Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Betsy Schneier

SUMMARY

Betsy Schneider discusses her role in founding the Washington State Jewish Historical Society, highlighting her family's curiosity about Jewish communities and the historical dynamics between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews in Seattle. She shares her experiences as president, including efforts to increase awareness through multimedia exhibits and advancing technology, as well as her vision for preserving digital and oral archives. Reflecting on her personal background and current challenges like the pandemic, Betsy emphasizes the society's community focus, volunteer contributions, and the importance of integrating newer Jewish communities.

Joshua Schaier: We're recording now. Today is August 15th, 2020. My name is Joshua Schaier and I am interviewing Betsy Schneier on behalf of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Welcome, Betsy.

Betsy Schneier: Thank you very much. It's Betsy Schneier.

Joshua Schaier: Schneier. Sorry. [laughs] Um, yes. So, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself, about your role with the society?

Betsy Schneier: One might say I almost grew up with the society. My mother was a co-founder, and I remember her compiling some of the archives with her friend who also co-founded Jeanette Schreiber. Both my mom and Jeanette, of course, have passed away, and that was before I left for college. So I remember the interviews and things on the kitchen table. But that was many, many years ago as, uh, as, you know. And then I was Dora Stiefel, who is also a past president and very active in the society, is a close friend. And when we moved back to Seattle, um, after I had gone through a variety of different, uh, board positions in the community, called me up and said, "Well, it's your turn, Betsy, would you like to join the board?" And, um, if you have met Doris, who is an amazing woman, she is very hard to refuse. And that's basically how I started, really on my own and that was, oh, my goodness, I can't even remember. You probably have the dates. Um, and then eventually I became president. Now I'm pleased to say president emeritus and, uh, um, it's great that you're doing these interviews.

Joshua Schaier: Very impressive. Tell us a little about your mother, about how she helped found the society. What was she like?

Betsy Schneier: Well, although I'm a native, um, my parents were transplants in the early '50s, and she was a very inquisitive person, uh, particularly with respect to Jewish communities. She had done a lot of community work, um, prior to moving to Seattle, although she was a young wife, fairly newly married, I think, when they moved out here and before having me. But Seattle is very unique, and I think that is one of your questions. And that always interested her, particularly because she eventually found work at the what is now Seattle Hebrew Academy. It had a different name in those days. Uh, the and she is the daughter herself of an Orthodox rabbi, and she taught English there and it is the one institution, really, that had both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews in her classroom. And she always, um, found that a bit unusual and was curious and also, uh, friendly enough to be included and got to know a lot of the Sephardic families in town. Um, and, uh, both she and Jeanette. Jeanette didn't know as many, didn't come into it the same way, but they received a grant and decided to start. It was time to start bringing more of the history into light, uh, because, um, at the time mom arrived, which was about the same time, I believe that Jeanette had been living here. Um, it was a it

was a very, uh, bifurcated, um, community. Well, that's not even the right word. A very, um, segmented community. Uh, much more so than it is today. Uh, the Sephardim were totally separate, uh, with the exception of this one school, because it was religious, but excluded, Basically from most aspects of life, Jewish life, um, even in the very few in the colleges and universities that always puzzled her particularly because their cultural life was so rich and, um, very large contingent of Reform Jews who were of Germanic origin and my mom and the newcomers of those days in the '50s were more from the Eastern European side, and the lack of kind of mixing it up, I guess one could say. Um, always intrigued her.

Joshua Schaier: Interesting. Would you say the relationship between those students was the Ashkenazi, the Sephardic? Was there any conflict?

Betsy Schneier: Oh, yes. Um. Armed conflict? Of course not. But as it happens, my childhood friend of mine, I believe, his parents were the first, quote unquote, intermarriage. His dad was a Holocaust survivor and his mom was Sephardic, and it created quite a stir. So, they're mainly their traditions were so different. They spoke a different language. They didn't speak Yiddish, for example. And, um, they went into trades that were quite different from what most assimilated Jews in North America were. They were more, um, small merchants, at the beginning, fishermen, those kinds of things, and so insurance, now real estate, which then of course, isn't quite the same as it is today. So those were fields that generally didn't, um, you know, the Pike Place Market Jews, for example, many of the fish shops were all owned by the Sephardi. And so it was considered for educated Jews. Usually you didn't see many in the professions at all. As a matter of fact, I think there was one gentleman who became a lawyer in a good law firm, and it was a singular achievement.

