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

Recording Date: November 16, 2021
Last Edited: October 27, 2026

Dianne Arensberg

SUMMARY

Dianne Arensberg shares her childhood in Tacoma, Washington, her involvement in the small Jewish community, and her family's business in plumbing. She recounts her educational choices, work experiences, and family history, including challenges like maintaining a kosher diet and the impact of a local earthquake. Dianne also talks about her fond memories of summers in Seaside, Oregon, her experiences growing up Jewish in Tacoma without a neighborhood, and the changes in the local Jewish community over the years.

Eleonora Anedda: All right. So today is the 16th of November, 2021. My name is Eleonora Anedda, and I'm interviewing Dianne Arensberg on behalf of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Hi, Diane. How are you?

Dianne Arensberg: I'm fine, thank you.

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

Dianne Arensberg: Pardon me? I'm trying to get rid of this screen. This meeting is being recorded by the host. Oh, okay. I'm back. Okay. What was your question? I'm sorry.

Eleonora Anedda: Um, I asked you if you could tell me a little bit about your childhood.

Dianne Arensberg: I grew up in Tacoma, Washington, and I remained in Tacoma until I went to the University of Washington in Seattle and our childhood was very, as far as the Jewish community, it was very small, extremely small. We had, there were three of us my age, which is hard to believe today. I was confirmed and the fellow was there was one, one Burton Gruber and that myself and Sandy Feingold and myself. My last name was Rosen. And being that Burton had a bar mitzvah, he could not be confirmed. So there was only two of us in my confirmation class but as far as activity, I was very close and active within all the schools, and I was on a lot of committees, and I intertwined with the non-Jewish community because we didn't have one. I taught Sunday school and tried to stay as active as I could in in the Jewish community, what we had of. So and in high school, I made a lot of friends. I think I was on every committee that possibly was in the school. I wanted to take German and Rabbi Rosenthal said, no. Rosenberg. I'm sorry. Said no because my grandparents only spoke, my grandmother only spoke Yiddish, and he was afraid that if I got up to talk, I'd intertwine the Yiddish. So therefore I took Spanish instead. So that's about that. And then do you have any questions on that that you'd like to ask me?

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah. Would you like to say a little bit more about your family history?

Dianne Arensberg: My family had two brothers. One brother passed away when he was 45 from cancer. My other brother is alive and well. We spent a lot of time together as there was no one else to spend time with. Anyway, but we got along very well. We went to camp. Camp Saratoga in, I'm not sure, Simi Valley is outside of San Francisco. We did that every year, and our children went there as well. So... anyway, and I think, yeah, I said that my parents had a retail- first, they were in retail in lighting and plumbing in downtown Tacoma. Later they gave up the lighting and moved to what they call Nellies Valley in Tacoma and went strictly into plumbing and changed the name to Rosen Supply. I worked at Rosen, graduated the University of Washington in 1959 and been teaching. I taught, substituted off and on until I was married in 1961. I was offered a job, but my dad said no, and in those days you

listen to your parents. He said, "Your mother needs you here in the office." So for 57 years, I worked in the office in Tacoma and drove back and forth to Bellevue. So before freeways. Anyway, so that kind of brings you up to date. We moved to Bellevue. We lived in the north end of Seattle from 1961 to 1964. We moved into our home here in Bellevue in 1964 and 57 years later, we're still here. So it's, it's been a journey.

Eleonora Anedda: Do you often go back to Tacoma?

Dianne Arensberg: Well, I used to go to Tacoma every day to work, and then my husband got sick, and I stopped going. I did some work from home as much as I could, but then, it just kind of faded away. I trained other people to take over what I was doing, and eventually I had to stay home every day with him. So now I have a caregiver for him as well as myself. So my schedule is full, my days are fuller, and my parents were from, my mother was born in Vancouver, BC and her name was Sarah Bell Mescher. My dad was born in Dayton, Washington, and he had a twin sister who lived in Portland. Her name was Ceil Tucson and they had no Ceil, had no children, and he had another sister that lived in San Francisco and her daughter had no children. So kind of limited there. My mother was raised- they had Republic, Washington seemed to be where the Jewish people went. It used to be like a spot for people to go to. Now, if you go back and I tried to get this, but I didn't get anywhere. If you go back to the newsletter that the historical Washington State Historical Society had, I have a copy, but it's not, I can't read it very well from March 1984. There's history here on Republic, Washington and the Jewish people and the measures. But it's really very, very difficult for me to read to you. So maybe Lisa or someone can get that and read it. I could try to read it to you, but it'll take forever.

