Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Powered by Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle

Recording Date: August 16, 2023
Last Edited: October 27, 2026

Nancy Greer

SUMMARY

Nancy Greer, president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, shares her background, career progression, and her commitment to strengthening the Jewish community through various programs and initiatives. She discusses the impact of the 2006 shooting on security and organizational culture, as well as efforts to engage younger generations and respond to global crises. Greer also addresses sensitive issues such as diversity, antisemitism, and the organization's stance on Israel, emphasizing education and community consensus.

CONTENT WARNING: This interview discusses themes of racism, discrimination, death, and grief.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Good afternoon. My name is Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes. I'm a member of the Archives and Research Committee of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Today is August 16th, 2023. This is an oral history interview with Nancy Greer, president and the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, Greater Seattle. She's speaking to us from her home office in Mercer Island, Washington. This interview is part of a six-part interview series documenting professional and lay leadership in the Seattle's Jewish community. We're especially concentrating on the issues of antisemitism, Israel and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. This interview will become part of the Washington Memory Archive of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. We're conducting this interview remotely using zoom. Dennis Barnes is hosting and assisting with the technical aspects of this interview, though he does not appear. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak to me, Nancy. Um, would you like to tell us about your family background, your age, and where you grew up?

Nancy Greer: Happy to. And thank you for inviting me to be part of this, this oral history. Uh, it's a privilege, really. So, I'm Nancy Greer. Uh, I'm 68 years old or young, depending on the day of the week. And I was born in Manhattan, and I grew up in and around the New York metropolitan area. Uh, I was raised in a suburb of New York City. And given the time, which I was a young kid, most Jews were focused on assimilating. Uh, we belonged to a reform synagogue and temple was not a focus for my family. And what really gave me my Jewish foundation was the eight summers I spent at Jewish overnight camp. In the East, when you go to overnight camp, you go for eight weeks. So it's a commitment. And in those eight weeks, you really are immersed in, in Jewish community and eight shabbats. And so really, uh, those, those summers of my youth were foundational for me as a Jew.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: That's, that's really interesting. I love hearing about the camp. Where I grew up in the, in the West Coast, it was not for eight weeks. Um, what is your, uh, what's your educational history? School and beyond. And what aspect of that have you found most valuable?

Nancy Greer: So I, uh, went to college, and I was a math major, also studied a lot of philosophy, which is math with words, or math is philosophy with symbols, depending on if you're a mathematician or a philosopher. Um, and then I went on and got an MBA in finance, uh, which was a very practical thing to do. And it also prepared me for what followed, which was a long and fulfilling career in the private sector. Um, I didn't start out as a Jewish communal professional. I, um, in 1986, I received a job offer from a private equity firm in Seattle to relocate here. Um, my then newish husband and I packed up and made the move to the great Northwest, uh, the far left hand corner of the country, as New Yorkers would refer to it. Is there really anything out there? We would say. Sure is. So, uh, I worked in the private sector for a long time, and in 2008 and 9, during the financial crisis when the

sky was falling, at least in my world, uh, I made the decision that it was time to do something else, that as much fun, as all of those years of the corporate world had been, and they were very rewarding. And I had, you know, a lot of great experiences. I really wanted to do something that would be more fulfilling holistically. And that's when I made the change to the nonprofit world. Having served on a couple of nonprofit boards, I thought I would find that far more rewarding. And so in 2010, I joined the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle as its chief financial officer. And yeah, a long time ago.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: When was that?

Nancy Greer: 2010.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: 2010? Okay.

Nancy Greer: Yeah.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Uh, so tell me about the Jewish Federation and your role in it.