Joshua Schaier: Interesting. Very interesting.

Betsy Schneier: Social, I think, as opposed to anything else, they had their own synagogues, two of them, which they still do. They're very interesting because they use Ladino and their customs are a little different even today.

Joshua Schaier: So were there any efforts to bring the communities together, try to do anything like that?

Betsy Schneier: I think once the Sephardic community started attending college, I think there were in the '50s, there was a bit more intermarriage. The rabbi at the time of the Reform temple, the main reform temple. Raphael Levine was his name. Um, a very noted person was very big in intercommunity relations and the spouses, the Sephardic spouses of some of his congregants. He was always perfectly accepting of, although, interestingly enough, in those days, uh, the Sephardic spouse would retain ties to the Sephardic synagogues. So there was a term. You may have heard it, it's called Ashkephardi, uh, for the children of these mixed, um, couples. But it's changed a lot since those days. My own children who were in their 30s, late 30s now, I guess, had Sephardic friends and, and, um, it wasn't a big deal to them as it was even to me growing up in high school, my neighborhood had very few people in it just because most of them remain pretty close together.

Joshua Schaier: Interesting, interesting. So, I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about your time as president of the society?

Betsy Schneier: I'm glad to be glad to. It was a wonderful experience. A little arm twisting, as I said at the beginning, to get on the board. Um, mainly because it was primarily focused on the archives and the archives only. And it wasn't until, um, Doris really that they started branching out using some of the tools of information science to sort of put in more technological approach, for programs to the public, so it became less focused on the archives per se, even though we always have had an archivist and more trying to reach out into the community, as I can't remember the date. But the first multimedia exhibit was when, shortly after my husband and I, I think, returned to Seattle in, uh, the in the '80s. But I may be mistaken. It may have been in the '70s, which was called A Coat of Many Colors, and it was held in on Seattle Center and drew a huge crowd celebrating the Sephardic heritage, um, as well as a little bit of the Ashkenazi. And that was really the first presence. But back to my time. It was- we hired Lisa Kranseler, um, as an executive director. We've never had one before. It was a very much a shoestring operation. And even when I was president, my biggest challenge was to- it was the best Jewish community organization you've never heard of, kind of motto of what we were able to pull off for the community when we would hold our, um, multimedia events were amazing. And yet we had virtually no community support in our budget. So that would probably be my biggest challenge. And the biggest pleasure was working with Lisa. Um, she has very high standards, works herself harder than almost anybody. But, uh, we're very proud. I, I didn't hire her myself, actually. Doris was the one who found her name in and she went to work on one of the most successful of the earlier, um, multimedia events. But then she came to work full time for us, and that was during my term.

Joshua Schaier: Very interesting. What would you say was the most unexpected part of, uh, chairing the society?

Betsy Schneier: The most unexpected for me was the excitement of really harnessing technology because what it allows you to do is, um, mount amazing exhibits that really draw in all parts of the community. I was fortunate in that I had been president of a

number of organizations before this one and so I was able to tap in a little bit, but thousands of people would come to these things. And if you if most of them knew what a teeny tiny amount of money we had to work with, they wouldn't have believed us and nationally, the awards that we got and and internationally, even to people who come to use the archives, was just it really, even when I think about it today, it's quite a feat. It, it's something to be very, very proud of. Um, and really a crown jewel in, in that respect.

Joshua Schaier: That's very good. So turning back to the subject of history, um, in your opinion, what would you say differentiates Seattle's Jewish history from that of other cities in the country?

