges so and and on top of it, our parents were very close friends, so all of us kids were always together, um, almost like family and we became a family. And I think it helped that, that my parents had kids, you know, young kids, so all of us kids grew up together at, you know, different stages and, I mean, an example is, um, when we were in BBYO Tacoma did Beau Ball, which made it into a full weekend, and everybody from all the other cities would come from Portland and Seattle and from Salem, you know, all over Oregon, all over Washington. They come to Tacoma for this Beau Ball which was at our temple. It wasn't anything, you know, in the social hall, but we all got dressed up the night before, there was always a before party, and there was an after party at someone else's house and after the before party, they would teepee a house and I remember my brother and the guys that were staying at our house, I was asleep, the girls didn't do this, we'd go, went to someone's house, tp'd the house, and the dad caught him and they had my little brother, who was a little kid at the time, in the car and the guy disconnects the battery of my brother's car and he says, "Now you guys can't go anywhere, I'm going to call your parents." And also he looks and sees my younger brother in the car and he goes, "You even brought the little one?" You know, and it was really funny. And then he put everything back together and said, "Okay, you guys go home and call your parents tomorrow." But it was- and they made him clean it up the next day. But it was funny because, you know, these older kids, you know, high school kids bring this little, probably fifth or sixth grader with them to help them do all this stuff. And that's all the different ages and how close we were to doing stuff like that, you know, and if and if we drive to Seattle for basketball games, they used to play at the JCC and all the Tacoma kids would meet at the temple and go in

each other's car, and, and all the girls would come to hang out with the other girls and the boy- the guys would go and play basketball and that was just who they were. They just had a blast. It was really fun. Just and we like I said, we all have the history and most of us went to college here too. In those days, you didn't really unless you had a lot of money, you know, you didn't look at it. I mean, I didn't even think I could go to another school. I, I was raised that when you go to University of Washington, You know that's what you're going to do, I didn't and I didn't know people didn't go to college, which was really odd because both my parents were college educated. So I think now when I as I raised my own kids, I never thought about that kids didn't go to college or that, you know, that's just the way it was, and my parents gave up a lot to make sure they could have put away money so we could go to college so that, you know, my parents, in those days, they didn't pay rabbis very much money. They didn't buy rabbis houses like they do now. It was a lot different. And, um, I, we we didn't know any different, you know, that's just the way it was. So in the neighborhood I was raised in, it isn't like Seattle, where you have the Jewish neighborhood, you know, the my husband grew up in Seward Park, which is where most of the Jewish, the Orthodox Jewish, he was raised Orthodox Sephardic. Um, his family wasn't strictly orthodox, but he was raised in the Sephardic synagogues, and he has a huge family there. It's huge. My daughter went to Yeshiva High School and it was like, oh, which Calderon are you? You're related to me, and Rochelle would come home and say, "I met another cousin. Mom, how many am I going to have to meet?" You know, where in Tacoma, I was in my neighborhood. It was us. And then behind the house, behind us was someone else in the congregation that had little kids that I babysat, um, we were all in the North End. We could ride our bikes, many of the Jews lived in the North End, I should say, and we could ride our bikes to each other's houses in different parts of, you know, we were probably five or six miles away from each other at different times, but it wasn't like the neighborhoods you see now where what you see in Seattle, I should say, in other big cities where there is a prominent there's a big Jewish community in one spot, and then people are kind of around the area, depending how they are. Um, I mean, like right now I think about I live in a neighborhood where my next door neighbors are Jewish right now. The house I live in now, and there's probably about six or seven people within a really short radius. They're all Jewish. We we know, know each other. We don't do a lot together. Whereas where I grew up, my neighborhood was not, there are very few Jews in my neighborhood, but it was close to, you know, my dad could, he could ride his bike to the temple. We were more looking at the school, I think my parents and what they could afford. So, um, but they're I don't know if there was an actual, quote unquote, Jewish neighborhood. So it was more just a middle class, um, North End, you know, Tacoma neighborhood. There was nothing special about it.

Eleonora Anedda: I see. Um, so I think you talked a little bit about this, but I just wanted to ask you, could you talk more about your family history?

Deborah Calderon: Um, like my parents history or-

Eleonora Anedda: -Yeah. Yeah, whatever.