Nancy Greer: Sure. So, when I joined in 2010, uh, we were four years coming out of the horrific shooting, the murder that took place in the Federation in 2006. And while I wasn't a member of the Federation team at the time, uh, by joining the organization, I really got to witness... the, the impact of the trauma. And I, it's hard to to describe. And yet, at the same time, it was an organization that was really coming through a very dark tunnel, um, because of that tragic, tragic incident and, uh, the life that was lost, those that were injured. Uh, everyone moved out of the building. They rebuilt the building and, and whatnot. And when I joined, um, you know, there were a few things that you don't prepare yourself for. Walking into the building. How heavy is that door? Well, it's that heavy because it is bulletproof to a degree that you really don't even want to think about. Why is it difficult to look out the windows? Well, it's because there's plexiglas that's so thick, in case someone shoots at us. And at first it was very disruptive. It's like, oh my gosh, you know, I understood there was a shooting. And, but it really was, uh, an immediate education in the importance of security hardening and why Jewish organizations have to invest so much money in it, so that people, uh, that go there every day to work, like myself and volunteers who come and give up their time and their talent, feel safe when they come to do it, because we had witnessed something like that. And, um, so 2010 and the next thing was 11 and I was promoted to the chief operating officer. In 2012, our CEO left, and, uh, I was asked to step into the interim CEO role, which I was happy to do, and made it clear to the search committee that I was not interested in becoming the CEO. So, I would happily rejoin my position as COO when they did hire a CEO, which is exactly what happened in 2013. New CEO was hired. I went back to being COO and then he left in 2016, and this time the board came to me and asked me if I would step into the role as CEO on a permanent basis. Because before he left, he you know, we as an organization had undergone some very significant change in our business model, in the way we did our work and within the community. And so, he was leaving during a period of significant change and confusion. And that's when I got the ball and I said, "Okay. Happy to have it." So, the Federation, you know, I'll sort of say what we started as almost a hundred years ago and where we are today, because I think, like any organization that's nearly 100 years old, uh, many of us have changed and evolved to keep up with the changing times. Our Federation was founded much like every Federation across the country, uh, as a fundraising mechanism to fund all of the services and social services for the immigrants that were coming to America. And, you know, that was early on, and that was very important, even through, of course, the, you know, the Second World War and beyond. And then things started to change because the organizations that Federations were funding became stronger and stronger on their own. And the, the the importance of Federation funding, uh, was diminishing over time. And so our Federation, not unlike many across the country, were, you know, spent a lot of time determining what the highest and best use of their resources were. What what is our place in the community as things continue to change and grow? So. Right, you know, and so it has changed. Whereas years ago we raised a lot of money. We granted much of it out to the community, while still providing many core services. Today, we provide many core services, also provide some funding across the community, but not nearly at the level that we used to. So, our, I would articulate our mission today is really, the Federation is in service to Jewish continuity. And I'm talking about Jewish continuity at the individual community, national and really international level or global level. And, you know, we accomplished that through many different strategies and tactics. But I'll try to be succinct in the interest of time. Uh, you know, we, we invest in programs that that provide leadership development training and resources, so that our entire community, uh, has lay leadership, uh, invested in a bright community. Because without the partnership of the professional and the, the lay, uh, and volunteer leaders in our community, you know, none of us is going to get very far. It's such an important synergy. We also invest in PJ Library, which is a very low barrier entry point for families who are just Jewish, or interfaith marriage and those kinds of things who are looking to raise Jewish families and don't really know the best way, or are not comfortable going to a synagogue or to an early childhood program at a, at a J or the like. And so it's a great entry point for these families to learn about Judaism in a very non-threatening way, in the privacy of their own home. Uh, we provide camp and Israel scholarships. We, um, also make significant direct investments, uh, overseas, uh, with organizations that you've heard of, like the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency, to Leket and others that are smaller that, uh, provide support services to at, at, at-risk youth and the like, uh, in Israel. So, uh, a deep investment there and also in bringing, uh, Israel

