Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Balint, Judy Oral History Interview

May 29, 2011

Glenn Richter: Today is May 29th, 2011. My name is Glenn Richter. We're here in Jerusalem and we're interviewing Judy Balint. Judy now lives in Jerusalem, but previously had lived before that in New York, before that in Seattle, before that, in London, before that in Israel, and before that in London. So we're going to sort of rewind the tape the other way and discuss Judy's very, very, very interesting journey, uh, in Soviet Jewry activism and especially Judy's founding work for Seattle, Action for Soviet Jewry. So, Judy, the question always that people ask us is what motivates what motivates a person to become active in Soviet Jewry work. Was there anything in your particular background?

Judy Balint: Clearly, I think the fact that my parents had fled from Europe right before the the war. They came to England in 1939. Um, my parents, my grandparents, of course, did not. Not, of course, but my grandparents did not escape. I grew up without grandparents. That clearly had a significant effect on who I ended up becoming. There's no question about that. And, uh, there are actually, as far as I know, no Soviet connections, no Russian connections in my family. My mother is from Galicia and my father was from what is now eastern Germany, actually Upper Silesia. And, uh, we don't trace our family lineage back to the former Soviet Union, to Russia, to the Pale of Settlement. Any of that. Um, but you have to remember, I was born in 1952. So during the 1960s I was in high school. It was a very turbulent time, even in England. And we had very different turbulence than America had, and we had the whole Carnaby Street thing going on. We had, uh, just a kind of a light headed, if you will, kind of, uh, type of society. Um, but I went to a Jewish high school, and I was active in Bnei Akiva youth movements, and all of that gelled, I think, uh, after the Six-Day War, um, my first visit to Israel in 1968, uh, all those things led me to. Somehow relate to the idea that there were Jews somewhere in the world that needed help.

Glenn Richter: Well, let me ask you, your own parents, did you ever discuss with your parents what if what if, uh, world Jews, world Jewry, outside of those who were threatened by the Nazis, had spoken up more, had pressured more?

Judy Balint: The topic of anything related to the show, ah, basically was not was not discussed in that manner in my house. My parents were the kind of people who my mother particularly couldn't relate anymore. After the war to what had occurred with their guilt at having survived the fact that they'd lost their parents at a relatively young age, etc. so no, that was not discussed overtly at home. I think it was more the sense of, I mean, I sensed as a, as a child and as a young person what had been lost. I sensed what had gone on in the family. You sensed that there were things that that that were not

discussed. It was kind of a black hole, actually. So, no, I would say it was more it wasn't it wasn't from home so much as in that respect, it was more a sense of of of of Jewish responsibility. And my father, particularly my parents, were both very active in the Jewish community. My father particularly, and I think from that I took again on a, on a subconscious level, the notion that, uh, that one needed to act on behalf of one's fellow Jews. And it was it was just as simple as that. And it was a time, the 60s was a time when people were acting on behalf of peoples that were oppressed, and this was the natural one that came to my attention. And so actually, during the time I was in high school, um, a member of the 35, uh, lived down the street from me. Her name was Sue is Susan Harold. She lives now in Raanana. I'm still in touch with her, and she hosted several meetings that I remember attending as a high school student.

Glenn Richter: Perhaps for the for the viewer explain who the 30 fives were.

Judy Balint: The 35 were a group of British women activists who were all around the age of 35. Although Susan was younger at the time. Uh, they coalesced around the character, if you will, of Sylva Zalmanson, who again, one of the people associated with the Leningrad hijacking. And she herself was 35 and she was in prison. And that was their whole they had an incredible, publicity PR sense about them. The 35. And they both educated the public, educated the Jewish community and did phenomenal things. And they were truly an independent activist movement at a time when when none others existed. So I was exposed to them. And again, I was in high school. So it wasn't something that, uh, I mean, it grabbed me in a certain sense, but there were many other things going on. And but I remember learning about the issue of Soviet Jewry from them. I remember going out on 1 or 2 demonstrations with them before I came to Israel after high school, which was again a given thing that everybody did in those years.

Glenn Richter: Well, now, Soviet Jewry demonstrations, your parents don't react negatively. Did they react positively?

Judy Balint: Not at all, no. My parents were very positive. Again, my parents were very involved in the community. So no, that was never an issue. Um, no, I would say on the contrary, they encouraged any kind of Jewish activity, any kind of Jewish activism, without overtly saying, oh, what you had suggested earlier. Uh. Nevertheless, there was a sense of, yes, you know, this is what one does to be a responsible Jew. And that was how I was raised.

Glenn Richter: So let me ask you, in the United States, by 1968, the book While 6 Million Died was published. And that really kicked off the big reaction. Uh, our parents were silent. We're not going to be silent. Did you was that sort of generational gap evident in your milieu?

Judy Balint: It manifested itself in a different way, because my parents and almost all of their friends were fellow Jewish refugees themselves. So how do I explain this?

Glenn Richter: So it wasn't they could not have been it wasn't an issue of silence because they had gone through it themselves.

Judy Balint: Exactly. So it was more the sense of our personal involvement, you know, just a

generation past, you know, again, we're talking about the 1960s. My parents had only come to England in 1939. 25 years earlier. I mean, not a great deal of time. So it was more that sense. So I guess my activism was was bound up. It was Zionism, it was Soviet Jewry, it was activism. It was, uh, a little bit of Jewish outreach. It was through school. There were it was an entirely um, it was that time and it was a sense of, of of what one does to to be Jewish in that, in that area.

Glenn Richter: So, so you were doing what your friends were doing essentially, or maybe a little bit more. But but basically, in other words, you weren't standing out in your activity in the sense that it wasn't that unusual.

Judy Balint: I would have to say in looking back that, uh, the people who are my age who were children of Jews who were already second and third generation British born Jews did not have the same feeling that I did and did not have the same, uh, need to be active. And in fact, if I go back to the Herald's Sherman Susan Herald, who I mentioned earlier, who were active in the 35, they interestingly enough, both have exactly the same family background as I do. That was not uncommon. I think it was far more common for those of us that had, uh, you know, what we now call today the second generation syndrome, if you will, um, to be pulled into activism. Uh, it was much more common than than my British Jewish friends who I went to, to the Jewish Free School with JFS school in high school, uh, they were not so motivated. They were involved in more general, you know, rebellious activities. You could say, um, but not necessarily in, in, in activist Jewish things. I do remember during those years, of course, uh, I believe it was in 1969 where there were demonstrations held outside the Iranian embassy in London after the incident with the Iranian Jews that were hung, and that, I would say unrelated to Soviet Jews. But that was a pivotal changing point in British Jewry in terms of how to react. And again, it was largely the younger people who showed up to that, that event. I remember that quite distinctly.

Glenn Richter: Okay. So you go off to Israel for a year. Uh, is there any.

Judy Balint: No. Not exactly. I actually had made Aliya. Ah, no, I was in Cuba. Um, the point I was, uh, I applied to English universities being accepted, but I'd also been accepted at Hebrew University. So my actual plan was to go to do ulpan on kibbutz, uh, as a prelude to, um, going to Hebrew. Um, so I left. I actually worked for half a year right after high school to get some money to go to, uh, to the program and, uh, ended up on Kibbutz Be'erot Yitzhak at Leumi Kibbutz, which I'm happy to say is still in existence today, right between Ludd and Petah Tikva, which now looks completely different. And, uh, there in that old pun, there was which was, uh, this would have been January of 1971. I was there between January of 71 to September of 71. Um, the majority of people in that open were, uh, English speakers from Australia, South Africa, America, England. However, we had one young woman from Moscow whose name was Anna, who I remember quite distinctly and, uh, she, of course, again, this was 1971, right. She had come without her parents. It was not clear to us how, where or what. She was not particularly talkative. She was there to learn Hebrew. She did not speak English, of course. And, uh, we didn't really get a sense from her of what was going on in the former Soviet Union. Um, other than that, things were bad. She was then maybe 18.

Glenn Richter: But that was the time of The Leningrad trials, the whole series of Leningrad trials.

Uh, were you basically isolated from from all that kind of news?

Judy Balint: Um. I'm just trying to think when I, uh. That's a really interesting question. Um. Yes, I don't remember. Or I'm just trying to think if there were if we if we.

Glenn Richter: I mean, forms of communication weren't that sophisticated at that particular point.

Judy Balint: Exactly. Um, yes. I don't actually remember hearing much of anything during the time that we were on on open. And I came back. I came back to England briefly in September of 71, stayed, stayed till December of 71, got married in December of 71 and went immediately to Seattle, where I was a student at the University of Washington for the next goodness knows how many years and that, uh, that again, that was a crucial point of of Jewish activism not related to Soviet Jewry per se. Um, that was I would have to say it was not on my radar in 1971, 1972, 1973, um, around about the latter part of 1973, early part of 1974. Uh, my husband and I, my ex-husband and I were contacted by, uh, somebody who gave his name as David Halperin, um, who wanted to know if we were interested in possibly going out to the former Soviet Union. And, uh, this is the story of many people who went during that period. Of course. Um, they the Israelis couldn't send people directly from Israel. They were looking for people for young people who had had experience in Israel, who spoke Hebrew, I spoke Yiddish, my ex-husband had studied Russian, um, people who could explain what was going on in Israel, who could explain, give, give some little passion about about yiddishkeit basically, and carry that into the Soviet Union and also, of course, bring information out. So we met with this David Halperin twice. I remember meeting him in a hotel. It was very cloak and dagger. Um, this was the early part of 1974 already. Uh, and then he set up a meeting with, um Carol. Aria. Aria. Aria. Carol. Oliver. Shalom, who is no longer with us. Um, who came to Seattle to do the actual briefing. And we sat in the home of Jack and Zina Greenburg in Seattle in their backyard. And Aria proceeded to grill us as to our fitness, if you will, for undertaking this task. And I guess we passed the test. And, uh, in around September, October of 1974, it was around the time of the chagim, we were booked on a first class deluxe tour, which was really quite funny because we were students at the time. I was 22. My ex-husband was 25. I had just graduated undergrad from the University of Washington. He was just in law school, and we were told that we were going on this three week trip. It was not part of a group. They booked us just on a first class. You know, in those days, Aeroflot had these classes of of vacations, and we were on the the deluxe class for three weeks.