Betsy Schneier: That's a very good question. Um, you hear me keep talking about the Sephardic segment. But we happen to have the third largest Sephardic community really in North America, if not the world. It's still very, very large. Even with all the assimilation, um, the fact that we have two- [phone rings] Pardon me. The fact that we have two, still today, two of those synagogues that have different customs. We, um. It's a very widespread community. There's no Jewish part of town, per se, even though Mercer Island tends to be the home of the Jewish community center, and they're trying to build up more of a sort of citywide campus there. I live far away from there. Um, people live all over the place, so it's scattered, which there are a lot of unaffiliated Jews in Seattle, because if you think about your geography, how much farther can you get in the continental United States? Exactly, and sometimes there's reasons why Jews come here for that reason, not to not to associate, not to join, necessarily. So, uh, I'm Conservative myself, and belong to the one that's not in northeast Seattle and grew up in Herzel, which is, of course, now in Mercer Island. Um, Conservative synagogue continues. I believe the Conservative movement continues to draw in more Jews, but Chabad, for example, is extremely popular here, probably because we're so segmented and not as well organized centrally. Um, so they have a very strong presence on campus. And here up here in northeast Seattle, central Washington, they have a spot now in southeast Washington, I think, and we're the Washington State Jewish Historical Society, of course. But you're talking about greater Seattle. Also, the fact that we're such a minority in terms of our proportion of the Seattle population. Right? It continues to grow. It's one it's a major city. We have a very small Jewish community relative to our size, 30,000, 35,000 now. 40, maybe.

Joshua Schaier: I don't know the exact number exactly.

Betsy Schneier: That's my point. Usually they don't, uh, nobody really knows. It's trying to take a census of that has always been. They've tried a few times. And, um, that makes us, I think, unique. Um, maybe a little bit like San Francisco's a lot like that, as opposed to Los Angeles, which is quite, more akin to more of the other, more established Jewish, um, communities. The flip side of that is, I would say from a community standpoint, we're a little bit more creative, I think, because speaking for the historical society, because, again, we have such a small budget. Um, we can do anything we wanted to do within the confines. Which sort of forces you to think outside the box, so to speak. And in the 21st century, let's face it. I mean, who would dream that we're sitting here in the middle of a pandemic on zoom instead of, uh, you know, in a studio? But again, there was, Seattle hosted a World's Fair out of nothing in the, in the 19th century, which is now where the this University of Washington campus is. Um, so there's always been this can do spirit even among the pioneer Jews here, serving the Alaska, Yukon trade, that kind of thing.

Joshua Schaier: Yes. Interesting. It's very interesting. So, you mentioned the the Yukon trade. That would be, they probably would have come here around the time of the gold rush.

Betsy Schneier: Correct. Right.

Joshua Schaier: Were there a lot of them?

Betsy Schneier: There were. There were not as many. San Francisco had many more that stayed in San Francisco. But but yes, that's where basically the first organized Jews really came from. And then peddlers followed. And then the Sephardim followed after the Ottoman Revolution was when the Ottoman Revolution sort of opened up the world to them. Right. Um, so, yes. Yes, that's uh, that's pretty much when there was an organized when there was enough to found temples and synagogues, this kind of thing. Mhm.

Joshua Schaier: Turning back to the Sephardim, uh, I understand, of course, if you don't have information at hand, um, would you say that they've delineated themselves along similar lines? Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, or?

Betsy Schneier: I would say Orthodox or a form with some Conservative. They-there's sprinklings, but there's still a very strong tie to, to, to their roots and of which they should be rightly proud, because it's really a very interesting tradition. Um, when we were in Istanbul and went to the Jewish Museum there, it was amazing. You saw the same last names of many of the families here, who are well known. There's a several of them in the archives. So, um, I keep dwelling on the, on the Sephardi, mainly because I think that was sort of the thrust of the way it was started. But what we also wanted to focus on, I believe, in the future. I think one of the

challenges and I think that's I can't speak on behalf of Lisa, but as a past president, it would be very nice to see again the the since we're so driven by technology, um, going in and including many more of the newer settlers of Seattle, you know, where are they going? Uh, the techies, the businesses that have supported tech, um, or after biotech, um, you name it, you know, frontiers of medicine, these sorts of things.

Joshua Schaier: That's good. Um, so let's let's turn back to your own past. Um, growing up here in Seattle, did you encounter a lot of prejudice?

Betsy Schneier: It's a very good question to my-personally, um, invectives and this kind of thing. Absolutely not. However, um, I was very well aware of clubs, um, residential areas, where we weren't allowed to buy property or I was a swimmer recreationally, which swim clubs bar Jews, the tennis club. Um, most of the fancy clubs in town excluded Jews, admitted a few during the Depression and then stopped. And that does, that still lingers actually, on my property deed of this house. It there's a clause at the bottom that says no Negroes and people of the Hebraic faith aren't allowed in this, in this tract, um, that that stopped after the war, but it's there, it's there. So the redlining that we talk about now, um, was around for us to, um, so that I was well aware of. And I think if you ask almost anybody my age. They might tell you the same thing. Um, fraternity and sorority life was not exactly for me. That was not my thing. But the Jewish fraternities and sororities were there because the other fraternities and sororities never, um, didn't pledge them. They weren't invited to pledge. So things have changed a little bit. But, uh, even today, even today, my Gentile friends, never knew about the restrictions of their clubs or their neighborhoods. So it was not really talked about.