Eleonora Anedda: That's okay. We can-

Dianne Arensberg: -But they were very well known in Republic and then Republic, Washington- they all moved. They they moved to Portland. Some people came to Seattle. Some went to Portland and that's about it. I can't give you any history. My grandma rose and lived till she saw me graduate college, and I don't remember exactly how old she was. My grandpa rose and died. When, when I was three years old so I don't remember too much of him, and we've tried to get family history, and there's no one to ask. And they never. And like many families, they didn't want to talk about it. They just absolutely would not talk about it. So I know a little bit more on the other side, but on my father's side, that's the end of that's the end of the story because I just I can't get it anymore and I have no one to ask which is really a shame, but it's best I can do for you.

Eleonora Anedda: Oh, no, that's okay, don't worry. I have something I wanted to ask you. You mentioned your parents had a business in downtown Tacoma, right?

Dianne Arensberg: Right.

Eleonora Anedda: Um, so, was the business open on Saturdays?

Dianne Arensberg: Yes.

Eleonora Anedda: It was, yeah.

Dianne Arensberg: It was. And I can remember as a child, there were a lot of gypsies on that street. I can remember as a child that we used to have to come down on Saturdays, and my brother and I would sit in the front window to prevent them from coming in or alert them. Alert my parents that they were trying to come in because the gypsies were known for stealing at that time. Now, you know, that's in the late '40s. So. Yeah, it's really a shame. My dad was a very generous person, and if somebody needed food or ask for money, my dad would ask them if they needed food and they said they were hungry. He would take them up to the corner, I don't remember the name of the drugstore, but they take them up to the corner drugstore, sit them down at the counter and tell the girls, give them whatever he wants. I'll come back and pay you. So, but he would never give them money. But he fed a lot of people through doing that and then in the summers. Being that both of my parents worked in the summers, we used to go to seaside, Oregon and stay for two and a half, three months with our grandparents because my parents worked, and this is one way they would come down and they'd visit, and sometimes my mother would stay for a week or two. Then my grandparents had a home there, which was actually a duplex. So there was always somebody there, either my, one of my aunts from Portland and her family, or there was always somebody there besides my grandparents. So I'm very attached to seaside, and my husband and I bought a condo down there for our 25th wedding anniversary, and we just celebrated our 60th. So Yes, seaside is very dear to my heart.

Eleonora Anedda: Can you tell me more about seaside?

Dianne Arensberg: It's a beach community. Seaside is right on the coast. In fact, somebody asked me how close was I was to the ocean and I said, well, it depends on the tide, because we're right. Our condo is right there on the ocean, and it's great and then

they have a prom. That is, if you walk the whole thing, it's two miles. You walk the entire prom, and then you have to come back, of course, and then they have the turnaround, which is the center focus of Broadway and cars will go up and drive around the turnaround. And it was the end of the Lewis and Clark Trail. So they have the salt mines there. The salt. And, uh, every summer they dress up as Lewis and Clark, and they're on the beach, and people can come down and see them and it's very interesting, especially for the children. They have 4th of July, which we did not have last year because of the pandemic and then they have this main street and there's, there's eateries and there's games to play and, and vendors. It's just a fun, fun town. And. It's changed a lot in 60 years or 70 years because we used to have a merry go round. Well, we still have the merry go round. They moved it inside, but it used to be outside and a Ferris wheel and the Ferris wheel is gone. We used to have two movie theaters and now we have none. There's one down on the highway. But as far as the center of town is concerned, it's just a real nice place to go and the weather's decent. You can walk around and walk the prom. Sit down on the turn around if you want to and watch the, you know, watch the water, watch the people. It's a great place, a great resort.

Eleonora Anedda: Well, it sounds wonderful. I also live by the seaside, so I understand the-.

Dianne Arensberg: -You've been there?

Eleonora Anedda: No, no, no, but I live by the seaside, so I understand the the love for the water and the ocean.

Dianne Arensberg: Yeah, it's inside Oregon. So the Oregon coast is absolutely beautiful. The Washington coast, forget it. Anyway. Yeah. So, it's there to stay.

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah.