people to people, connections to our community through, uh, ShinShinim, which are young emissaries that will come and work here for a year. They'll work at, you know, some of our schools and synagogues. And so, we really invest in those kinds of things to bring Israeli culture and life to our country, to, you know, to the Diaspora, so that we can see firsthand what it's really like. And, you know, beyond what we read in the papers or hear on the news. Um, and we also then provide, uh, services and programs to support our community organizations, uh..., you know, advocating in Olympia for the needs, you know, of our community. We have developed SAFE Washington out of the ashes of the, of the shooting, uh, which is a program that we've been running since 2007 or 8, uh, for our community. We formed a Jewish Community Relations Council three years ago, which is really very timely given the rise and the continuing rise of antisemitism, to help bring our community together. To the extent that that is something that can happen. Um, to build consensus around critical issues and to help educate the non-Jewish community as well. And then finally, the one thing that the Federation does about every ten years or so, is we administer, we run and fund a large community study, a demographic study that inures to the benefit of the entire community. Every synagogue, every organization, um, you know, will receive access to this. We, um, it's a very important, uh, process and, and, uh, service that, that, that we provide that, that's really important because it helps all of us in the community understand how our community is growing and changing, and how its needs are growing and changing, how its demographics are changing. And boy, have they changed, right? We've, if you've been here for a while, it's hard to to to see how it could be anything other than major change. And, and of course, I mean, fighting combating antisemitism is a top priority for the Federation, as it is for many of the key agencies in town.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Um, thank you that, this kind of goes into a question I had, uh, about, um, about the all the different programs, many of which you just described. Um, which one was, um, particularly meaningful to you, yourself, the council? I think that the Jewish Community Relations Council is really interesting. Um, myself, I'm kind of like to get involved with that a little bit. What do you think though, which which one of them, kind of?

Nancy Greer: Oh, it's like it's asking me to choose among my children. So, um, rather I mean, they they each serve very, very different purposes and, um, provide something different. You know, the Jewish community is not a monolith. You might notice that. Right? We're, we're each different, different streams of Judaism, different, uh, not only different religiosity, different political views. You know, we, there are very few things upon which we might agree, even like the best bagel in town and really, coming from the East, I might say, there might, there is no best bagel in town. So, um, I would say that, uh, you know, the, the formation, there are a few things of which I think are really remarkable and noteworthy. Uh, bringing the Jewish Community Relations Council back to Seattle because years and years ago, there used to be a JCRC and it... was, it was sunset and it was many years ago in the 80s, even before perhaps I lived in Seattle. Uh, and in 2017, uh, shortly after I, uh, succeeded my predecessor as CEO and not that long after we had a new president. And really, the community and the world was sort of very disrupted by, by that election, regardless of what side you're on, I'm, this is not a political conversation at all. Uh, I, in my new CEO capacity, convene the community. And that was both lay and professional leaders. Uh, it was a process that took place over a period of time. There was one large convening to start, and then we sort of broke it down. And one of the outcomes of that was a strong sentiment that our community really would benefit from a Jewish Community Relations Council. So it, and nothing is that simple, because if you've been involved with a Jewish organization, you know that you don't just say, "Okay, let's do this then." You form a committee and you explore it. And we actually did go through the process of determining, well, what would the JCRC or Jewish Community Relations Council do that isn't being done? What value, what place would it have in the community that the amazing organizations that we already have here, the ADL, the AJC, StandWithUs, I mean, you know, you could go on and on. We have lots of great organizations doing a variety of things in our community. And in 2017, things weren't quite what they are today either with respect to antisemitism. They were just heating up, you know. So I'm, somone just started the pilot on the stove, I guess, uh, to, to rekindle that, that fire. And, um, and so the decision was made over a period of time, uh, and our board, after a very deliberate process, because it's a big investment, obviously, made the decision that, yes, this is important to our community. This is going to add value. Um, and thus in 2000 and..., well, three years ago, so it was 2020. Oh, there was nothing much going on in the summer of 2020, no pandemics or anything like that. Um, that's when the Jewish Community Relations Council was, uh, born, so to speak. And, uh, I wouldn't say it was a slow and painful birth. It was challenging because of the pandemic. It was challenging because we weren't meeting in person. And building relationships over the internet. It can be done. And, It's not the same as sitting in a room and having a cup of coffee, whatever. So, the JCRC was formed, uh, with a small staff. We studied JCRCs across the country, and we did a lot of work going into it. We formed an advisory board and the council. We today now have 35 of our local Jewish organizations, including the Federation, who is a member of the JCRC. While the Federation runs the program, we don't control it. We, we, we don't sit like big brother or sister and head the council. We fund it. We sit on it. We get to vote. Uh, and if something goes, if something gets passed that the Federation doesn't vote for, then that's the consensus of our community. Uh, and the Federation would learn from that, right? It's sort of like, huh, well, maybe we're not aligned with our community. And what does that mean? So the JCRC was born, and really it was a just in time delivery because as we were gaining traction and, uh, forming the various committees of the JCRC and figuring out how all of the dynamics would work in the community, antisemitism, you know, was heating up more and more. And it was just I mean, how fortuitous that we had this body formed that would give us the opportunity to convene and to discuss the topics that are of such critical importance and to determine what we as a community,