Joshua Schaier: No, no, I know what you mean. This, this sort of thing was stuff that I found out myself about only fairly recently. You mentioned that things changed. Uh, what would you say was the catalyst for that change?

Betsy Schneier: I think income probably. Um, I think there's one family that managed to get a house in the Highlands. That was a big deal. Um, I know that- oh, I know that Windermere, which is not too far from where I live, was closed until the Moonies. I'm not sure if you're old enough to remember who they were. Sun Myung under the Korean Unification. Yeah, yeah, that one tried to buy a house, and, uh, there was a big lawsuit over that. Windermere lost it, and they finally had to open up. And ironically, several of my Jewish friends had purchased property that they thought was to be in Windermere when I was a kid and the and those days before the Moonie suit, this would have been in the early '60s. The Windermere Association actually redrew its boundaries to exclude them so that no longer exists. They're part of Windermere. And then I know Jewish families do live in Windermere. I know that Sand Point Country Club, which also exists not too far from here, what, spent thousands of dollars to redo their bylaws? But even today, I have friends who avoid living there. You know, if they may get a golf membership and even so, some people will kind of look at them like, "Really?" Um, so those memories linger a little bit. Um, and I think there are still a couple of closed places I couldn't tell you. I don't pay much attention anymore, but it's there. It's, it's, it's there and not to inject politics into it too much, but this region as a whole. I went east to college, and so the invectives that were hurled at Jews back there were never spoken here. But as political rhetoric sort of gets ramped up in recent years, it wouldn't surprise me if you hear some epithets that nobody in my generation would dream of hearing. Um, I'm I think my kids have told me that actually, they're 37. They're twins.

Joshua Schaier: Interesting. So your parents did not grow up here in Seattle? They immigrated here, that's right?

Betsy Schneier: That's right.

Joshua Schaier: What would you say were some differences between, um, their attitudes, how they approach being Jewish? Um, living here and yours, growing up here.

Betsy Schneier: It's a really good question. They ended up here because even though my father turned out to be an American citizen, he had a Canadian- he grew up in Montreal, and his dental degree was his dental diplomas. And his undergrad was at McGill. And I think at the time, you couldn't pass the, um, not the not the bar. What's the one for medicine and dentists? I'm blanking on it. Yeah, you have to take a licensing exam. But anyway, there were only two states that allowed foreigners, quote unquote, to take them and one was Oklahoma and the other was Washington State. So my father became the first children's dentist in in Washington state, uh, because it was a fairly new, um, field. Um, in those days, it wasn't a pleasant thing for anyone to go to the dentist, I think. But my dad was very successful and very popular and far more observant than I. Although he was not Orthodox. My mother grew up in an Orthodox home. I'm the- her father and her grandfather both were Orthodox rabbis. She was not Orthodox. Um, but very involved in, in shul hopping, we like to say. She she helped form three congregations in town. Mine, ours split off from Herzl, which is a Reform one, split off from Herzl as well. Um, but ultimately we didn't join because it was Reform. Um, so I moved more easily, I think in certain respects, they they were, they kept kosher. Um, they weren't Shomer Shabbos or anything, but they went. My dad always went to synagogue and I'm, even though my husband and I both have really traditional educations and very good ones. We don't, well, what else would be a difference? Um, again, just moving. I'm much more active in the Gentile community than my mother ever could have been. I think, I'm on the Seattle Art Museum, for example.

I'm on one of those junior board things. They didn't allow Jews in those days to do that. I would say that's probably the biggest difference.

Joshua Schaier: Okay. Very interesting.

Betsy Schneier: Yeah. Um, my parents, both were big boosters of Seattle, as am I. I mean, most natives tend to come home no matter where we've gone. Um, I think what other- I would say they're just more traditional in keeping with the times than, than we are now. My kids both, for example, had b'nei mitzvah on a Saturday morning. Everybody did. It does now. But when I was growing up, mine was Friday night because women weren't called up to the Torah. They are now, not that my parents had any problem with that. They were delighted. Um, but, I'm trying to think what else? Um, we travel more than than they do, we've achieved, we were fortunate to have achieved really stellar educations that permitted us, um, entree into a lot of experiences I think they could only dream about. Well, that's probably the biggest difference.