Glenn Richter: For a classless society.

Judy Balint: Exactly. And we started out in Leningrad. We were we were in Leningrad. We went from Leningrad to let's see which way around was Leningrad to Kiev. Kiev to Odessa. Odessa to Czernowitz, and then back to Moscow.

Glenn Richter: Do you remember some of the people whom you met?

Judy Balint: I certainly do. I'm still in touch with some of the people we met, actually. So, uh. Yes, it was quite an incredible experience. Um, so, Kol Nidrei night of 1974. We arrived at the plaza of the Leningrad Synagogue, the only synagogue that was operating at the time, and uh, in the courtyard

were probably no less than 3 or 400 people congregated, um, of all ages. Mostly the younger people were mostly, uh, outside in the courtyard. And no sooner had we entered into the courtyard, through the gate, the gate of the courtyard, we were literally mobbed. Um, literally mobbed, I would say. And, uh, very quickly, I spotted 2 or 3 other people, um, who were like us, uh, whether they were set by the Israelis or not, I'm not sure. But clearly people who were not, um, you know, who had come in from other places, um, we each one of us, we split up. I mean, we couldn't help it split up. And we were surrounded immediately by 20, 30 people crushing to to get a glimpse and a and a taste and a A word in Yiddish or an idea from us. It was really quite overwhelming as a 22 year old, even though we'd been warned that this would happen or warned isn't the right word. We'd been told that this was, uh, this would occur. Um, it was it was nevertheless a very overwhelming experience.

Glenn Richter: Both young and old.

Judy Balint: Outside. Yes. Once I went upstairs, I spent about. We got separated. Of course. I spent maybe an hour outside, uh, during the midday service, um, talking to people in Yiddish, Hebrew, a little bit. I remember one very, very elderly gentleman whose name I can't possibly remember, but who I later found out was one of the seminal Hebrew teachers who had managed to to preserve Hebrew, uh, a little bit in Leningrad, who spoke this beautiful classical Hebrew, much with grammar, much better than I had. Um, and then there were people, the younger people who some of whom spoke a little smattering of English, uh, and a little bit of Hebrew that they were beginning to learn. Um, all of that happened outside. Once I was able to, then I really wanted to get inside to see what was going on inside and, uh, to go upstairs. And I went up to the, to the women's section and there I that was not so full. Uh, it's a kind of a semi-oval, actually, uh, balcony overlooking quite high up, overlooking the rest of the the the congregation. And I plunked myself down on the right hand side between a group of old women. And, uh, I had, I believe, again, it's hard to remember exactly, but I had several little sedarim the little, little size, not the really tiny size, because I had those, too. But but this, this kind of size of cedar and and, um, opened it up and, uh, the women, the reaction of the women upstairs, they were all old women upstairs, uh, who were trying to govern in some semblance or other. And they had marks that were obviously very old and a great hubbub started up when I came in and there was one other woman, as I, as I said before, who who was obviously from abroad. Um, in any event, people get again, they didn't exactly gather round, but they there was this kind of there was, on the one hand, a pull of people who wanted to speak to me. And then there was a push of other women who for whom they were obviously scared. They were scared of the consequences of of being with anybody from from abroad, obviously. Um, and they were telling the other woman, oh, don't talk to her. Don't talk to her. You know, it's dangerous. Whatever. But there were people who who approached, approached me upstairs and who watched me. David, I made a point of, you know, showing them that here was a person who was 22 that knew how to dovvn. And that was, again, a very moving experience. Um, I can't say that I absorbed much of the colony service that night, but, uh, nevertheless, it was a it was a very moving experience. And then we went back downstairs. Um, and we must have stayed there until after the services for maybe, oh, 2 or 3 hours. And one of the people whose address we had we were asked to contact was Daniel Fradkin. Daniel and Sarah Fradkin and Daniel somehow found us. Daniel was a very slight figure, uh, probably my height or shorter. Very thin guy. Very from already. He was wearing. Had his head

covered. He had a beard. He was then probably my age, slightly older. Um, so he would have been in his maybe mid to late 20s and, uh, hopped on right away that we were the people that he was supposed to meet and essentially dragged us away and said, you must come to, to to my home, you know, I want you to meet my wife and see where I'm living. And he again, we were talking to many, many, many people there. And, uh, but he was one of the people that we were supposed to see. So we went with Daniel. Um, and by this time, it must have been, I don't know, 11, 12:00 at night we walked perhaps 20, 25 minutes through the dark grey, wet, damp streets of Leningrad in October and we arrived at his home, which was probably the most for me again at the age of 22, was an incredible experience to experience. The Soviets had divided up. They'd taken Tsarist era mansions, palaces, and they had divided them up into really can't even call them rooms, apartments, uh, divisions with with almost paper or fabric divisions between each. Each family, uh, shared bathroom, shared kitchen, quote unquote kitchen. Um, and this is how the Fradkin family and observant family, who I believe had two kids at the time, uh, small kids were living amongst. Goodness knows how many 20 families possibly, uh, in these really disgusting conditions in Leningrad. And what stands out in my mind is this sense from them of this inner peace, this inner conviction of that a they didn't belong there and that they would ultimately succeed in getting out, even though there was no logical, rational reason to think that that was the case in 1974. Um, and just this commitment to Yiddishkeit that was that was quite incredible given their circumstances. And we had a very fascinating conversation.

Glenn Richter: Now with Daniel Fradkin. Okay. Judy, you said that Fradkin had a sense of sort of inner peace. Uh, this was not, however, an easy time for refuseniks. 74. So how did he insulate himself from from all the pressure?

Judy Balint: That's a very good question, Glenn. Uh, I just had the feeling. I mean, if I think of Fradkin, compared to, for example, other people that we met on that trip, I mean, I can he was probably the most observant person that we met. Not probably. He was, uh, Um, um, and I can only surmise that that was a good part of it. Um, and I just think he, he well, they all were, they were obsessed with, with, with their quest and they were obsessed with the just justness of their cause. Um, and they were so grateful to find people like, uh, like yourselves and, and us who had come to, to be a sounding board for them that, uh, I think all of those things helped, but I obviously I can't tell you, uh, you know, what was in his, uh, in his in his heart and soul, the other people, I mean, we went to see, for example, the family of, um, Alex. I think it was Alex Boguslawski. Boguslavsky was in no boguslavsky. His brother was in prison. Whose name? I don't remember now. And we were asked to visit Vadim.

Glenn Richter: Was it.

Judy Balint: Not? To the best of my recollection, but I honestly don't remember now. Boguslavsky was an entirely different character. The family was entirely different, and we went to see them out in what was then called the Micro-regions of Leningrad, which was in itself like a again, in retrospect, was like a bad movie. We didn't think so at the time. It was quite, quite scary at the time. Um, we were told exactly. We were given the directions how to get a cab, where to get a cab from, uh, you

know, where to get them, where to have the cab. Let us off. Of course. You didn't want to have the cab. Let you off in front of their apartment house. And then finding, oh, my God, finding the number amongst these huge concrete slabs of so-called apartments which were built one after the other was was almost like a maze, actually. It was just incredible. Um, after a day or two, we were able to actually phone these people and they met. Some of them met us downstairs, but the first time that we went to meet them, um, we had to make our way there. And I remember that was just a really a nightmare. Uh, but anyway, we did find them, and I remember going up. It's funny, the things you remember. I remember going up in the elevator of Boguslawski's so-called apartment with other people from the building. And you have to remember, these buildings were massive. Um, and again, we had been quite well briefed, of course, not to not to open your mouth and say anything on the elevator. Even though we were dressed, we thought quite modestly and in black clothing, and nevertheless, it was quite obvious to anybody seeing us that we were not Russians. That was quite obvious, but we shut up. We didn't speak to each other. And, uh, of course we got some looks from the people in the in the elevator. But we finally made our way to Boguslawski's, uh, door. And I remember again, distinctly knocking on his door, uh, saying, you know, them, them approaching the door. You could hear them approaching the door. And, you know, they said, damn. We said, Shalom, Shalom, Yisrael, you know, door opened and we were welcomed with open arms and all the warmth of, uh, of the refuseniks and the and the families of the prisoners of Zion, of course. And, uh, but in any event, Boguslavsky and his family, whom we came close, became close to in that just 2 or 3 days that we spent with them, um, they were secular. They were committed Zionists through and through. They had suffered tremendously, uh, because of that. Um, and they too, I have to say again, in retrospect, they, they they exuded strength. They gave us strength. I mean, it's so hard now to, to convey this, but the feeling we had from them, the, the, the sense of, uh, it's just a very difficult thing to explain, the sense of, of connection we had with them. The, um. The, the admiration we had for these people. Again, they were probably ten years older than we were at the time. They were in their 30s, probably mid 30s, uh, just quite, quite incredible. Um, there's another family now I really must remember their name because they're now in Atlanta. Uh, the alaskas. We met through the boguslawski's actually the family of and again, I don't remember their first name. I think it was Vladimir Olesker, uh, from Leningrad. And just to fast forward 20 years, um, they again we struck up a very they were younger. They were also students like us and, uh, they spoke English and we struck up again, a very strong connection, emotional connection with them. And years and years and years later, I lost contact with them completely years later. Let's see, that was 1974. In 1999, uh, a year or two after I made Aliya, I met at a political meeting here, some a young woman with the last name of Olesker. I said to her, well, it's not a very common name. Would you by any chance be the daughter of or related to? And she looked at me and she said, oh, she said, well, that's my uncle. And she then put me in touch with them. Uh, they were they had got out actually quite soon after we visited them. They got out in 1975, 1976, and they, uh. Vadim. Vadim I think Vladimir Vadim, um, became a professor. He's a professor now at Emory University in Atlanta. I'm in touch with them. I've visited them in Atlanta. Uh, so again, just just another sidetrack of a story here of of where we're going with all this, um, but just. Yeah, the different types of people that we met on that trip. And that's just in Leningrad. We met Yevgeny Lane on that trip in Leningrad. Uh, no. I'm sorry. That was the other trip. I'm sorry that I take that back. That was 1986. Um, no, 74. We did not meet Lane. Uh, in any