uh, the organized Jewish community, that is part of the JCRC because we can't speak for everyone, um, believes is, is in the best interest. So, I think that that is something extremely important and valuable, uh, that the Federation has done and is dedicated to continuing to, to see it grow and flourish. I think that any new organization comes with growing pains and we have suffered some of them. Um, it would not be realistic, I suppose, if, if we hadn't. And at the same time, we have tremendous staff members. We have, it's a small but mighty team and they do amazing work. And I, for one, are extremely grateful that they're here working on behalf of our community. So, that's, that's just one thing, uh, that, that, that I'm extremely proud of and, and think is of tremendous value to our community. Um, there are many, there are many others. And though I do think that, one thing that I've noticed and I don't know if you've noticed this, but many of us are getting older, and although we think we may have found the answer, and, that's, I'm grateful for getting older. So our donor base, and when I say our, our community is aging, and the question that many of our organizations are asking is, how are we going to engage the next generation or the next, next generation, uh, in Jewish life? There are so many causes out there. I mean, the climate, some, some may say there's global warming, right? There, there are so many critical issues going on that are not necessarily, I mean, they may be bound in Jewish values, but they're not Jewish organizations. And so for those Jewish organizations, uh, that are fundamental to our community, and I absolutely consider the Federation among them, how do we... invite younger, uh, community members in? How do we meet them where they are? How do we make them feel welcome? How do we speak their language? How do we show them the importance of an organization such as ours? Because, you know, young people and I think young people are great. My husband and I, you know, it's like, we've had a few . Right? So it's like [laughs], you know, um, I think that it's, it's, it's about not only meeting, you know, the young community members where they are. It's really hearing them and hearing what's most important to them. Uh, and, and trying not, not to change to, to respond, but making sure that what we're doing is somehow going to resonate. Because in the long term, this is their future. If, if there aren't young people in our pipeline to work at the historical society, to work at the Federation, to work at the JCC, JFS, Hillel, etc. Well, Hillel has a corner on the market. They work with young people all the time, so good for them. Uh, it's, it's a challenge. And so one of the things that we're really focused on, uh, is engaging with that cohort, in that cohort is from the age of 22 to almost 40. I mean, you're talking about a fairly wide swath of our population. Uh, to engage them and not just to have an event where they can say, oh, that was fun and then they go home and do something else. But to really have what, you know, cohort-based experiences. So, they're not only learning something about leadership development, learning something about Judaism, learning something about whatever it is there that, that experience is based upon, they're with people just like themselves and they're meeting other community members that are of like mind, like age, forming community. And so it, it's about trying to build those bridges and give young Jews today the opportunity to meet other people like themselves, to build relationships that will build community, that will hopefully encourage a lot of the people that moved here for tech jobs to set down roots and maybe not transfer with Amazon when they say, "Hey, you know, we're sending you to wherever." They might say, "No, I'm going to stay here because I've got a really great community and I don't want to leave it." So, that is something that we do with intention, and we do it really well. And it's because we have, and you'll hear me say this, amazing, dedicated professionals who care very deeply, because without those and without the dedicated, caring, uh, volunteer partners, we're we're nothing but, you know, an office with a bunch of paper. So.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Um, yes, I have seen some of those, uh, programs that you have been, uh, uh, publicizing and working, uh, for the young people. I think a lot of the, uh, Jewish organizations have the same, same idea, you know, that.

Nancy Greer: Oh, it's all of our, all of our community members are getting older, right? I mean, it's a fact. And, and while there are a lot of young, young professionals in our Jewish population continues to grow in the region. And with our next demographic study, we'll see just how much, uh. The, the younger, the, the, the younger community members are less inclined to just, you know, to join the JCC or to join a synagogue, to give to the Federation. They need, they need more than say, their parents did, and not that their parents didn't have a compelling reason. But they see the world through a different lens. And so it's about each of us figuring out how can we present ourselves, what is it we can do to engage this cohort of individuals in a way that's meaningful for them? Because not, you know, for, for the Federation, like PJ Library, I think is a great example. We have, you know, we send out like 3,000 books every month to little Jewish boys and girls across our community. And our goal, we also expose them to the Jewish early childhood programs. We expose them to the Jewish summer camps. We expose them to the day schools. We expose them to things that are happening at synagogue that may be good for them. You know, we don't, our goal isn't to say, "Oh, we're so glad that we have all of these young families engaged with the Federation." Well, sure. And it's, it's for the, this is all about Jewish continuity in our community, getting these families and kids engaged in whatever Jewish life looks like for them, making sure they know how to find it and they have access to it. So.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Really, really useful. I also am glad that you, you run the program about a security.