Joshua Schaier: So your parents grew up where? I don't quite recall if I asked you.

Betsy Schneier: That's a very good question. My father was born and raised in Montreal, but his parents, his his dad was an American, so he chose to be an American citizen and left Montreal once he got married and did his fellowship in pediatric dentistry in New York City. Um, he met my mother in New York. My mother is not from New York. Everybody thought she was, but she wasn't. She was actually born in Greenwood, Mississippi, of all places. As the as the daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, she grew up on the prairie, actually in Aberdeen, South Dakota, and her grandfather had a congregation in North Dakota. So, um, that's really where she was based, although she had some significant health issues, so she was hospitalized in Chicago for a lot of her youth because of a childhood accident. Um, so that's I think she would call Aberdeen her home. I think she would say, uh, where she came from, although she was a very proud Seattleite.

Joshua Schaier: Good. That's good. So let's let's bring the conversation a little bit closer to the present, now what would you say are some of the challenges that society faces as we're in this unprecedented pandemic situation?

Betsy Schneier: That's a great question. And first of all, it's great that people are starting to ask about it and to think about it, because for many months, I think all of us have been wandering around in my in a miasma of confusion. But if any organization can pull themselves together and create something out of chaos, I put my money on the historical society. Just in terms of kind of- this isn't the first time we've had crises in this world. There was the, you know, the Spanish flu, wiped out a bunch of people in Seattle just as well as everywhere else. And it continued. So I think the focus on the past shining a light of history from the past, both so that you don't forget it, of course, but also so you can learn how people coped with adversity before us and so that you can reinvent yourself to face the future. We're obviously going to be relying on remote distance learning. Um, we're going to have to develop curricula in all sorts of ways, not just for kids, but for anybody. Think about it. Synagogues are using zoom. Um, my cousin, for example, who's lost her mother in law, and I think they're having a funeral on zoom, um, in Saint Louis. How are we going to hold our life cycle events?

Joshua Schaier: Excuse me. What is that noise in the background?

Betsy Schneier: I'm sorry. My husband is gardening. Hold on just a moment. Could you please close the door? Thank you.

Joshua Schaier: Thank you very much.

Betsy Schneier: There we go. Sorry about that.

Joshua Schaier: But you were saying?

Betsy Schneier: Uh, I think just re-envisioning how technology can kind of help pull us out of this. Zoom has brought a lot of people closer together in terms of-I don't know about you, I've heard from people from my high school I haven't seen in, you know, 30 years or 40 years or longer. Um, I see I talk to my college friends a lot. Um, it's a little bit trickier when you talk about larger events, but there's no way we can't come up with some sort of platform that will enable us to do that, and what sorts of biotechnology, when the vaccines become available, how soon can we get out? And once we're out and about, it would be great to have stuff right out of the box ready for people to participate in and maybe get a little energized about. One thing I neglect to mention in the interview that skipped over that is probably the biggest difference in my life is I am multilingual and my second language is Russian. And, uh, we have one of the largest Russian speaking communities in Seattle. Not just Jews, but Gentiles. But I was very instrumental in the, um, Soviet Jewry movement in the '70s and, um, know knew a lot of the dissidents from my days, a couple of trips to Russia. But there's a lot of Russian Jews here that have been not assimilated very strongly into the Seattle Jewish communal life. And that would be a real, um, shame to not harness a little bit more, invest a little bit more energy when the time

comes to to sort of bring them into the fold. Not everybody is married out of of there. But they're not joiners. Um, that that's their heritage. You don't join up with the Soviet former Soviet Union. You're forced to. So it's a whole different mindset. It's the same with, you know, Israelis who choose to settle here. Same kind of thing. Um, that's a challenge. That's a challenge. It's part of the melting pot, though. And we're- the society is very good at dealing with melting pot issues. And, um, maybe we should start re-examining that again. You know, are we melting pot? Of course we are. That plays into all sorts of things. Economic, uh, equality, justice, you name it.

Joshua Schaier: Very interesting. Now, although this current pandemic is relatively unique, obviously we've had pandemics in the past, but it's not something that happens very often, could you talk about other crises that the historical society specifically has, has weathered? What sort of pitfalls have you have you run into?