event, that was Leningrad. That was Yom Kippur in Leningrad. Um, from there we went to Kiev. Kiev was an entirely different set of circumstances. The information we had been given about the Jews in Kiev by the Israelis turned out to be entirely wrong. Um, they had told us in Kiev, in and in Odessa that the people we would be meeting had in fact requested permission to leave when we knocked on the doors in actually primarily in Odessa. Every single one of them, I think, without exception, uh, told us that they, in fact, were not interested in Israel. They wanted to come to America and they did not want to talk to us. And, uh, so that was a bit of a, as we say in Hebrew, a, a screw up, um, in Kiev, uh, that was the place where we had, uh, problems in the shul because because of our lack of ability to connect with families of refuseniks in Kiev, we actually didn't connect with any of them, to the best of my recollection. Um, we ended up playing tourist in Kiev. Um, and actually, there's some very funny stories about what happened to us playing tourist in Leningrad. But okay, I could sit here for hours and talk about that. And there are other things to talk about. Um. Uh. Kiev. Um, Kiev. We were in the shawl that was in the puddle. Podolskaya, uh, which is the old Jewish area. And it was the first days of Sukkot. Again, to cut a very long story short, what happened there was the Shamas. And I actually have a picture of this somewhere. The shamas of that shawl, uh, was clearly in the pay of the KGB. There was no question about it. Um, I had one of these tiny little siddurim from Israel that you put in the palm of your hand. We had been told. Yes. You know, if you meet somebody, you know, you can shake his hand and pass off this this, uh, thing of tehilim. I speak French, so I had met a elderly. What I thought then was an elderly gentleman who was probably no more than 60, um, in the courtyard, and we were speaking French, and, uh, I said to him, I said, well, you know, let's shake hands. And he put out his hand, and I and I gave him this, uh, this little white sitter. And I went off back upstairs into the shawl, into the ladies section. The shawl was quite empty. As I got up back upstairs, a fracas ensued, and from downstairs the Shamas, who must have seen this, somehow yells upstairs something in Russian, which I didn't know, of course, what he was talking about, but I kind of figured out what he was talking about, and, uh, the the entire service stopped. Um, my ex-husband was downstairs in the front row with the men, just kind of schmoozing. And, uh, the woman who was the the female gabbai upstairs literally pulled me out, took me and, uh, into a room that my ex-husband was already there. The shamas came in, another person came in. Fortunately, they didn't lock the door. Fortunately, they didn't lock the door, and they proceeded to yell and rant and rave for about ten minutes, mostly in Yiddish, because that's what we understood. about how we were endangering the congregation and how we were provocateurs and how we were Zionist agents, and on and on and on and on and on. And we just played totally dumb, as if we didn't understand anything. And after about ten minutes of this, we we looked at each other and we made a run for it. We just pulled open that door and we literally made a run for it. And we literally ran back to the hotel. And of course, at that point, we knew that they were on to us, so to speak. And our next stop in Odessa, um, again, we had knocked on. We had many addresses in Odessa. Not a single one worked out. We were there for, uh, must have been in Odessa. And I have pictures of the sukkah. Very beautiful sukkah in the what was then the only operating, um, shul in Odessa. And we had kiddush in the sukkah. And we, we lay low in Odessa. We kind of played tourists and we really lay low, lay low. And then we ended up in Czernowitz, in Chernivtsi, which was then Ukraine, and there we had some very, very, very profound experiences that were not expected and, um, that that could be divided into several areas. One had to do with the Jewish cemetery in Czernowitz. Uh, we met a

fellow named Sasha Dorogobuzhsky, who I will never forget, who is today living in, uh, somewhere up in Nahariya, uh, who was again, about our age. He was married with small kids. He and his family were literally living on their suitcases. This was in Czernowitz, 1974. Literally living on their packed suitcases again. I'll never forget this. Um, with no rational reason. They had no rational reason to think they were going to get permission. They had requested permission from relatives in Israel. The letters hadn't arrived, they had not been given an invitation, etcetera, etcetera. But they were convinced, absolutely convinced that they, the Dorogobuzhsky family, was going to end up in Israel and they were going to be given permission tomorrow, and that they were going to be out of there. And again, Sasha was one of the most upbeat people, Um, and I don't remember what language we spoke to him in. Maybe in Hebrew. Actually, I think he learned Hebrew. And he took us to the Jewish cemetery in Czernowitz. And again, I have pictures of this, uh, which back then, in 1974 was a schunda from the shandor's, um, uh.

Glenn Richter: Overgrown tombstones.

Judy Balint: Well, the schunda was that the Czernowitz cemetery? The Jewish cemetery lay literally side by side with the general cemetery in Czernowitz. The general cemetery was beautifully kept kempt. And everything else. The Jewish cemetery was overgrown, tragic, you know, uh, tombstones overturned, etcetera, etc.. Now, interestingly, just yesterday I was reading an issue of Segula magazine, which is a fabulous magazine produced here in Israel, where they documented the work of some Jewish activist students who have been funded to go to various communities around Eastern Europe. And they wrote an article about the cemetery in Czernowitz. And you should see. It's beautiful. I was amazed I saw the building of the chevra kadisha, uh, which I have a picture of in 1974, and of the gravestones. And today, I'm happy to say, which I would never have believed I would be saying this. In 2011, the Jewish cemetery in Czernowitz is actually being kept up in any event. 1974, that was not the case. And so Dorogobuzhsky took us there, bemoaned the fact that, uh, that this was going on, took us to meet another family who I whose name I cannot remember, but whose faces I remember, all of whom ended up in Israel within a year and a half. I'm happy to say. And then by chance, we met in the park a group of Jewish students from the university in Czernowitz. Um, and I, again, Mark Schramm was the name of the leader of this group. And Mark, the minute he saw and he was a very brave young man, he was again, probably no more than 20 years old at the time, saw or overheard us talking English in the in the main park of Czernowitz, and came over and very quietly said to us, can you meet me here later at 10:00, or whatever time it was? And, uh, we got the picture right away of who he was, and he came back at 10:00 with a group of 4 or 5, uh, fellow Jewish students. Again, I have pictures of these people who were about our age. And, uh, we had an incredible, uh, meeting of the minds with these young people. We met them three, 4 or 5 times. I don't even remember now. Um, they were wonderful. They were Jewish students who were dying to be involved in, in Jewish activity. Um, the other thing we did in Czernowitz, uh, was they Dorogobuzhsky actually took us on a historic tour of the horrible events that had taken place during the Shoah, was a typical story of how they had herded Jews into the central synagogue and burnt the synagogue. Um, and then we spent Simchat Torah in again the only operating synagogue in Czernowitz, which was a tiny, tiny synagogue with an Ezrat Nashim. And again, we had no problems there, but that was our that was basically our time in Czernowitz. So and then we went to

Moscow and did a number of things in Moscow that again, nothing unusual than what everybody else has done. So the whole this is all a prelude to say, uh, what started off Seattle Action for Soviet Jewry? Because we came back in October of 1974, I, I had graduated undergrad, I had applied to graduate school in social work and had not yet been accepted, and began to look around after having had these very profound experiences and met these people, uh, to find out, you know, who who was doing anything for Soviet Jews in Seattle anywhere. And, uh, fortunately, I came across, uh, somebody by the name of Leonard Schrader, who was a Seattle lawyer who had recently returned to 1974 from a couple of years working at the Israeli Ministry of Justice, um, working on legal issues related to Soviet Jews. And he had come back to Seattle for personal reasons. And somehow I got introduced to him, and he was already in touch with how Light and Selma in California, in San.

Glenn Richter: Francisco.

Judy Balint: In San Francisco, and I believe with Lou Rosenblum also. And he put me in touch with the Union of Councils. And in 1975, Seattle Action. Well, we founded it. In late 1974, Seattle Action for Soviet Jewry was founded with Leonard Schroeder's help. And, uh, we became a member of the Union of Councils in 1975. And there are many stories.