Nancy Greer: SAFE Washington.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Yes, because I think that many organizations don't really have any idea where to start or wonder what

does it mean to have an armed guard by our front door? And I'm really... glad that you are providing the community with ways to do this.

Nancy Greer: Yeah, that was that, was one of the, I guess if there's a silver lining to the the hate crime that took place in 2006, it would be that SAFE Washington was born out of that. And, uh, it is, it's a model, actually. There are a number of communities across the country that have implemented, uh, a SAFE Cincinnati. I think in Kansas City, there are a few, another in Texas. Um.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: And you hate that it has to be there.

Nancy Greer: Pardon me?

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Hate that it has to be there.

Nancy Greer: Yeah. So it is, it is, it is part of what an organization needs. I mean, we have 100 and, I don't know, 100 between 100 and 110 organizations that are members of SAFE Washington. They get, I mean, all kinds of timely reporting of threats and things that you really don't want to know about, but are important that you know about. They also, we provide training. We assist any organization that's applying for a Nonprofit Security Grant, which, uh, I don't know if you're familiar with the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. It's a national program. And actually, our state legislator, legislature just passed a $500,000, uh, bill in the budget, uh, for, for just the state of Washington augmenting the federal funds. The federal, the federal funds, uh, have been between $275 and $310 million a year. Uh, our affiliate, Jewish Federations of North America, uh, lobbies very heavily in Washington, DC. We help them any way we can, of course, because we had a hate crime here. Our Federation gets, I don't want to say special recognition, but is recognized, uh, for, for that and uh. And the grants, so we will help our local organizations, uh, fill out, you know, do an assessment. We'll bring in all of the partners from the FBI, Homeland Security, local law enforcement, and the like to do walkthroughs to identify weaknesses, to identify the top priorities for an application. And we will then work with them to complete the application. The applications then go through a very complicated process. First, they're adjudicated by the state. Then they're sent to the federal level, the federal, the federal level. It's almost like when they're deciding on a pope, they go into a deep, a dark room where they have all kinds of intelligence, which gratefully, we don't have. They know where, they know of threats that we hopefully will never hear of or experience. And so, they will determine where to focus the funding and what kinds of funding. Uh, and then they come out and they make their awards and we'll actually, our community will be hearing, um, in the next, I would say, four weeks or so, about this current year's cycle. So, it's, we have helped the community raise millions of dollars. And it's unfortunate. Right? "Isn't that great? We've raised millions of dollars," so we can put up plexiglass, so we can put electric fences, so we can protect ourselves. Uh, and yet it's important that we do that so that when you do engage and you go to a Jewish preschool or a synagogue, that you're not, you're not thinking about those kinds of, uh, forces of evil and that you're able to focus on what it is you're there for.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Mhm. Really interesting. So, um, I understand that you are going to be, uh, leaving pretty soon. Retiring. Congratulations.

Nancy Greer: Thank you.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: And so, how is that? And I, and I understand that there's a successor that you already have. So, um, how do you feel about all that?