Betsy Schneier: Our biggest pitfall has always been funding from the Jewish Federation, which is sort of the pocket book for the Jewish communal life, uh, funding Jewish communal life. So the directors has and her assistants have literally scrambled with help of volunteers, which is the strength and the challenge. Um, you know, you literally put your heart and soul into every single program because every penny counts. And like I said, it's the best, Jewish, most interesting Jewish organization you've never heard of. It's, it's not, it's not funded very, very well. And it deserves a lot more funding than it does every, every- you know, there's limited funds everywhere now. And again, the pandemic will undoubtedly play into this. Um, but the biggest challenge is funding. No question about it. Writing grants. Where to find them. Who would be willing to underwrite programming these sorts of things? Also, um, I, we skimmed right over the Holocaust. You know, we weathered that. It wasn't the- survivors were very active in the society, actually, um, in its early years, they were very active in it, and to their credit, it was about the time when they started to open up a bit about their experiences because for a long time, as you undoubtedly know, that was something that most people didn't talk about. So we played a little part in that, I'm glad to say, through the archives and the oral histories. You talk about a horrendous phenomenon, that there's one right there that was almost not in my lifetime, but almost, um, I know a lot of survivors, kids. I grew up with, a lot of survivors here. Um, I don't know whether that answers your question directly.

Joshua Schaier: It's an answer, always useful, even if it wasn't the exact answer. That's okay. Where would you like to see the society moving in the future? Best case scenario, if you could get all the funding you wanted, what would you do with it?

Betsy Schneier: I would continue along the same lines of making sure that our history, especially our unique histories, every history is unique, but our particular strengths, meaning our diversity, is preserved orally and digitally and so that it can be stored and taken out and stored and taken out. So, for example, this new Jewish museum, the digital museum that's being talked about. Um, so that you can pull up all sorts of information about who has what and from from the past. That's exceedingly important whether you come here five years ago, whether you own a tech company, whether you own a shoe company. If with all the funding in the world, I would, I would basically, um, expand the efforts to preserve as much as possible through that museum and through the archives. I think it's absolutely vital because if we don't preserve our stories and our history, um, our great-our grandchildren aren't going to know them, or their great-grandchildren. So that's what I would do, enlarge our base, enlarge our presence. A better public relations staff would be nice. Um, given some funds. Um, but that's not the most important part. The most important part is the basic bones of the work. Just expand on them. We have great bones in this organization. So just just so that just they can enlarge the scope of those of those bones. I guess one might say.

Joshua Schaier: So. Right now, the archives are very entwined with the university. Um, is that something that you'd you'd like to see continue or change? I understand if you don't feel like answering.

Betsy Schneier: I think it's great that it's the archives are preserved as well as they are, and that they're open to the public and that they've been stored and preserved as well as they have and I think that's all I'm going to say about it.

Joshua Schaier: Of course I understand.

Betsy Schneier: Right. I think it's vital that we keep them. I think it's great that the U has graciously continued to store them. I hope that relationship continues fruitfully in the future. How's that for an answer?

Joshua Schaier: That's a great answer. How would you say that the the Jewish community in Seattle has contributed to the city's history of, shall we say, protests, challenging norms, that sort of thing?

Betsy Schneier: Our organization?

Joshua Schaier: No, no, no, just the overall Jewish community.

Betsy Schneier: That's a very good question, and one that really should be talked about a lot more. So, for example, um, Rabbi

Norman Hirsch was the first, was the second actually, rabbi at congregation Beth Am was jailed in Selma, Alabama, with Martin Luther King, and the congregation had to bail and I think my parents also helped, uh, had to bail him out. Um, Jews were very active in the Civil Rights Era. Lenny Schrader was part of the Thurgood Marshall's team arguing board versus, Brown versus Board of Education. Um, I think he was a junior. But if you asked him, I'm sure he would tell you he's gone now. But he liked, delighted to tell people about his role, however small it actually was. But he was on the team. Um, we protested constantly against the war. The Seattle Seven, one of them was Jewish. Um, so there was always a protest. Is is really part of who Jews are, right? They we've always questioned the status quo, and I think, again, since we're a relatively small component of this town, um, a lot of the protest leaders way disproportionate to our numbers. And it's something to be proud of. I think that would really be great to highlight in the years to come, because I think that's being forgotten a little.