Glenn Richter: Let me ask you this often those who were sent by the Israeli Soviet Jewry office, as you were, were told, when you come back, write us up a comprehensive report. We're going to debrief you. Uh, thank you very much. But don't talk about your activities. Yours You seem to be a little bit different. Were you were you were you asked not to speak. Were you encouraged to speak?

Judy Balint: I don't remember being told not to. And I certainly remember we came back with slides in those days. Everybody had slides and we went around. We put together slide presentations. And for the next 2 or 3 years, between 1974 and 1976, 77, uh, David and I went around to schools, to youth groups, to goodness knows where Jake's showing these slides, because as far as we knew, um, with the exception of Len Schrader, uh, no other Jewish activists had been to the former Soviet Union. Now, I have to say that at the same time, what was going on in Seattle was that Seattle had become a sister city to Tashkent, and there was a tremendous amount of activity going on between Seattle and Tashkent on an official level. And of course, that drove us crazy because, needless to say, human rights issues never came up. Um, now, I became a member of the Seattle of that committee, actually, and there were a number of Jews, among them Dorothy Schrader, Oliver Sholom, Leonard Schrader's wife, who worked for the mayor of Seattle and was active on that committee. And she kind of greased the way into that committee. And I remember distinctly sitting in numerous, numerous sessions of that committee, kind of banging our fists on the table saying, how can you have this relationship if you're not talking about human rights? And they would counter to us and they would say, no, we cannot talk about human rights because it's going to destroy the relationship. And we would say to them, well, what? What the heck is the point of having a relationship if you can't talk about issues that are that are dividing you? And we never I mean, that went on for years. It went on through the Seattle, uh, Tashkent sister city committee. It went on through. We had something called Seattle two, 2000, I think, which was again a national conference on, on, um, nuclear disarmament, where the Soviets came. We had the Seattle Goodwill Games as late as 1990.

All of those events, uh, brought official Soviets to Seattle. And we were out there constantly, constantly demonstrating that was in addition to the cultural people. I mean, everybody, every community had the Bolshoi. Every community had the Leningrad. Uh, I don't know who, uh, music troupe or whoever it was. I mean, all those events, we we of course, uh, all the Union of councils, uh, did we made sure that we would, um, we would, uh, leaflet them, flyer them, etcetera, etcetera. And that kept us very, very busy. And I actually have some pictures. I don't know if you want to see pictures.

Glenn Richter: Absolutely. Judy, you have some photos. So what are you showing us?

Judy Balint: Okay, so here is one example of a relatively early demonstration. This is actually from 1979.

Glenn Richter: This is free Soviet Jewry.

Judy Balint: Right. These are our Seattle action, uh, T-shirts. And this is a demonstration that took place outside the Pacific Science Center, where there was a Soviet women's exhibit, and we used the opportunity to leaflet on behalf mostly of Ida Nudel, but other other women refuseniks. And, uh, the reaction was quite something. They, they we wore the T-shirts. Uh, again, this became a tactic that was very, uh, used often after that. Um, in many places, of course, they wouldn't let us leaflet. So we said, fine, you're not going to let us leaflet, we'll put it on ourselves and we'll wander around, which we did. And we got quite a lot of press for that. I mean, there were 5 or 6 of them, all of these people here, by the way, I'm still in touch with to this day, uh, this woman here, Ruth Knauer, now lives here in Israel. She's 92. Janine Rosenbaum is the wife of a rabbi in Seattle. Leah Alexander is the wife of Professor Edward Alexander in Seattle. And this is their son, David and myself at the end. And, uh, again, you know, these kinds of activities tend to forge bonds, strong bonds amongst people. And, uh, that's another sideline of all this activity. Another very interesting picture I have actually, is this one here from 1978, which is slightly earlier. Now, this is Professor Deborah Lipstadt, um.

Glenn Richter: The famous Holocaust scholar.

Judy Balint: Correct. She has just written a book on the Eichmann trial, and she is renowned for her, uh, standing up to the Holocaust denier David Irving in London. Uh, but this was 1978. She was a professor, then a professor of Jewish studies at the University of Washington. And, uh, we had invited her to be one of the speakers at a birthday party for Natan Sharansky. Then Anatoly Sharansky was January 20th. He shares a birthday with my daughter, and we had downtown Seattle. This, uh, very at the time was considered a creative demonstration where we had balloons. Here are some other pictures of that in the main Westlake Mall, uh, section of Seattle. Uh, again, we had very, very good press coverage for this because you have to remember, this was not usual in Seattle. People didn't go out there and demonstrate for for anybody.

Glenn Richter: Well, let me ask you a question though. As we're speaking about this, I mean, Seattle certainly has a reputation as a sort of a leftist community, a community with a leftist bent. Now,

there were, I assume people were demonstrating, advocating for other social causes. But when it came to the Soviet Union, was it different?

Judy Balint: Most definitely. Um, and that was part of our problem, because the politically correct thing to do in Seattle at that time was the anti-war. Anti-nuclear. Uh, what's the word? Um.

Glenn Richter: Mobilization?

Judy Balint: Yes, yes, yes. Uh, so the idea was that any any time you had anything to do with the Soviets could only be good because, uh, you know. Yes. You know, there are people just like us. That was the whole thing. Um, the Climax of that whole thing, if you will, occurred, I think, in 1986. I can look up exactly when we host. We Seattle hosted the visit of, um, Vladimir Posner, who was the prime, um, Soviet propagandist.

Glenn Richter: Sees the word slime, not prime.

Judy Balint: Slime and prime. You got it. Um, who went around the world basically, um, with this TV show with, uh, what was his name, Phil Donahue? Yes, exactly. Phil Donahue. I'm just looking up the exact date of that. I believe it was 1986. Um, you.

Glenn Richter: Have to mention here that Posner was Jewish, correct? Actually, he still is. He's Jewish. Yes. Uh, but he was a spokesman for the Soviet propaganda line.

Judy Balint: Exactly.

Glenn Richter: Okay. So, okay, so now you've gotten Posner and what happens?

Judy Balint: Well, Phil Donahue, 1986, 1987, it was called the Citizens Summit. Right. And Phil Donahue, why, he picked Seattle, of course, because Seattle was like prime territory for all this stuff. And they ran these things at the King5 Studios downtown. Um, we had and I don't have those pictures with me, but there are pictures in the archives, actually, of our demonstrations at various, uh, appearances of Vladimir Posner. Um, and it came to the point he was there at least 3 or 4 times I was actually allowed to be in the audience once we sent in somebody else. I remember we sent in 2 or 3 people, uh, you know, to be part of the audience. It was very difficult to get into to the audience there. And, uh, finally they caught on to the fact that what our agenda was and the last the last event, they, of course, wouldn't let any of our people in there. Um, but our point again, was to press home these issues, to say, you know, how is it, Posner? You can stand here and spout off your propaganda. Uh, again, remember, this is 1986. Things were already, you know, it was the beginning. Beginning of glasnost. Um, but we were concerned about zelaznik. We were concerned about people that we had visited in 1986. That was the second time I went to the Soviet Union, was in 1986. And, uh, so we actually then got quite a big cadre of people to demonstrate outside the TV studios, and we created quite a ruckus there. And I'm sure the tapes are available, you know, somewhere in the archives of, uh, of, uh, I think it was NBC. Um, would be very interesting to to get those, actually for your archives. But yes. So so the atmosphere in Seattle was certainly not friendly to our point of view. And I would say within the Jewish community itself, that was also an issue. And,

uh, again.

Glenn Richter: Going back to the time that you created Seattle Action, was there any pressure from the local federation, and if so, what kind of pressure, encouragement or discouragement?

Judy Balint: Uh, well, there were different periods. Initially, the, As president of the federation at the time, the paid professional was a gentleman by the name of Murray Schiff, who is no longer alive, and he was quite, quite old already. Then, uh, and when I went to see him, he was relatively sympathetic. When I came back in 1974 and said, look, you know, here we have a Jewish community, you know, you have a community relations council. Let's do something for Soviet Jews. And he was actually quite sympathetic. And, uh, again, to cut a very long story short, tried to co-opt us, said, okay, why don't you come and sit on the CRC and be a committee of the Community Relations Council? And for a while we did that. Um, again, our time is too short to go into all the ins and outs of it. But, uh, what occurred after that? And it occurred in many, many, many, many communities, if not all the communities was the same thing that the more we got active and we started being vociferous and we started being out there, we started getting press, the more uncomfortable they became. Um, because in my view, because it showed up, it showed up. The fact that the organized Jewish community was actually not doing anything, um, you know, our activism showed that, you know, there was nothing else going on. And we pushed and pushed and pushed and sometimes we had their cooperation, sometimes we didn't. In later years, I would say in the years, for example, I remember distinctly when Sharansky got out in 1986, the party we had that day, when he got out in 1986 was in the Federation office. Okay. So by that point, it was already more or more accepted, um, that Soviet Jewry activity should go on. And by by 1987, when the when the great demonstration took place on the mall in Washington, the organized Jewish community did take part in that. And we had a delegation of probably 30 people that went from Seattle, which was quite significant when you think we were schlepping across the country.

Glenn Richter: The the person, the Jew on the street in Seattle when you started, were they where were they sympathetic? were you able to get into? You mentioned talking to schools. Were you generally allowed to to communicate with students or with synagogues?