Deborah Calderon: Okay. Well. I'll start. Um, my dad was born in Uelzen, Germany, which is not far from Frankfurt. So, um, he, you know, is he left Germany. He was, uh. Right. Well, the thing is, the story is, um, right after Kristallnacht, um, his father had been beaten up and left for dead and him and his sister were actually at an aunt's house at that point in Frankfurt, because they were supposed to get on a boat to Israel. The kids, they were trying to get them out of Germany. My grandfather somehow, a soldier who knew him changed clothes with him, so he had on a German uniform and got him to Frankfurt, to this aunt's house where my dad was and his- my grandma, I guess to the day she died, they did not know how she got to the aunt's house, but she was there too. Instead of going to Israel at that point, they went- a few days later they went back. They had a store in Uelzen, which was like like a department store. It had a little of everything, and they sold everything they could and because my grandfather's brother lived in England, they were able to get to England. And this was 1941. I mean, it was late in the war. So, um, my, my dad at that time was already out of school. He was wearing the band. Um, he was he was beaten up at times. He was the Jewish boy. So he left and went to England and lived with my great grandparents were already there. They all the rest of them had already left, and my grandfather's brother was a doctor in England, so he had a big house and he his practice was down below and my dad and his sister lived with the my aunt and uncle for, um, probably I think a little over a year my grandfather left London and went to the United States to try and get a job, and then he sent for his family, and they lived in Brooklyn for a year. My dad tells the story of he was this. My dad was kind of chubby and short, and the uniforms in England were the shorts and the, you know, very proper uniform. And that's what his clothes were, they didn't have any money. So Brooklyn was a kind of, you know, was a rough and tumble area and here's my dad, this very, you know, probably had an accent at that time. He did not have an accent by the time I, you know, I was born and, um, him and his sister, his sister was fine. She just she was that much younger. Didn't matter. But he said it was a hard time that year in Brooklyn because they were rough and tumbley and my dad was a kid with always had a book in his, my dad always had a book in his hand and was always reading. You never knew what language it would be. He always was reading. So he went from there. Um, there's a group in New York at the time, it was probably the National Council of Jewish Women. It was probably- the way he talked, it was an organization like that before that was formed. So it was that type. It was the, the um, it was an organization that became later National Council of Jewish Women. And they would say, "What was your- what