Joshua Schaier: That is very interesting. That's definitely something that we should be expanding our focus on. But that's a matter of fact...

Betsy Schneier: Yes. Excuse me, I'm interrupting you, but I'm thinking that Raphael Levine, who lived to be 100 years old, actually, uh, was very famous for hosting the first interreligious dialogue with the Catholic Church. He had a father, Tracy, I believe, still alive or recently died, I can't remember which, but they had a program on every Sunday morning, interreligious dialogue and no priest had ever set foot in a Jewish house of worship in Seattle until Rabbi Levine invited him to come to Temple De Hirsch. Temple De Hirsch. Getting back to the racial situation, Rabbi Hirsch put his foot down and said to his congregants, we are not moving this temple. It was a time that was during the '60s when there were riots in the streets here in the central core and some of the synagogues, most of the synagogues that were in central Seattle moved, many to Mercer Island, some to the south end. Um, and Rabbi Levine put his foot down and said, absolutely not, and today it's a great location. It's a very enviable location. But that took a lot of courage. That took a lot of moral courage. Um, he got a lot of flack from his congregation. As a matter of fact, if I remember right, but they stayed put. They had a branch in Bellevue that some people Sinai, which I believe is still there, but the main one has still remained right there in, in-And it was a little dicey for a while. It was a little dicey to go down there at night. I remember because my parents made sure I went and same to me at Herzl Friday nights. It was a little tough, but those were also the days where, um, whenever there was a when Martin Luther King was assassinated, everybody went to synagogue. Um, it was that kind of a traditional in that sense. When 9/11 happened, as I recall, uh, the synagogues held services, all of them, until we had a terrorist attack at the Federation and that changed everything.

Joshua Schaier: Yes, I recall that.

Betsy Schneier: Yeah, we didn't think about that. But that was as a matter of fact, right before Lisa Kransler started to work, she was hired and then the attack came and the Federation had to go and move for a while. It was, that was a tough time.

Joshua Schaier: Must have been very difficult.

Betsy Schneier: Very difficult. Funny how one forgets about those challenges, but that's the joy of being a president emeritus. You, you rejoice in the accomplishments and sometimes the challenges. Don't remember maybe as much as, as when you did when they occurred.

Joshua Schaier: Yes, yes. So it's a reminder that we still have a long way to go even though we've come so far.

Betsy Schneier: It'll be interesting, especially with current events abroad we haven't focused them on much. But, um, one thing about our society is that we draw from all of the, we are one of the few organizations that people who are Reform, people who are Unaffiliated, people who are Conservative, people who are Orthodox it doesn't matter, and they all come to our, our, our programs or and join and it's it's kind of a neutral space sometimes. If there are, um, differences in traditions between the different, different denominations, one might say, we've never had that problem and which has also been a strength string, particularly at certain times. Um, like that. Um, what I was about to say was with the if pandemic, uh, woes ease, um, if the political landscape changes and even if it doesn't, um, more, uh, Arab countries have opened ties with Israel. I mean, the Emirates have just declared relations. Um, exploring those types of issues might be an interesting one. We really haven't, didn't spend a lot of time on Israel's place in the world because that has become a very divisive issue, I think, in the Jewish community recently, and it might be one, a good one in the future to explore.

Joshua Schaier: Interesting, interesting. Um. How do you feel would be the best way to go about exploring that? Um.

Betsy Schneier: That's a good question. I would probably by doing what we do best, which is, um, mounting a multimedia presentation, bring in partners, um, from all over, um, work with the university. We, uh, not just from the archives. I'm talking about the academics, uh, side. Studies? Um, I know working with Jewish studies. Um, I really haven't given it much thought, but there's a lot to work with.

SPEAKER_S4: It's very interesting.

Betsy Schneier: And again, because we're sort of neutral, um, we don't have an agenda one way or the other. It might be kind of a safe space to invite members from other communities that...

Joshua Schaier: I know the issue is fraught with controversy. Um, everybody's got a very strong opinion on that matter. Well.

Betsy Schneier: Well, Jews don't lack for opinions.

Joshua Schaier: That, that is very true. We certainly do not. Um. Are there any issues that you feel, um, should be addressed more? Or being addressed enough?