Judy Balint: Well, again, if I go back to 1974, yes, because we went as two private individuals who had just come back from visiting refuseniks. Here we have a slide show. Isn't this an interesting program? And people accepted us and we. Yes. Um, and that was how we got our mailing list. That's how we got activists was going to synagogues, going to the youth groups. And we put together, as in many, many places, a very, very small I emphasize, very, very small cadre of real activists who we could count on to come out and leaflet and come out and write the letters and do all the activities that every council did. Um, as far as the Jew on the street went, uh, one of the things we did in those early years also, and it happened by chance, I would say, was, uh, so happened that there was a family in Seattle, the bonus family, um, whose daughter, uh, whose name now escapes me, um, had been refused permission, and the bonuses lived in a suburb of Seattle, and they were very persistent people. Um, they were a couple who were then probably in their late 40s, early 50s. And, uh, they were doing everything they could to try and get their daughter out. And they. Because that was a

local story. Um, it made it easier for us to get press, and it made it easier for people to relate to them and to, to to somehow then relate to the whole issue of Soviet Jewry. So we, we focused on the bonus case, uh, you know, to try and kind of get more sympathy, if you will. And that worked to an extent. It worked to an extent. But, but, but still, we were constantly confronted with, with many, many Jews who sided with the Seattle sister city committee crowd and the Goodwill Games crowd who who saw us as, um. you could say.

Glenn Richter: Raining on their parade.

Judy Balint: Obstacles to peace. Okay. We were the obstacles to peace. Quite, quite clearly. And, uh. And that was not a comfortable position to be in. Um, and, uh, what happened a little bit later was actually very interesting. In the late 1980s, uh, it was already announced that the, that that Seattle was going to host the 1990 Goodwill Games. Again. To cut a very long story short, we had had good relations. We the Seattle action for Soviet Jewry, had had good relations with several non-Jewish groups. Um, we were fortunate to host the World Without War Council in Seattle, uh, which also had a branch in San Francisco, some very fine people there who who understood the issues, not Jewish. Um, they were the catalyst to put together a coalition, which we called the Seattle Peace and Freedom Coalition, which came together for a period of 2 or 3 years prior to the Goodwill Games, exactly, to bring these issues to the fore. And they were, interestingly enough, people from the Latvian community, people from the Polish American community, uh, Armenians, um, who else was there? Those were the main ones, the Armenians, the Latvians, us and the World Without War Council that I recall. Um, oh, and, um.

Glenn Richter: You say you work together?

Judy Balint: Yes. And this committee that still exists for refugees. What's it called? A very well-known committee which has been in existence for years. Thank you.

Glenn Richter: The International Committee for refugees.

Judy Balint: Yes, exactly. Uh, Keith Axelson, who I'm still in touch with to this day, um, really fine human beings, fine people who who understood it. And we had a coalition, which I think was quite unusual, where we, the Jews, played a significant part, and we succeeded in getting the issue of human rights onto the agenda of the Goodwill Games. And we actually had several sessions of the Goodwill Games that were dedicated to human rights, I think because it was very much like the Sharansky approach. It was not a Jewish issue. It was the with the Helsinki period, of course, and we took our cue from his. View of things and and it worked. Um, and that, you know, that was something I think that was, again, somewhat unique to Seattle.

Glenn Richter: So now let's since we're talking about publicity and pressure. Of course, there are two more elements. One is the general media and the second are politicians. So how did the general media treat you? In other words, sympathetically. Uh, fairly. Uh. Not enough.

Judy Balint: Okay. It's a very good question. Um. They loved us. I have to say, the media loved us. We were good. Copy. Um, here was this small group of people. We put on interesting demonstrations.

We were articulate. We had something to say. We had the local angle. Uh, yes. The media, I would say, really, we had very good relations with the media. I was on the radio all the time. There were certain radio hosts. Talk show hosts who are, by the way, still there today, with whom I became very friendly and who were very sympathetic. And I have to mention here Dennis Kelly, who was on KOMO radio, who's now on another radio station in Seattle. Dave Ross from Cairo, Cairo radio. Um, people again, who understood the issue and who saw the importance of this as an issue and they were happy to give us, uh, time, you know, to discuss these things and, uh, TV a little bit less. But again, we had the Donahue stuff and we frequently were, were, were featured on TV. So, yeah, that the media were good to us. Um.

Glenn Richter: What about politicians, in other words? Let's let's start with members of the Senate and Congress and, uh, certainly, you know, there was always activity. We were always asking a member of, uh, of Congress to, quote, adopt, unquote, uh, a refused a prisoner, uh, to intervene for specific cases to back certain resolutions. Uh, how how did you find those local politicians?

Judy Balint: Well, you have to remember, we were from Seattle, Washington. I worked on Scoop Jackson's campaign. Okay. Many of us did. Um, I was doing his scheduling for a while. I mean, that was. I kind of remember what year that was. Very early in the 70s. Um, this.

Glenn Richter: Was when he was running for president. Yes. I mean.

Judy Balint: Yes, he was running. Yes, exactly. Okay. Um, that, of course, was an honor. He was incredible. We met Richard Perle. We met, uh, you know, all the people that ended up on top. Um, so he, of course, you know Helen Jackson, his wife. I mean, all those people, you know, that was an incredible, incredible, uh, uh, event. Not events. I mean, it was just just so heartwarming to find somebody like a Scoop Jackson and his wife, who, again, who got it, who were so supportive, who were willing to, you know, to carry the issue. I mean, what more could you ask for than somebody who who authored the Jackson-vanik amendment? So that helped tremendously. Shortly after that, um, we found ourselves a lot of our work, like all the council's was, was with elected officials, and we had many that were magnificent, I would have to say, who did all the work, who adopted the families, who adopted the prisoners, who came with us in 1986. And the next time I went to the Soviet Union, I traveled with a legislative aide to, um, ah, Mike Lowry, who was a Democratic congressman. Um, his legislative aide came a legislative aide to Congressman John Miller, who was a Republican. Um, uh, they were people. I mean, John Miller particularly was, you know, is an incredible human rights activist, uh, incredibly helpful. We had also Senator Slade Gorton, who for many, many years was the senior senator in the state of Washington, who again got it instinctively. We never had to ask twice. His staff people were incredible. Um, whenever we went to Washington for Union of Councils meetings, we always had the most productive meetings with them. I mean, that was I would say that was a relatively easy part of our work, frankly. It was the congressional piece. Um, I took Jim McDermott came who was, you know, the liberal of all the liberals who still to this day, the congressman from my old district in in Seattle, the seventh district, um, and who today is not a friend of Israel, I would say. Uh, back in 1986, uh, saw himself as a human rights activist and came with us on that trip to the Soviet Union. He was then in the state Senate, and we had again,

some incredible experiences there in Riga, where we were followed by the KGB. And he stood up to the KGB. Jim McDermott.

Glenn Richter: As you as you begin talking about.

Judy Balint: This.

Glenn Richter: Great trip.

Judy Balint: Yes.

Glenn Richter: How was it organized? I mean, were you sent again by the Israelis?

Judy Balint: No. This was, um. And again, I can't quite honestly remember, uh, the union, you know, had encouraged us. Us? All of the councils to be taking our elected officials. I honestly don't remember how we came up with the money for this. Um, I know we were briefed. Uh, I mean, we, of course, were doing our own briefings then, but, uh, all our information was from the union. Um, I honestly don't remember how that how the logistics of the trip were put together. I remember exactly where we went. We went to Leningrad, Moscow and Riga. It was a much shorter trip than the three week trip in 1974. Um, I'll just tell you one piece of it from Riga, which was really, truly incredible. We had been asked to see, uh, the wife of, of, uh, Alex Alakanuk, who was then in prison. She lived in an apartment building on the main street of Riga, which, if I'm not mistaken, as every main street in the Soviet Union was called Ulitsa Lenina. certain number. And we went on a Friday afternoon to scope out where this apartment building was. We found the right entrance to that apartment building. We said, great stuff, guys. It's five blocks up from the hotel tonight. We're going to do the deed. Right? And, uh, so we did our tourist thing during the day. And four of us then. No, sorry. Two of us. Two of us stayed behind in the hotel. Myself and Paul, the aide to Mike, Congressman Mike Lowry, decided that we would be the forward party, if you will. And we went to find Zelenskiys wife's apartment. We come to the, uh, entryway, which again was a building with many entrances. We come to the entrance of this apartment building. We make our way slowly up the stairs, very quietly again. It was quite dark. Lo and behold, on the first landing we found a guy in a trenchcoat. And it was the classic movie KGB. Here is this young, handsome fellow. And he's wearing. I'll never forget this as long as I live wearing a beige trench coat. He sees us coming up the stairs. He opens his trench coat as if he's a flasher. Right. He opens his trench coat like this, and he pulls out his red leather, like a little wallet. Like a business card case with the KGB logo. Right? And he says to us in accented English, he says, you know, what is this? And we kind of looked at each other and we said, uh, yes. And we again, we'd been briefed for such occasions, of course. And so the main object was to be loud enough to show zelaznik, eh, we had been there and be, you know, that somebody was on the staircase. So he said to us, you will not, you know you will not. You are not welcome here. You will not visit these people here. And we said, oh, who would that be? We're just here to visit friends, you know. We said in a very loud voice, um, and this kind of stilted conversation went on for a few minutes, and he stood his ground. Big brawny guy on the landing. There was no way we were going past him. And so we very sheepishly went down the stairs, the two of us. We were. Then again, we were on the main street of Riga. It was Friday night. We made our way back to