Dianne Arensberg: It's changed a lot, but it's there. The change is there to stay. Then the south of there is Cannon Beach, which is more quiet than seaside and some people prefer to be down there, and I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of haystack Rock? If you ever look at that, that's in Cannon Beach. You can take that, that highway, which is partly washed out at the moment because of these heavy rains. But all the way down into California. So. Windy road, but a beautiful drive.

Eleonora Anedda: I wanted to ask you a little bit more about Tacoma. Um-

Dianne Arensberg: About what? Tacoma?

Eleonora Anedda: Tacoma. Yeah. So, um, what was it like growing up Jewish in Tacoma?

Dianne Arensberg: Doing what?

Eleonora Anedda: Uh, what was it like growing up Jewish in Tacoma?

Dianne Arensberg: Well, you had all non-Jewish friends, be growing up like any other, but you didn't have your Jewish people and when I went to college, when I went to college, I, one of the girls said to me, "You mean you let your your parents let you date non-Jewish?" And I said, "Yes?" They said, "Well, why?" And I said, "Well, they wanted me to have the experience of dating before I went on to college." So they accepted that for an answer. It's just I don't know. I mean, life went on. I mean, we didn't know from a Jewish life. My parents tried to keep kosher when they first moved to Tacoma, but they'd have to drive to Portland. I presume they could come to Seattle, but being that their parents were in Portland, they went to Portland to get kosher food and then they had to give that up because it was just it was too hard. I guess especially after we, uh, they started having children. I've just got to be too much. So they gave that up.

Eleonora Anedda: So they were never able to keep kosher?

Dianne Arensberg: No, but, and to this day, we have no bacon in the house and there's certain things somebody can't understand how I can make a meatloaf. I just went through this with some non-Jewish people. "You have to have an egg and meatloaf." I said, "No, I make meatloaf without egg," "I don't- well, how can you do that?" And I said, "Well, you do this and you do this and-" "No, no, no, that's, that's, that's not, that's not meatloaf." Okay, fine for meatloaf. Then I went into the history and tried to explain to them with milk and flesh, but it didn't, of course they don't understand that. So. Yeah.

Eleonora Anedda: So could you-

Dianne Arensberg: -Life is interesting. Pardon me?

Eleonora Anedda: No no, no. I was going to say, could you go into a little bit more detail about what they were able to do in trying

to keep kosher, but not in its entirety, I guess. So you wouldn't mix dairy and...

Dianne Arensberg: Uh, no.

Eleonora Anedda: Right. Right. What else did you try to do?

Dianne Arensberg: But I don't really remember. I just I can't really tell you. I don't really remember, it's a long time ago. [laughs]

Eleonora Anedda: And what do you what do you do now?

Dianne Arensberg: What do I do now?

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah.

Dianne Arensberg: Well, I did a lot earlier because I had a little sister from college that kept kosher, so I did a lot there and one time I had all the rabbis over for, I think it was a Jewish day school, and I made sure that everything met the standards of being kosher with the paper plates and the plastic. And I went to the kosher bakery and put everything out. And I still had a couple of rabbis that would not eat in my house, but that, you know, that's fine. That's fine. But a couple did, couple didn't. So it was fine. But I you know, I try to emphasize, I mean, if you know, if you're having the meat, you don't put the dairy on the table and so on and so forth, of that. I do that to some extent, but not to what I used to do. So.

Eleonora Anedda: And what is your relationship with Tacoma today?

Dianne Arensberg: The only relationship I have with Tacoma is my brother. I have no other bonds there. Had a couple very close friends that have passed away. So other than that, I, I really don't, and I don't go to Tacoma.

Eleonora Anedda: Um, were you in Tacoma when the, when Rabbi Rosenthal merged the two temples?