Nancy Greer: Well, I feel, I feel great. So, um, because I took over as CEO during a fairly tumultuous time, um, and I, I and I've been here for quite a long time and have invested a lot of my, myself in the Federation. I really wanted to make whatever transition that was going to come next, I wanted it to be smooth for, for the Federation, for, for the staff and for my, for, for my own well-being. And so, uh, I, I met with the board chair a while ago and I said, "So I, I've checked and I actually have an expiration date, um, a best by date. So with that in mind, let's talk about what comes next and how we can get from here to there." And, and so, it really was quite, you know, we really were very planful about it, with intention. Um, and I, you know, my goal was to retire by no later than June of 2024, which would be the end of this fiscal year. And I, and I told the board that I was happy for them to start a search, um, earlier, because you never know how long it's going to take. That's the one thing when you're searching for, uh, for any role, really. And and I said, "And if you find that person more quickly than anticipated, I'm good with it. I'm good with it. We'll figure it out." And I will, I'm not going to say we'll put them on ice because I'm not leaving until June. And so, we formed a search committee. And when I say "we," the organization, I was not part of it. Um, and the committee did its work and we had a couple of really outstanding candidates. And in the end, um, my successor will be Solomon or Solly Kane. He is currently the head of, I want to say, three URJ camps out of Wisconsin. He lives, I believe he and his wife live in Chicago. Uh, his wife, uh, works for the Foundation for Jewish Camping, and that's an organization that the Federation knows quite well because we engage with a number of, of its programs. Um, and so, Solly and his wife will be relocating to Seattle, uh, in November. So, not until November

because he's finishing the camping season, then they've got to come find a house and all of that good stuff and pick up and move. Um, and then I will work with him. The board has asked me to transition, if you will, for two months and, and hopefully, you know, just, you know, let Solly get sort of centered and grounded. Um, and then I'll, I'll retire. I'll, uh, see what what's really out there.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Um.

Nancy Greer: But he's going to, he's, he's a very smart, caring, um, just a wonderful, wonderful guy. And I feel really great about, about, uh, the selection of Solly to succeed me. So. And he's young.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: That's good.

Nancy Greer: I know.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Oh, I look forward to seeing him.

Nancy Greer: Yep.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Um, now, when we started this, um, when our, our committee started our, uh, this series, we were considering these difficult questions, and they were very, they, they seem very difficult to, to deal with, but we wanted to put them as part of our, uh, series of interviews about leadership. And we already ,we mentioned them before. Uh, one of them is diversity. Uh. Diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, which I think is complicated in the Jewish community because it's sort of within and without. So. Well, what do you think about that?

Nancy Greer: Yeah [laughs]. Yes. It, it is complicated. Absolutely. Um, because... there are Jews of Color... And, you know, it's really interesting. I don't know if you attended Limmud, uh, at all.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: I did for the first time this year.

Nancy Greer: Okay. So. Uh, I, I have attended Limmud, and in 2000 and-, was right before the pandemic. So it was 2020, because I think it was in January. It was in January of 2020. Limmud took place. It was at Bellevue College campus, and they had a... a part of the theme or part of their focus was on, it wasn't, I don't think DEI had its you know, the acronym really was a thing yet, but they were really focused on diversity within the Jewish community and how welcome Jews of Color felt. And I remember I attended a number of those sessions, and it was so eye opening and fascinating just to understand how Jews of Color feel and how Jews of Color identify, and how you would know if someone is Jewish or someone who might not even, you wouldn't look at them and think that they were a Jew of Color, would identify as a Jew of Color. So it's very complicated.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Its complicated.

Nancy Greer: And, and so in 2019, or 2020, I'm sorry. It seemed like it was a very interesting... and important element of, of, of something that we as a community needed to pay attention to and embrace and engage in. And then the pandemic happened. And then George Floyd was murdered, and then all hell broke loose. Pardon my, my, my language. Um, and it really, it was it just obviously elevated the importance of DEI as, as a construct. It elevated the importance of all of us understanding, you know, who we are, what our, our own unconscious biases are because, of course, you know "I'm not racist" [parodying speech and folds arms], right?

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: [Laughs].

Nancy Greer: And, and, and because who would ever call themselves a racist except somebody who's like, they carry a flag. Um, so it's, it's, it's a fascinating, it's a fascinating and challenging, uh, dynamic because as, as you pointed out..., it's within the community and it's without the community. Jews are considered white and privileged, and it's sort of like, well, there's this small matter of antisemitism we could talk about, but, you know, we so, and you can't really bring it up in certain circumstances because it is such a lightning rod and you say, well, well, wait a minute [raises hand]. And it's like, yeah, but so, so it's figuring out how to engage in those conversations and how, uh, to, to move the conversation and really the, the way we interact with each other forward and how, you know, people of all colors, religions, you know, should feel welcome. I mean, under any circumstance, I'm a firm believer of that. I, I didn't need, you know, to undergo, uh, any kind of training to feel that. I think that, you know, some of us as human beings just feel that, yes, we're all human beings, regardless of our color and our backgrounds. Others don't believe that. And so, uh, how do we carry ourselves in the world to make it a better place? So, a lot of the JCRC is doing a lot of work in that space. They, their first consensus statement was on racial equity. Uh, and there was a lot of interesting conversation around that, but it was important and timely. You know, and of course, as an organization and I, you know, I meet with my colleagues, you know, across the community, and I know we're all very attuned to it. And so we would, you know, we many of our