the hotel, of course, very obviously followed, very obviously followed. We get into the hotel, which is the main hotel, and I think the only hotel in Riga at the time, 1986. And we're by this time we're kind of shaking and we see the other our other two, Jim McDermott and Nancy Sterner from John Miller's office. And we kind of said to them, meet us upstairs. There's been a problem. And we then used our the famous magic slate, um, to describe to them what had occurred. Okay. So then what's the plan? You know, how are we going to connect with Zelaznik? We had a whole list of other people to go to. Well, that night we kind of went to bed, uh, in the morning, early in the morning, we get a knock on our doors. The two women, we were rooming together, and the two men were rooming together, and they said, you will come down to the manager's office now. We get down to the manager's office. In the manager's office are. The hotel manager, KGB, the same guy. Another person who? We didn't know who it was. Um. And that was it, I guess. And the. It was amazing. The head KGB guys. It was a quite a small room. The hotel manager, the head KGB guy starts talking and he says to me in English, he says, like this. He points at me and he says, you, you are Zionist provocateur. We know you were here 11 years ago, 1974, right? We know who you you know what you did in 1974. You know, if you persist in these activities, you will never again get visa to our country. I'm like, yes. You know, uh, McDermott now. So we had been you know, we kind of expected this. Nancy who? The Jewish aide to Congressman Miller, you know, we kind of expected this. We were like, okay, you know, fine. So you're going to you won't. We knew that the effects on us were not going to be anything, that the effects. Unfortunately, the potential effect was for the refuseniks family. Um, Mcdermot didn't quite get it. So Mcdermot was an Irish guy, very big, gets up out of his chair and he starts like this. He he takes his business card, which is from the state of Washington State Senate, and he flings the the business card on the table. And he says to the KGB guy, you know who I am. He says, he's a big Irish guy. He says, I'm a state senator from the state of Washington, sir. He says, you will not talk to my associates like this, sir. You know, and he goes on like this, trying to intimidate this KGB guy. Very long story short, uh, eventually, I mean, it was just fascinating to me that they before the age of computers, they knew exactly who we were. Of course, uh, in any event, at the unfortunately for all of us, the end result of that was, of course, that we could not go to visit those refuseniks. We did not want to endanger them. So we ended up walking around the the it was Shabbat. We ended up walking around the market again. They were very obvious following us. Um. It wasn't, you know, they didn't pretend like they weren't. And it was, of course, to intimidate us. Our next stop was Moscow. We the. And we told them this. We said to the KGB in the hotel in Leningrad, we said, you know, this is unacceptable conduct. You know, we're not doing anything that's wrong. We are going to take our complaint about you to. We're on our way to Moscow, and we're going to complain at the American Embassy, which is exactly what we did. We got off the plane. We took a cab to the American Embassy. McDermott, you know, as a state senator and the other two who were, uh, congressional aides, uh, we lodged a formal complaint. They listened to us, the Americans, and we went on our way. Um, now, fortunately, from what we know, nothing happened to electronics. Wife Zelaznik himself, unfortunately, spent many, many more years in prison and didn't get out until a few years after that. Um, and that was our experience in Riga. But, uh, but that experience with those congressional aides, again, only helped to, um, impress upon them, you know the real nature of this issue. So, yes, I would say our congressional people were were our best allies all along. We were very fortunate in the state of Washington. You know, Slade Gorton again, I can't say enough

good things about about how he helped us in the Senate and we never had any problem with them, you know, reading things into the Congressional Record, uh, anything we wanted essentially. Excuse me. So that was that was that was the easy part.

Glenn Richter: Were more people at that time over the course of these, let's say, 12 years, the Jewish community gets on board, right? Uh.

Judy Balint: In 1987 were the big march. Okay. Yes.

Glenn Richter: And was the general community becoming aware? In other words, if you could say the word Soviet Jewry to just a regular person in the street in Seattle, would that person have some awareness that it had become an issue in Seattle?

Judy Balint: Uh, I would say so to some extent. Again, mostly because of the Posner Donoghue thing. I would have to say that was a huge big deal. And the Goodwill Games, which occurred in 1990, um, and at that time we had already had, of course, like everybody else, a quite a big influx of Jews from the Soviet former Soviet Union who had chosen to come to America, not to Israel. And, uh, they were being absorbed. And there were stories we again, every Hanukkah, we had a story about them, um, every Pesach, you know, we, uh, liberation. ET cetera. ET cetera. So they became there were many families. Well, many I would say there were several. There were probably six, seven, eight families to whom we could rely, you know, to whom we could go, uh, and who were willing to speak out and who were, you know, refusing material. Um, you could say, um, and they created an awareness at that point. Yes.

Glenn Richter: We did Seattle or Seattle action. Ever get mixed up in the battle between the Israeli government and many American Jewish organizations over the issue of Jews coming out of the Soviet Union, who chose to come to the US rather than to Israel. Although using Israeli invitations to come out? Yes. Were you sucked into that sort of battle?

Judy Balint: Yes. And, uh, I personally, you know, took the position of the Union of Councils, um, which was not the position that the federation took. The federation, you know, who the federations who were taking their lead from the, uh, did take that on as an issue. And we always fought back to say, you know, we don't have the right to be telling people where they can go. That's not, uh, not where we're coming from at all. And that, uh, of course, our preference would be that the majority of people would go to Israel, but if they choose for their own reasons, like our parents and grandparents did, to come to America. Um, and so that was an issue for a goodly portion of time. Um, it didn't become. I wouldn't say that was, you know, I mean, it was an issue within the within the the internal, the inside, the Beltway Jewish community.

Glenn Richter: Okay. You then moved to New York?

Judy Balint: Well, not really. I started to work for Rabbi Avi Weiss, whom I came to know through the Soviet Jewry movement. And in 1992, when he was on a visit to Seattle. Right. The shul that I belonged to had bought him in. Um, we sat down after after his speech, and Avi expressed to me his his great frustration at getting such great feedback to his activist talks, but nobody to kind of put it

all together. And he kind of casually threw out to me and said, oh, he said, you should come to, to to New York, you know, you're coming. Come and organize the whole thing. I said, yeah, right. Avi, at the time, I was actually employed at the federation, um, directing the Operation Exodus A campaign which was the fundraising campaign to bring Jews out of the Soviet Union.

Glenn Richter: This is, of course, after December 31st, 1991, when the Soviet Union formally went out of existence and we weren't really talking about it, let My People Go campaign as such. It's sort of like, you know, protect my people.

Judy Balint: Exactly, exactly. Um, what occurred then again, briefly, is that I kind of went home that night and I scratched my head and I said, hmm, what an interesting idea that is exactly what I would like to do. And so I called up Bobby the next day, I said, okay, you know, let's do this. And he was kind of surprised, I think. And we initially decided to, uh, put together what what you had formed already with, uh, many other activists in New York, the coalition for Jewish Concerns, in a more formalized way. I was supposed to just do the West Coast part at the beginning, and it was the era of faxes and phones, of course. And we said, okay, we can do this. I'll be the West Coast person and let's see how that works. And that worked for about six weeks. Um, the issues then were was David Dinkins, the Norman Rosenbaum trial. It was the Nation of Islam. It was Jonathan Pollard, the Israeli MIAs, on and on and on. Um, and it very quickly became apparent that, in fact, this was much bigger than just the West Coast. And at that point, I started essentially commuting. My kids were still teenagers. I essentially started commuting between Seattle and New York, and I spent about two weeks out of every six in New York and the remaining time on the phone and the fax and then eventually email, of course, in, uh, in Seattle. And that's how we, uh, together with, uh, with you and many others, we forged the coalition for Jewish Concerns. Um, but it was based on our knowing each other, of course, through through Soviet Jewry. And, uh, well.

Glenn Richter: The coalition for Jewish Concerns, um, really was an outgrowth of student struggle when we no longer had the Soviet Jewry issue because we basically said our job was to open the gates. And, uh, we, in a sense, had helped accomplish that. But we had a set of skills like we all did, that we'd all developed, and how could we use it for other things?

Judy Balint: Right, exactly.

Glenn Richter: Now you then. I'm sorry.

Judy Balint: No, just don't want to miss out talking about the Israel connection. You know, about how many people. Right. Are. We all are still in touch with today from our early days, which I think is really quite something and shows the strength of both. Israel shows the strength of our activism, shows that what can be achieved and what can be done. Um, the fact that that we, the activists, you know, from from out of Israel, uh, to this day to this day, you know, 2011, many, many, many of us, almost all of us who are still alive and unfortunately, we've lost several, uh, are involved in Jewish activism vis a vis Israel. Some of us, like Enid Wortmann and Pam and others, you know, still, around the issue of Soviet Jewry and making sure that memory is preserved. I mean, all those things I think are quite extraordinary. And there are people, you know, we run into today with Enid Yulico

Tchaikovsky, you know, Natan Sharansky and Avital lived down the street. I told Avital the other day, whenever I see her in my neighborhood, pushing her grandson, they have two grandsons. Every Friday, almost. She's out in the shopping area near me and she's pushing her grandson. And I told her, I said, it gives me such, such, such just personal pleasure. It's a very selfish thing. Personal pleasure to see Avital Sharansky, you know, the grandmother pushing her grandson. You know, if you would have told me that when she came to visit me in Seattle in 1970, visit me? I mean, she came to visit Seattle at the behest of Seattle Action for Soviet Jewry, 1979. Um, my daughter was two months old. Avital is a year or two older than me, and she, of course, was languishing without her husband. I had this little baby, and, uh, we had organized a breakfast event for her again. I'll never forget this. And at the end of the event, she, of course, was exhausted and spent. And people were, you know, all over her. The media was all over her, and she was, you know, rail thin and just distraught and everything else. And, uh, at the end of the morning, she looked at me and she said, where's your baby? Because I told her we were chit chatting. And I said, well, she's at home, you know, she's two months old. This is like in April. And Abby looked at me and she says, well, what are you doing here? She says, go home to your baby. She said, what are you doing with me? And that was just, again, such an incredible expression of who she, Avital Sharansky is and was and is um, and now she's living down the street from me and, and she's wheeling her grandson. I mean, you know, events that we could never have dreamed of, that, uh, fortunately, we're we're privileged to have the support to live through. And that's something I think that, uh, I don't take for granted.