Dianne Arensberg: Yeah. I remember, um, then it became a show and their group of fellows that I don't remember the name of the other temple, synagogue, I can tell you where it was. It's right across from Wright's Park, but I can't remember the name of it, and there was a group of- and that was the Orthodox, and that there was a group of fellows that wouldn't put up with going conservative, and they went off on their own. So. Whatever happened after that, I don't know. Once I came to, got married, came to Seattle. Um, I kind of kept losing track, especially the people I knew and one by one, they faded away. So. I lost contact. Unless my brother will tell me something that's interesting. People are interesting because they'll say, well, you had to know them. Well, I've been gone since 1955. I don't have to know the- Oh, yeah, but you must. They're from Tacoma. I said, well, can't help it. Can't tell you who they are. Wouldn't know them if I was standing next to them. So. But we had a very small, everybody knew everybody when I was growing up because, you know, the population was so tiny. My mother used to work for all the volunteer, she, for all the dinners and Passover and she was always involved with temple. We had a very bad earthquake in 1949, I believe where one of the Jewish boys got killed with the rocks tumbling from the school and his mother and my mother were in charge of the second night, the Passover Seder at temple, that that particular night. And so, obviously, there was no Seder. So there's a lot of different stories that. I probably can think of more and that was a very sad day for the Jewish community, especially when they told me that that my brother had gotten killed. And, uh. My brother had walked out with this fellow that got killed and that Marvin went to the right to do patrol duty and my brother went to the left. So they were like maybe six, six feet apart when the earthquake hit. So yeah, that was also a very sad day. Anyway, hopefully we don't have earthquakes like that again. For any of us in the world.

Eleonora Anedda: So one thing that I got told about Tacoma is that there isn't unlike, um, other cities, like maybe bigger cities that there isn't really, there wasn't really a Jewish neighborhood that- right?

Dianne Arensberg: Absolutely, There was no Jewish neighborhood that. No. People were spread out. I mean, we didn't even have any Jewish neighbors, but people were, I don't know what the population was, but there was no such thing. I mean, we had a Jewish family that lived one, two or three blocks away from us and then the fellow that started Costco, he also lived two, three blocks from us. But, there was no particular Jewish neighborhood? No.

Eleonora Anedda: Was that hard?

Dianne Arensberg: I didn't know different. And it can't be hard when you don't know different.

Eleonora Anedda: That's very true.

Dianne Arensberg: So, you know, we, we grew up really, I don't want to say blindsided as far as the Jewish community outside of

Tacoma. With what was going on. We used to do high holiday services a lot, at least one of them up in Portland, because we would go to share, and I think it was generally Yom Kippur that we would go and share with our grandparents. Um, and it's and they belong to congregation. Never show them in Portland. So. Yeah. But you know, when you don't know different, you just do your thing.

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah, that's that's very true. Um, I have one last question for you, but I wanted to ask you before. Is there anything that I haven't asked you yet that you would like to talk about or something that you've already talked about, that you would like to say a little bit more about?

Dianne Arensberg: I can't think of anything.

Eleonora Anedda: That's okay. And if anything comes to mind, like, even later, um, just tell me. So the last thing that I wanted to ask you is, um, what would you what would ,what would what do you wish for, uh, Tacoma and the Jewish community in Tacoma today?

Dianne Arensberg: From what I understand, the Jewish community is not too active anymore. A lot of people left the temple, and this is all hearsay because I don't know as it as a fact and they've gone over to the Chabad House because they're not happy with the temple over there. But other than that, I just I don't know. I don't know. So what what the problem is, I mean, I just don't know. So it's, you know, it's like I say, I haven't been over there to see. I haven't been to the temple. I was married in in the old temple before they built the new one. But, um, I don't know. Something- and maybe the Jewish people are leaving the city. I don't know. Get a lot of people from Fort Lewis that would come, you know, like for the holidays or something. And I don't know, I can't really tell you.

Eleonora Anedda: That's okay. Maybe they've all moved to seaside, Oregon.

Dianne Arensberg: There you go. That's a good place. That's a good place to raise a family. People have done that.

Eleonora Anedda: Yeah.

Dianne Arensberg: Please.

Eleonora Anedda: That's okay.

Dianne Arensberg: Yeah, people have left. We know a non-Jewish family that moved out of Seattle and did move down there because they felt that it was a better environment for their children to grow up in. A lot of people are leaving the area now for smaller communities, because Seattle is not the best place to be at the moment. Hopefully it'll get straightened, straighten itself back out.

Eleonora Anedda: That's okay. Is there anything else that you'd like to say before I stop the recording?

Dianne Arensberg: No, I really can't think of anything at the moment. Um, if I do, may I text you and and or email you?

Eleonora Anedda: Of course. Of course. We can always do another interview if anything comes to mind in the next couple-

Dianne Arensberg: -That's okay.

Eleonora Anedda: I will go ahead and stop the recording now so we can keep chatting.

Dianne Arensberg: All right. Thank you.