staff members, they're not Jewish. We have, we have people of color, we have LBGTQ, we have Trans. We, you know, all within the community. And as an employer, you know, regardless of what you believe personally, you set that aside. You can't be the head of a nonprofit organization and bring your own personal biases to work. Well, you can, but then you lock them in a drawer, and then you do what's in the best interest of the organization and the community that you're serving. So, that's work that I think every organization, not just the Federation, is engaged in in some manner or form. And I will be, you know, transparent in saying that it's difficult to keep it, um, as topical as we'd like because there are so many other demands and priorities that seem to not want to get in the way, but unfortunately seem to take precedence when there's another antisemitic incident. You know, Pramila Jayapal says something, uh, you know, and then all of a sudden, you know, your, your next two weeks take a turn you didn't expect. So, um, it is an important issue, not even calling it an issue, but the work that that surrounds, uh, diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility is very important for, for our society.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: It is. I certainly have experienced it, um, myself. Um, uh, what about antisemitism and how you see things going? I know you mentioned that, you seem to think that things are, there's more antisemitism since 2017. Um, would you like to comment on that?

Nancy Greer: Well... sure. I, antisemitism is, I don't, I'm not going to say it's at an all time high. It's at one of its worst places that it has been. And, you know, the last four or five six years, um, there's been more and more just hateful rhetoric, you know, from Kanye West, you know, from, you know, from public figures to, to small things that happen locally. There, it, it just seems to be growing. And I mean, there are statistics that bear it out. I mean, the ADL does a remarkable job in reporting to us what's going on. And so, some of it is, I think people are reporting things that are happening more, so some of it is just improved reporting. And though having met with law enforcement on a number of occasions, uh, it's, it's a real thing. It's a real thing. There are a lot of people that don't like Jews, and they feel emboldened to act on it. And it comes from both the left and the right. So this is not just, well, it's just the progressives or it's just the really, you know, it's the right-wingers. It's, it's across the board. Uh, it's worse from the extremes. And, you know, the Federation is, you know, in a very systematic way. You know, we're doing a lot of work and we, we, you know, but we also coordinate with other organizations in the community because we're not the only ones who are doing a lot of work around antisemitism. And we certainly don't want to be doing the same thing. So it is... Um. It's an unfortunate reality of where we are right now. And, but we've been here for 4000 years, you know. And, you know, during the Second World War, 6 million of us perished. And when you kind of extrapolate, as a math major, how many more Jews there would be in the world of 6 million of us weren't put to death?

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: I have often thought that.

Nancy Greer: It is. It's a remarkable thing. So, we make up less than 2% of the population. Um, and we get a lot of flack for being this very small minority that somehow has this [unintelligable] to survive. And, um, and we'll keep fighting it. We'll keep doing what it takes. We, it's in large part it's about education. In large part, people say and do things that we consider to be antisemitic, and the person doing it has no idea. So, that's the low hanging fruit. And then as you start peeling back the onion, you know, it's like anything else. Then there are people who really do carry antisemitic, uh..., you know, thoughts and feelings based on maybe something that's not real. But what is what is truth anymore? That's, that's a whole nother conversation.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: A whole nother conversation.

Nancy Greer: Yes.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: So, um, I do want to mention also, um, Israel. The, what I have left is Israel and what you see as the challenges for the Federation going forward and any additional comments. But we have ten minutes.