Betsy Schneier: I think the whole question of future generations sense of identity as Jews that concerns me. We have excellent summer camps, which unfortunately now are not in session. But we have them. But not everybody goes.

Joshua Schaier: Right, right. Um.

Betsy Schneier: Day schools, not everybody goes to them. They're private, they're expensive. Um, there're Sunday schools. But how else do you, um...

Joshua Schaier: What what exactly concerns you? Um, regarding Jewish identity?

SPEAKER_S3: Uh, it's the age old question. We're, we live in a in in a country, for better or for worse. And how do you navigate your path? Do you-marriage is an issue. If some intermarried families raise their kids as Jews. Some don't. Um, but again, it's a very rich tradition. How best to pass it on. That in a way, that means something to a generation that is not as focused on the past as we are. Maybe. Let's put it that way.

Joshua Schaier: Um, certainly isn't the same urgency of persecution that people in your generation would have known about.

Betsy Schneier: It's also very flat. Yes. Through the internet. You know, to use, to rip off Tom Friedman there for a minute. Um, you can just pick up the net and you can just strike up conversation with just about anybody. And that's great. There's nothing wrong with that at all. Um, it's nice to know things about what came before you while you're having those discussions. And I don't think that has been happening as much in future in I'm a grandparent now and I'm not too worried about my own kids, but I know a lot of their friends have very little idea about their pasts. And, um, it's too bad because there's a lot to be proud of, and it would just be a richer, um, identity to take with them into the future.

Joshua Schaier: Without delving too deeply into matters of politics. Uh, would you say that the last couple of years have brought with them an increase in prejudice or?

Betsy Schneier: Oh, yes.

Joshua Schaier: What changes have you noticed specifically?

Betsy Schneier: Um, I have no doubt heard the term of the canary in the coal mine, Jews being the canary in the coal mine, meaning that, you know, when one group is persecuted or, you know, but just the vandalism, um, the hate groups, the marches, uh, um, you don't just see them on TV anymore. I mean, you see people strutting around, we have police and our, um, well, we've had them ever since the terrorist attack, but it's taken on a different kind of form, too. It's morphing, you know, hatred morphs and, um, that's very scary. And it's morphed again in the last couple of years. It's kind of boiled over, I'm afraid. It isn't just a question of Israel or not. It's, it's, it's, it's.-Yes, there's a lot of antisemitism out there. After the defacement of the swastikas. My husband's grew up in Pennsylvania and the synagogue was vandalized last weekend. So.

Joshua Schaier: Despite all this, do you have hope for the our future, for the future of the Jewish community here in Seattle?

Betsy Schneier: Yes,I do. I. It's sometimes hard not to despair. Um, you don't want to talk politics, and I don't either, although I'm a rather political person. Um, but it would. I think eventually we will have different leadership that will be pointing us in a more constructive direction. I hope that comes sooner than later. Um, again, we've we've suffered before. We can. We can pull through.

Joshua Schaier: All right. Um, I think that would just about wrap it up. Uh, but we, we do have time. If there is anything else that you would like to say?

Betsy Schneier: I don't think so. Except to say that the one unappreciated aspect of the historical society is the sheer talent of its volunteers. Not just the commitment, but the creativity. Um, it stems from the Executive Director who pushes herself way too hard. I don't think I'm telling any secrets. I'm sure you'll agree with me on that one. Um, she has exceedingly high standards, but every everybody in the leadership does. Um, and the quality of the value and the again, the creativity, the strength, the commitment is just amazing. And it is not, um, an egocentric organization. Um, nobody likes to call much attention to themselves. It's really a refreshing place to work in that respect and to be to be a leader in that with boards like that. Um, my parents had a term called machaeritis, um, where lots of people like to puff up attention to themselves. You find none of that with the historical association. Um, the flip side, of course, is there should be more recognition. But on the other hand, nobody asks for it. And that's that's all too rare. And but again, I'm thinking of Doris Stiefel, the who's a dentist by profession. Quite a trailblazer, but just just thinking ahead to using the internet, you know, and making use of the small amount of funds, hiring, you know, finding Lisa. Um, she's not alone. But the fact that there's so many of us that have stuck with it this long because they just love it and and. It's very impressive.

Joshua Schaier: Well, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. I found it a very fascinating conversation, and I'm sure that, um, posterity will as well. So I'm going to turn off the recording now.

Betsy Schneier: Thank you.