did you do in Germany?" They would try and find a place to place to place these families where they were needed and maybe could raise, you know, earn money. And so my grandfather and grandmother had this store, which was my grandmother's family store so it's generations back of the Stearns. What? Stern was her maiden name. And so, um, they ended up in Shreveport, Louisiana, and it's an area where a lot of German Jews ended up. It people like. It's like you're. How did you get to Louisiana? In Shreveport, it's a little city, and it's because a lot of German Jews ended up there. And so they had a liquor store. So it's funny because my dad could have told you so much about wine and stuff like that, and people don't even realize how much you knew about liquor and wine because he swept the floors at this, the this little store. But he also, at the time was very influenced very much by an Orthodox rabbi and realized, I think it is he graduated high school at 15. And so he decided that he was going to be a rabbi and he went to school, he had on scholarship to Sentinel, which is a very small school in Louisiana. And, um, he then went on to Hebrew Union College. But this reform rabbi, I mean, this Orthodox rabbi told him, "You should become a reform rabbi because your life will be easier. Being an Orthodox rabbi is a difficult life." So that's where he ended up there. My mother had a totally opposite type of upbringing. Her parents were from- my grandpa was from Harvard, Illinois. My grandmother was from Chicago. My grandmother's family was fairly well-to-do. My grandfather's family had a store. My grandpa worked at, he probably had a 10th grade education, really- he was very smart, which is amazing. But he, you know, he worked at the farm. Everybody worked at the family store. And they had a huge both. You know, there were probably ten kids and both families had a lot of kids. And somehow they met, I don't know how my grandmother's family did not approve of my grandfather. So they secretly got married and then they got married a second time when they found out they were married. So then so they ended up in the city called Rockford, Illinois. Um, grandpa wanted to get- I think he just wanted to get away from my grandma's family, and he became a tailor. He did, like, policeman uniforms, firemen's uniforms, that kind of thing and he loved the horses. He played the horses for years. He owned horses, horse racing was his thing. And he also did his business. And, um, he they had one child. My mom, my grandma just she had a lot of miscarriages. She didn't have any. So. And they weren't the maternal type, but they weren't religious. They weren't they didn't like I, they probably had if they could have and they might have had Christmas Tree, they would have, um, my mom, they I mean, my mom's friends were Jewish. It was a city much like Tacoma. It's just a small city, you know, with one synagogue. I think they had two. I think they had a concert by the time I was growing up. They did have a conservative and a reform, and I think they had those two. But there's one Jewish cemetery there. And, um, mom just, you know, she went to camp. She was the kid who went to school during the year, and her parents sent her away to camp all summer, where they did archery and art. You know, she knew how to she knew how to fire a rifle and, you know, it's a whole different kind of lifestyle. And then she picked this school to go to for college, which was in Missouri, and it was all girls school. She was the only Jewish girl and she said there was one black girl, one Jew. That's what it was like and I don't think they people even knew she was Jewish. But my dad at that point was at Fort Leonard Wood, um, which is a military base there and he was a chaplain and they would bring Jewish girls from the different universities in the area to meet the Jewish soldiers and my dad was the chaperone. Well, my mother was one of the Jewish girls to meet the Jewish men. As my dad said, um, she chased him until he caught her. So it was kind of a joke, but my grandparents, my mother's parents were not happy that my mother was dating a rabbi and offered her a trip to Europe to not to date this rabbi. And of course, I probably pushed her more to date this rabbi, and they ended up getting engaged and I mean totally up- I mean, I can't, I never knew my dad's parents, they passed away before I was born, and I'm actually named after my grandma. But it sounds like two families couldn't have been more opposite. And, um, I look at the wedding, it was this huge, you know, my grandpa loved the bigger, the better. So it was this huge, crazy wedding they have iMovies of them it's amazing. And, um, at that point, you know, they lived in Missouri for a very short period and then my dad was, you know, was out of the army and placed that. You go through the interviews and he got placed into Tacoma, which when my parents said that when they knew they were going to Washington State, the only city they'd ever heard of was Spokane, which is Eastern Washington, and it's way far away from Tacoma. and so in their mind, they're going to city near Spokane. So when they end up in Tacoma, mom said they were like a fish out of water. They had no idea what they were in for. But it worked for them. You know, she mom was, um, a very we used very, um, a very smart, opinionated, um, she told you how it was, she didn't mince words and I think they liked that. But she was very careful because she was a rabbi's wife while my dad was alive. She was respectful, I can tell you. After he passed away, some of those people got the words said to him because she didn't, they weren't paying her paycheck anymore. But at the time she was respectful and very. She did what she, you know, the sisterhood thing, the Hadassah thing. Um, she was involved in League of Women Voters. She was very political. Um, I remember doorbell ringing for at that time, and I remember the Meiji buttons because I thought they were so cool. Um, but she did get involved in that stuff. She did what you know, what most rabbis wives did plus raising three kids, and she had a degree in fashion merchandising, but my dad didn't want her to work, and so she respected that. I mean, she was actually a person that would have done very well in her career because she was very good. She would take like these young doctors that would come to Tacoma and she'd say, "You need clothes." and she'd take them shopping. And they loved it. And they they'd give her their credit, their credit card and say, pick me up. She was a bargain hunter. So she she would find him stuff at you know, she'd go to Nordstrom's in Seattle had um, what is now the Nordstrom Rack but it was the Nordstrom basement in those days and it was truly clothes that came from the Nordstrom store to the bargain basement and they were beautiful. Some were designer stuff. Things that you nowadays you go to the rack. Things are bought for the rack in those days. Um, there was no outside rack. It was the Nordstrom basement, downtown Seattle. And she would go take them shopping and buy