Glenn Richter: Well, that really leads into the the, you know, the next phase, which is what. What made you decide to leave comfortable America for perhaps slightly less comfortable Israel?

Judy Balint: Oh, well, I mean, it was.

Glenn Richter: It was the Soviet Jewry part. Was the activism part. Part of your decision?

Judy Balint: Definitely. Um, I mean, again, I had planned on making Aliya in 1971, 1972. I just had a slight detour of, you know, 25 years. I came I came back in 1997. Um, no, it was definitely a part of that. I mean, the sense of and don't misunderstand me, I love Seattle. I go back to Seattle, I love the community there. It's an extraordinary community, full of warmth and full of, uh, purpose and everything else. But as Avi Weiss always says, the destiny of the Jewish people is not being written in Seattle, Washington, in Manhattan, in Riverdale, the destiny of Israel is being written here in Israel. And again, the very fact that we see that we have all coalesced here. And many of the people you've interviewed, um, you know, we're all friends to this day, and we're all active in things to this day that are important to Israel. I think says says it all. Um, so I wanted to be in the front row of the front front on the stage, if you will, not in the, not in what we call in England and the gods. Um, and that's, that's where we are in Jerusalem, and that's fortunately where many of our refusenik, former refusenik friends are as well.

Glenn Richter: Well that's okay. So then the question is, I mean, these people at that time were objects or objects of campaigns. They were faces on posters. There were people whom you called, you know, on a on a telephone line that the KGB would try to cut. Now you see people as regular people. Uh, how does that work out?

Judy Balint: Well, that leads me to a story, actually, which is a story about Grisha Wasserman and his wife, uh, Grisha Wasserman, who today lives in Haifa. Um, a very observant Jew. Uh, I met in 1986, in Leningrad. Um, Grisha was a very observant. Then I forget what his wife's name is. Uh. Our route into Leningrad on that particular trip was by train via Helsinki. We'd flown from Seattle to Helsinki. In Helsinki, it was quite cold. It was October, November. We went to a supermarket in Helsinki and we said, okay, what can we buy little gifts to, you know, we can take to the refuseniks. And I see in Helsinki, in the supermarket, an Israeli avocado hard one with a Carmel sticker. Oh, perfect. So I buy 2 or 3 of these things, right? We come to the home of Grisha Vasserman. We were taken there by Yasha Gorodetsky, another incredible Jew who now lives not far from here. Uh, we sit down. We have the conversation with Grisha Vasserman. A very warm interaction. Again, mostly about Yiddishkeit, actually. And so at the end, we try not to embarrass them and we get up and I say, well, we have a few little things for you. And I pull out this avocado. His wife, who they were then in their late 20s, probably early 30s, his wife's entire face lights up. She says, oh, she says, now I know. She says. She says, tell me again what this is. I said, it's an avocado from Israel. She runs to the bookshelf, pulls out an olive baitz primer in Hebrew. And again I have a picture of this somewhere. I'll have to find it for you. Uh, pulls this book off the shelf, turns to the Aleph. It's a hardback book, like for kids. Turns to the Aleph. She finds the avocado. She says, oh, she says that she pulls the avocado from my. And I have a picture of them, of Grisha grinning, of his wife, you know, holding this book and the avocado like, ah, you know. And she said, I never knew what this was, what it was. You know, Mozzie, you know. So here she began to see that. And that, you know, again, was such a heartwarming thing and was such an incredible thing for us. You know, today I go to the hood, I buy a kilo of avocados for four shekel, right? I'm sure she does, too. And yet, you know, in 1986, this was. We had bought her something from Israel. She and she very carefully put it away like an etrog. And she says, oh, she says, this will be for Shabbat. And again, it was just the joy on her face. I really must find you. That picture one of these days was just something that, uh, that, as you said, you know, makes made people human. We were able to share experiences with people that were very profound. And I feel incredibly privileged to have been part of something that was that elicited such, uh, bonds between Jews, whether it was bonds between us as the activists. Uh, and again, we have incredible bonds between us all to this day, uh, and certainly in the days when we were faxing backwards and forwards, or we were phoning backwards and forwards, and certainly to the activists that we were privileged to meet in the former Soviet Union everywhere, even those who were KGB people. I had great, great sympathy with those people. The people who we danced with outside the Arkhipova Synagogue when we went in 1989 with a union of councils we were there for, I mean, on and on and on. I mean, there's just. And today, the people who we see walking the streets of Yerushalayim as free Jews with grandchildren, who are Israelis, who some of whom don't even know the stories of their parents and their grandparents, that's okay. You know, um, again, I just feel incredibly privileged to have been part of that and to have lived through a piece of Jewish history that, in a sense, puts into perspective the horrors that my parents and my grandparents went through. They were not privileged to be part of this whole thing. And, uh, again, as a generation. I think it's again, I wouldn't I wouldn't have wanted to live in any other generation or not be part of this. And I feel sorry for the for the American Jews who did not take part in it, frankly.

Glenn Richter: Well, let me ask you, as somebody who looks somewhat as an outsider and somewhat as an insider, uh, Gal Beckerman in his book When They Come for Us Will Be Gone, ends the book by saying that in a sense, uh, the Soviet Jewry movement, in a sense, redeemed the soul of American Jews who were relatively quiet during the Shoah. Uh, do you feel that's correct, or is that too facile?

Judy Balint: I think, unfortunately, I'm sad to say that it's overblown. Holloway. That should be the case. You and I know Glenn and everybody that's probably going to watch this video. You and I know because the testimony of. I think everybody will say the same thing, unfortunately, sad to say, the Soviet Jewry movement was not a mass movement on the part of American Jews. There were very few of us who lived it, breathed it day after day after day. Yes, by the time 1987 rolled around, people, people began to to take part.

Glenn Richter: We talk about the big rally in Washington in December.

Judy Balint: But I am sorry to say I could I would not view it the same way. Having lived through it, that that it was like pulling. And I'm sad to say that it was like pulling teeth to get people to actually come out and do what needed to be done. And at the end of the day, as I guess with all social movements, it was a small group of people, dedicated people who and again, you know this as well, who gave their lives and who at great personal risk in many, many cases dedicated themselves and gave away their personal lives for many years, decades, uh, to the cause of Soviet Jews. And that was a very small number.

Glenn Richter: So then what was the impact of the Soviet Jewry movement on the American Jewish community, in your view?

Judy Balint: Well, I think in retrospect, I think now in retrospect and again, Beckerman's book, Laura Biala's movie, I think those, those, those two things have had a tremendous effect in, in, in bringing the issue to the fore in terms of and I have issues with Beckerman's book in a certain way. Um, but, uh, so to make people realize today the significance of the movement and again, I feel sorry for them, those that did not participate. And again, I have many friends. I'm sure you do too, who say to me, oh, you know, I didn't realize at the time, you know, what you were involved in and how important it was. You know, now I realize, uh, it's a shame. It's a shame that that people, you know, that it truly speaking, you know, until the very end was not a mass movement.

Glenn Richter: So then, though, for those of us who worked hard. Would you say that there was anything that we sort of missed? Didn't understand. Uh, in our in our work for Soviet Jews.

Judy Balint: Oh, that's a very profound question.

Glenn Richter: Um, I mean, from my side, I think we did not understand, uh, the the incredible necessity for Jewish education for Jews coming out of the Soviet Union. In other words, it wasn't really we really didn't prepare for that. You know, we we had this romantic view that that Jews would come out, they'd be free. They'd learn to be Jews. And not understanding the, you know, what 80 years of communism did for for the Soviet Jewish mind. Uh, but is there any, you know, in your mind, is there anything that if we could sort of roll the tape back that we could do differently?

Judy Balint: I would focus. Okay. So you're focused on on the the people that came out of the former Soviet Union. I would focus more on perhaps, you know, As as community organizers, if you will. You know, on on the failures. I mean, yes, it was a successful movement. Obviously we were successful. Incredible things happened. But, uh, but clearly, yeah. Uh, could anything have been done about that? I mean, the whole, uh, relationship with the establishment, the whole, um, uh, difficulty in, in, in, in, in actually moving again, masses of people to, to to get involved. Uh, and that's, by the way, why I take issue with, with Beckerman's book. Because I think there's an overemphasis in that book, uh, on the role of Mayor Kahana, you know, three chapters or something on, on, on Kahana and his influence. And I think that that's that's, again, overplayed and not an accurate reflection of the grassroots movement as a whole. But anyway, having said that, um, I mean, I think there were tactical things, tactical ways that that had there been leadership, I mean, we had leadership. The Union of Councils had incredible leadership. But, you know, and maybe that's the nature of a grassroots movement. We we we were so intent on staying grassroots movements, um, that the, the, anything that the establishment did was anathema basically. And uh, I'm not sure again, I, you know, neither none of us can, can, can go back in history. I'm not sure what could have been done differently, but I think there were things perhaps that we could have we could have maybe paid attention to, uh, in a different way. Um, although the outcome, I think is probably the same, because, as I said, I think, you know, social movements by their very nature, uh, you know, tend to be small. They tend to be, you know, you have to be nimble. Um, and we were that we were that student struggle was, was the ultimate in that union of councils also. I mean, we were able to keep things moving. We were able to keep things dynamic. Um, we were not able, with the exception of some councils, some councils, I think, you know, the San Francisco, the Bay Area Council, for example, Chicago action. I mean, you know, those those those people did magnificent work in, in broadening out their cooperation, but they were few and far between.