Nancy Greer: Okay. Well, that should be easy [sarcastic]. Um, um, so, so the Federation is, you know, with respect to Israel, the Federation believes in a safe, strong [emphasis], democratic Jewish state of Israel, period. Okay. We're not going to talk politics. There's a lot going over there, going on over there right now in the political arena. And, you know, the Federation believes in a safe, strong [emphasis], democratic Jewish state. And we engage in Israel. You know, as I shared earlier, by bringing Israeli Emissaries over here. You know, we have trips to Israel, we invest in Israel, uh, and our JCRC has an Israel Affairs Committee. Uh, so dealing with, you know, issues of the moment, should we say something or shouldn't we? Because it's hard to be a Jewish organization today with everything that's going on and to remain silent on the one hand, on the other hand, there are very few things you can say where you're not going to... upset, alienate or agitate some portion of the community. So... You know, I will say that the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle is a pro-Israel organization, period. So, that's what I'll say about Israel.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Okay. That's good.

Nancy Greer: Yeah [laughs]. Challenges for the organization in the future?

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Uh huh [affirmative].

Nancy Greer: Um, well, we have a big transition coming up, and I'm very optimistic about it. I don't, I don't think that, "oh my gosh, what a challenge. " I think that any big change is a challenge. Be it a good change. "We're moving. We're buying a bigger house. I got a bigger whatever." It's change. Human beings, we're not really built for change, although some of us are more adaptable than others. And the community. So the Federation, because of having new leadership, it will it, by its very nature will change over time, and I'm hoping it will change in a way that is agreeable, and I suspect it will. Um, so I think that the the near-term challenges having our new CEO onboarded and sort of settling in and finding his place in the community, I think that that is a challenge. Longer term challenge that would happen regardless of who is at the helm of the organization, is really the the place of the organized Jewish, uh, you know, structure in, in our community. And, and I have to point to, uh, you know, if I think back on how organized Jewish life is so critical in the last several years, I look at Hurricane Harvey, I look at the war in Ukraine, I look at what's happening in Hawaii right now. How, you know, the established organizations can, in a moment, send resources, can help the Ukraine, the Ukraine challenge that the Federation was part of. That was one of my proudest experiences. It nearly, you know, you know, put me under because we all work so hard and compressed period of time that our community raised so much money for Ukraine. We punched way above our weight. It's because we cared. It's because it was important work, and it's because we had the infrastructure to enable that. And, and I think that you don't want to look to tragedy and war to say, well, that's why we're here. No. Um, however, it's one of the reasons and it's an important reason why organizations like the Joint Distribution Committee, and the Jewish Agency, and the Jewish Federations are so important to our communities because they're able to step up and respond at a moment's notice in times of great tragedy and need. So, um, so I am hopeful that we will be able to bring that younger generation along, uh, to engage in and embrace that, uh, that, that same important construct. Um, so that's, that's, you know, the future. I think it's bright. We have great people. We have so many great, uh, I mean, between volunteer leaders and younger individuals who are engaged with the Federation and in our community, not just with the Federation, I think that our community's future is bright. And though we can never take our eye off the ball, so.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: Uh huh [affirmative]. No, I take your words to the heart, really. Um, and, uh, so I would like to know if there are any additional comments that you wish to make? You talked a lot about young people. Anything on your way out you'd like to share?

Nancy Greer: Well, yeah, I guess you know, first it's been, I never envisioned myself as being the head of any Jewish organization. So, my mother of blessed memory, if she had any idea, she, she would not, she would say, "You're doing what?"

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: [Laughs.]

Nancy Greer: And I say that not, only because it is not a path that I was ever on. So, I am in many respects the unintentional CEO. And it has been a privilege to serve the community. I have learned so much. You know, I, I was sort of, I had a long career. I had done a lot of things, you know, go me, woo hoo. And I have learned so much in this role. I've learned about myself. I've learned about people. I've learned about, you just, the importance of humility. Not that I didn't know that, but I think that we all need to carry a fair amount of humility around with us. Um, and I hope that I have given as much as I, as I have received. I really do. Um, it's hard to measure that, right? It's just, it's just a thing in the ether. But I have gotten so much out of this experience. Uh, it's my. And hope isn't a strategy, but that's all I've got right now. I just, I hope that I have, um, contributed as much as I have received from this amazing experience.

Sandy Ginsburgh Barnes: I'm sure you have. I'm sure you have. Thank you so much for participating in our oral history project. It's been a delight to get to know you a little bit. I really appreciate it. So, thank you very much.

Nancy Greer: Well, thank you so much, Sandy. I again appreciate the opportunity.