this stuff and she'd buy us stuff. You know, that's how my clothes. I mean, I remember one day saying to her, "Can't you buy anything regular price because I'd want something. It's like, I just want to walk in the store and buy something. Why do we have to buy on sale?" I mean, I never knew, I didn't understand, and now I, you know, as an adult, it's a whole 'nother story. But though that was like she couldn't afford not to buy at the basement, but I didn't understand that at that time. So, um, yeah, I mean, that was kind of their who they were and they respected each other for, you know, how their differences were amazing that these two people found each other, to be honest, because they couldn't have been from different backgrounds, totally different, and my grandfather to the day he died drove my dad nuts. I mean, he would call him up and say, "It's Friday night and it's the pork chop special at the restaurant. I can't wait to go there." And my dad would go, oh my God, you know, and he grandpa always, you know, he'd come visit and he would go to the track, you know, that ran Tuesday through, um, the track was closed Monday, Tuesday. So Wednesday through Sunday, he would go to the racetrack at Longacres with his buddies, or one of us would sit. My dad would go there and read a book one day everybody would laugh is even grandpa was betting on the horses and there's my dad reading a book, and, um, that's who he was. You know, that was my grandpa on that side. And my dad, you know, took him in. And my dad's sister and her family lived in New Orleans after she after they got married, my dad left. His sister moved to New Orleans and married a guy, a Jewish guy who, um, like, third generation from New Orleans. Totally different than my dad. Um, kind of. He was a wild, loud, flamboyant. Um, he was the uncle that you just loved to visit because he was wild and crazy and did silly things and loved to do pranks, which drove my dad nuts. But he also was extremely prejudiced because he was typical person from the South. I mean, the little black girl cleaned his house. That's how he said it. You know, the color colored girl cleans my house. You know the end to the day he died. I don't think he changed much, but, um, that was my dad's sister and brother in law, and we would visit them. We went to New Orleans, we would drive from Seattle or Tacoma, I should say Tacoma to Rockford, Illinois to New Orleans and back to Seattle right after school is out for like three weeks. My dad had those three weeks off and three kids and a dog. So that's what my childhood was. Every summer was to go visit my parents family because we couldn't afford to get on a plane in those days. Um, I can't even imagine my parents trying to get us on a plane, but we all got in a station wagon with no air conditioning and drove across country and that, you know, in fact, someone said to me, "I can't believe you don't like, you know, going on car rides." And I go, "If you saw what I grew up with," now I'm better about it. But it took me a long time. "If you saw what I grew up with, I hated it. I hated every second of getting in that car and driving straight through." But that's what we did. So anyway, my to get back on subject, my parents were very from very different backgrounds, but they worked. It really worked. And my dad was able to bring my mom mom down because she had I as an after he passed away. The way I explained her her to people, I go, I love my mom, she's a great person, but I warn you now she has no filter. It goes in the head, out the mouth and they found that out. But people loved her for it. So it's just the way she was. And she she made it work for her, so that was good. But she kept that filter until my dad passed away. It was in our house. I heard it, but not outside of the house. Very few people saw that side of her, just her closest of friends, and my parents are really had a small group of friends that they did stuff with. They're very careful. Another thing when you talked about growing up is anything that was said in our house was not to be repeated because a lot of things were said that. So I had a hard time, even with my kids opening up because I wasn't able- there's so much I wasn't able to talk about. I never knew what I could and couldn't say. So I just didn't say anything. And then I had to learn to open up with my kids, who really taught me a lot because I, I would have a hard it just was hard for me. It's still hard for me to open up to people in, in a with, in private stuff, because it's not. I never knew what you were allowed to say and what you weren't because we weren't allowed to say anything. It was just it was like things that were phone calls that were said or comments were said in the house. We basically knew you couldn't repeat.

Eleonora Anedda: Um, so I have one last question, but before-

Deborah Calderon: -That's fine.

Eleonora Anedda: I wanted to know if there's anything that, um, you wanted to say that we I haven't asked you yet or that, um, you already talked about, but you would like to say more. Um, and you can take your time to think about it.

Deborah Calderon: Um, I don't know. I mean, um, no, I, I just I do know you guys have a lot of information on us. Um, not me personally. I was thinking, I wonder if I should let have you guys talk to my brother, but I don't know if he would talk to you guys or not. Um, he lives in Indianapolis now, and he probably, I mean, because he's that much older than me, probably knows a lot more and can say a lot more and remembers more than I do. But, um, he's like I said, we're we're raised in where everything was like. We weren't allowed to talk about that. He's he probably holds more in than I do. I mean, we- so I don't know if he would talk about it, but he would be a good person if I can ask him. I don't know if he'll say if he would or not. My younger brother would have, but unfortunately he's not here today. Um, so and that's hard to I think it's hard on him to talk about some of this stuff because my we lost my younger brother with a brain aneurysm that he was 47 and we were very, my brothers and I were always have been very, very tight. And probably because of being rabbis, kids and stuff and being careful And, um, it was really hard to lose the youngest of all of us at that time. And that changed everything for us. My mom, my dad was already had passed away, and it changed a lot of stuff for us. I have to say, when I go back to Tacoma, it's not the Tacoma I was raised at. It's a different

community now. I have someone said to me, "Do you ever go to the temple there?" And I said, "No," because I went a few times with my mom before she passed away. And I said, "I really didn't know anybody there." A few people- and they don't know who I am. Um, few people do, but most don't. The, you know, the older generation kind of will say, think I recognize her or something, but they don't really know us, you know? So it's not the community I grew up in. It might be. I don't think it is, but, um, I do see the people I care about and I try to go there. I love going to Tacoma and I probably could live there again, but I it's not the community that I, I grew up in, so it's hard to go back. But that's all I was going to say.