Glenn Richter: What about American Jews ability to influence Congress? Do you think the Soviet Jewry movement was a, let's say, an education for American Jews, uh, in the way that we, uh, responded, reacted, interacted with Congress on an issue very much of importance to us.

Judy Balint: Yes. Um, yes. I think we paved the way in in many senses. Uh, of course, AIPAC was going at the time, uh, obviously, um, and we took lessons from them. Uh, but I think the, the, the very personal relationships that we were able to establish on a, on an ongoing basis, I mean, in the, in, in our, um, in our main years, I mean, we were we were in Washington. I mean, you were in Washington even much more than us, but even those of us on the West Coast, we were there twice a year. Uh, we were in congressional offices. I mean, I was in there sometimes not. Not on a weekly basis, but but in touch with them on a weekly basis. Um, they knew that we were a, a source of information for them on issues that were important. We knew they knew that we reflected, at least they thought the views of a large constituency. Um, they knew, you know, that that that again, there was this symbiotic relationship, you know, that we needed them and they needed us to be seen to be, you know, active on an issue like this, if human rights was beneficial for them, too, of course. So, no, I think I think we did pave the way in many ways for, for for this very personalized relationship with, uh, members of Congress and elected officials altogether. I mean, it wasn't just elected, wasn't just congressional members. It was mayors, right? It was state senators.

Glenn Richter: It was okay on a local level in Seattle, right. You have political cooperation.

Judy Balint: Um, well, the mayor's office was always problematic because, uh, of the Seattle Tashkent sister city thing. Uh, we always. Not always. There was one mayor whose name I can't remember now either, but, uh, who was okay, but many of them were were much too allied with the with the Tashkent business. Um, so the mayor's office was not always great, but they were very aware of us. Very aware of us. Uh, I would raise here the issue of rabbis, um. Some of whom were disappointing, some not. Um, you know, some were, you know, really leaders and got it. Um, but I would say there were, there were some in the community who were who were disappointing to us on a, on a local level and did not take their leadership role seriously enough and, uh, go out to do what, what needed to be done. Um, that was disappointing. But, uh.

Glenn Richter: If you sort of now had like a final word on the Soviet Jewry movement, uh, what would you say about it? Characterize it, sum it up.

Judy Balint: Well, kind of what I said earlier, uh, this, this incredible sense of privilege to be part of that generation that, that, that had this to be part of that incredible flow of history. I mean, it's a, you know, when you look back at it and you see the the after effects that we're experiencing here in Israel, uh, to some extent in America. And I have to say that on my travels around America, the best campus activists, the best campus Jewish activists are nine times out of ten are the sons and daughters of people who emigrated from the former Soviet Union. They get it on a on a on a gut level. What what what needs to be done. And that's very encouraging. Um, so I would say the movement was, was a, a, a part of 20th century Jewish history that, um, was, was fulfilling for everybody involved. Uh, obviously fulfilling for very obvious reasons for the people who gained their freedom, fulfilling for us for the reasons that we've discussed for the last hour, um, in terms of righting the wrongs, in terms of of being able to do things that our parents and grandparents could not do. Um, and being. Uh, being part of a historic movement, I guess that's that's what I can say. And seeing the fruits of it. Uh, how many people can say that they see the fruits of their labors? That's something that's, uh, extraordinarily, uh. As I said, a special special to be part of that.

Glenn Richter: And that's a terrific way to end before we take a look at your famous button collection. And, uh, that has been a absolutely terrific hour and a half. Thank you very much.

Judy Balint: Thank you.

Glenn Richter: Judy. We're looking at what? Right now.

Judy Balint: We're looking at a poster that marks the second Brussels conference in 1976. It says in Spanish Liberté, freedom for the Jews of the Soviet Union. Brussels. 17th to 19th of February, 1976. And it's a Yaacov Agam poster. Very well-known Israeli artist. I was not at the Brussels conference. I actually picked this up, this poster up, unframed in a store in Seattle somewhere in the early 1980s, I believe. And this one, the reason I brought it with me on Aliyah, um, this hung in my dining room in Seattle for some 15 years. Um, and I just brought it with me and haven't quite hung it up yet. I've only been there 14 years in this apartment.

Glenn Richter: Okay.

Judy Balint: Some of these are now upside down, but these they sell these now in the in the Soviet Union or in Moscow for, you know, they're knock offs, but these are real ones.

Glenn Richter: These.

Judy Balint: This is the real thing. Yes, exactly. Uh, that we got from Riga, Moscow, the 1980 Olympics. Right. The the Soviet space guy, of course. All of Vladimir Ilyich. Um, so these are real ones, some of some of which were given to us by refuseniks, actually. Then we have things like this. The women's plea for Soviet Jews. That was an annual event that was held, I believe, from the 70s on, uh, started really around the New Deal. But that I have to say, the women's plea actually was an event that did get quite broad support. This is an old student struggle button. This is an old student struggle button that you'll recognize. So is this, if I'm not mistaken.

Glenn Richter: I know it's Long Island.

Judy Balint: Yes, exactly. Thank you. This is another student struggle One second.

Glenn Richter: Yeah.

SPEAKER_S3: This one.

Glenn Richter: This is when we were going to the Statue of Liberty. Exactly right.

Judy Balint: This one. So, I mean, yeah, of course, but I can't remember what the occasion was.

Glenn Richter: One of our earliest buttons.

Judy Balint: Okay. Um, this is another one that has a lot of history, which other people have probably talked about as a student struggle. One, uh, was the era when there was a ransom, uh, attacks, a heavy tax.

SPEAKER_S3: Education tax.

Judy Balint: An education tax on Soviet Jews. This upside down one Svoboda.

SPEAKER_S3: One second. Let me let me sort of. There we go.

SPEAKER_S4: Right here.

SPEAKER_S3: So about, uh. Yeah.

Judy Balint: And then we have this again. Very.

SPEAKER_S3: There are others. Okay.

Glenn Richter: So the viewer will have to stand on his or her head. Yes.

SPEAKER_S3: Uh, okay.

SPEAKER_S5: Actually is ours, but I don't remember what it must have been. Yes. Connection with the UN.

Judy Balint: Exactly. This is the UN resolution. So those are those. Um.

SPEAKER_S3: Let's see. Oh, yes. Then the Zionist.

Judy Balint: Then I have I've actually just taken this down. I will find this for you. I have an old, And I have an old, um. Ah. This one. Okay.

Glenn Richter: Okay.

Judy Balint: Believe it or not, this was the sock note. The Jewish Agency assembly in the former Soviet Union in 1997.

Glenn Richter: Oh, wow.

Judy Balint: This one was a commemoration from Beit Hatfutsot, right? You'll remember you were there, I believe, 2000.

Glenn Richter: 2007, because they asked us whether they could reprint it. And we said, of course they could.

SPEAKER_S6: Exactly. That's the one. The first.

SPEAKER_S5: Vaad conference.

Judy Balint: Which won.

SPEAKER_S5: The. Was this the first Vaad conference?

Glenn Richter: No, no, the first.

SPEAKER_S6: Conference.

Glenn Richter: Was 1989.

SPEAKER_S6: Yeah.

Judy Balint: Um, let me go turn off that thing for a minute and I'll get you the. This was a Seattle one, I believe.

SPEAKER_S6: This is part of the whole UJA.

Judy Balint: Exactly.

SPEAKER_S6: I actually was employed.

Judy Balint: These two. Ah, yes. This was 1990. Oh, a few things here. Well, first of all, this is 1987. This was the official one second.

Glenn Richter: Okay. I went to.

SPEAKER_S6: The summit.

Glenn Richter: For.

SPEAKER_S6: Soviet Jews in December.

Glenn Richter: 1987.

SPEAKER_S6: Right?

Judy Balint: Correct. This is 1990. A Seattle one that we developed for the Operation Exodus campaign. Here's another Long Island one under here.

SPEAKER_S6: Right.

Judy Balint: But I got from Lynn.

SPEAKER_S6: Right.

Judy Balint: And right here, too, is another operation Exodus one.

SPEAKER_S6: Same as the other. Right.

Judy Balint: They will be free because of me. Support operation Exodus. You've got to love the Federation, right? This is Jim McDermott, who I told you about. Who I went to the former Soviet Union with right up, along with. Let's see. I don't know where I have that. All right, turn that off for a sec.

SPEAKER_S6: Okay. Okay.

Judy Balint: This is a union of councils. Right up the badge. Goodness knows why I kept that.

SPEAKER_S6: Oh my gosh.

Judy Balint: In Moscow annual meeting in Moscow in 1989, which was the last time I was in the Soviet Union, actually.

SPEAKER_S6: Okay. And I think with that.

Glenn Richter: That's a fantastic end. And you've completed the circle.

SPEAKER_S6: There you go.

Glenn Richter: Okay.