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah. And so related to that, this is the the question that I had for you was, um, if, um, you could talk to, uh, you know, the Jewish kids in Tacoma now, um, what would you like them to know about the Tacoma that you saw growing up? You know, the the sounds, the smell of of the Tacoma that you, that you were describing just now?

Deborah Calderon: I know they're looking for a new rabbi now, and I know they have a cantor. And my dream for Tacoma is them to bring in a rabbi that becomes part of these kids lives and that these kids can communicate with and that- I mean, here's an example. I want these kids to know that it's a wonderful place to be because you live in the city where you're really a big minority, but it's a place you can go and gather at any time and be comfortable and to do things and an example is, um, my friend Gail, who my so just to explain is my dad wasn't just the Tacoma rabbi Qoheleth, Olympia, Centralia, Aberdeen. There were no other rabbis. Olympia did not have a rabbi in those days, only for High holidays. So if there is a bar mitzvah, if anything, or Sunday school, those kids all the way Aberdeen down, they went to Tacoma. So I had a friend who, she has a dinner at my last night at my house who grew up in Chehalis, which is a good hour outside of Tacoma, and her dad would drive her and her brother and her sister to Sunday school and their might- I think there's one other family there, and it was, um, confirmation where they talk about the Ten Commandments and each kid had to write something, and she wrote something about the Ten Commandments and she went to bring her little script to my dad, what she was going to say. My dad sits very quietly, and he used to have a pair of glasses, like above or at the end of his nose or above, because he never he always had the wrong glasses on. He looked over his glasses at her and he looks at her and he says, "Well, Gail, I thought in the Ten Commandments that movie was really good, but I didn't really like the way-" In other words, you didn't read the book, you watched this movie and she made it known in a funny way, "I know what you did. Now fix it." And she just she said at first she he was mortified and then she laughed. She loves telling that story and and you know, it's it's that the things like that. And I hope these kids get to have that kind of relationship with, with the rabbi and the community in Tacoma that we got. And I just don't know because I'm not part of it and I've talked to some of my friends who most of us moved away, but there's a few families there that I grew up with and they say it's not. In fact, there's a Seattle, a guy from Mercer Island, Washington, who loved the way us kids were. He grew up, he knew us through the House and through BBYO, and it was amazing that he loved it so much that he took, got married and moved to Tacoma and started a business in Tacoma because he wanted his kids to have what we had. And he said, in some ways they did, because my dad did bar mitzvah, a couple of his kids, but they didn't. They don't have it as much as he wished, you know and now, like when I talk to him, he says it's not the same, but they, you know, there's a new rabbi coming in. It's a new whole new thing And and that really who you bring in as a rabbi brings in the community because if they don't care about the community as much or they do more outside or civil stuff, but they don't bring the community together, then it's not going to be the same. It has to be a community and that that was really important to my parents. I know it really bothered my mom to watch things that she knew that was important to my dad, that she felt was leaving. I used to say to her, "Things have to change, mom, you have to understand that." But I but I know to the day she died, it really bothered her. So that that is what I would say is go back, do things, you know, because they're, my dad made it so we always came back because he would say, oh, I need you to teach Hebrew. I need you to do an art class, or I did dance classes with these kids, you know, Israeli dance at one point. And in college, I taught Sunday school because of that, you know, it it it brought the community. And I hope that they get that back. That's where I, you know, and that I would want to go back to the temple and, and go to service there, not just in Seattle. I hope that I can feel like I'm part of that because it is my history. I mean, I walk in and there's a huge picture of my dad as you walk in the door on the left hand wall. I can tell you exactly where it is. And I look at it every time. It's the first. One of the first things you see when you walk in that building is this picture of my dad and I hope these kids know who he is too. I don't know if it's just a rabbi, the picture of a rabbi now, to some of these children. He's been gone a long time. He died in 1999. So, yeah, that's what I, I hope for.

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah, that was a lovely thought. So, um, I want to thank you for taking the time to do to this interview and for sharing, um, so much about your life and your family. I really, really appreciate it.

Deborah Calderon: And I hope I gave you enough information. I was kind of all over the place because my mind, that's the way I'm a little A.D.D.. I go one direction, then another.

Eleonora Anedda: That's okay. If there's something that just comes up that you think, oh, I should have said that you can. We can just do it.

Deborah Calderon: And if you have a question when you're doing your transcript, put it in there and I can add to it if you want.

Eleonora Anedda: Sure.

Deborah Calderon: So don't be afraid.

Eleonora Anedda: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'll just stop the recording so we can keep chatting.

Deborah Calderon: Okay. Okay.