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Richard Arensberg

SUMMARY

Richard Arensberg, with the support of his cousin Mel Freeman, shares about his family's migration from Latvia to Bellingham, and his childhood in the tight-knit Jewish community on Capitol Hill. He discusses the family shoe business, and reflects on the importance of kindness and respect.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Hello, my name is Jacqueline Estrin. I am a board member with the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. It's October 19th, 2021. I'm in the home of Dick Arensburg in Bellevue, Washington, with his cousin Mel Freeman. He has graciously given us his time to talk about the story of his life. So thank you so much. I am happy to be here too, and I'm just going to dive right in with the questions. So the first question I have for you is, um, where were you born, and where did you grow up? You were born here in Washington State. And also, where were your parents born? You were born in Seattle, in Capitol Hill, right? Okay.

Mel Freeman: Well, actually, you were born in the hospital and not in Capitol Hill. Dick. In those days, we went to the hospital for births, and that was the way it was. And, of course, your father was born in Latvia.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay.

Mel Freeman: And your mother? Your mother was also from Latvia.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay. So when your father came over, the little history that I know he was a teenager. Did he? Oopsie. Pause for a second. Okay. So when your father came to Washington State. Did he speak English? And that was a problem for him, or did he speak Latvian or? And whenever you want to interject, Mel, please go ahead.

Mel Freeman: The family o they spoke multiple languages.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And what year was this? Approximately?

Mel Freeman: Uh, this w , rather well-to-do in Latvia. The three brothers and the three sisters went to a gymnasium, which would be, in essence, a private school. S as at the turn of the century.

Jacquelyn Estrin: The turn of the century. Okay. So when your father. Okay. There was an aunt in Bellingham. So when your father arrived here in Washington State, he went right to Bellingham, which I imagine was very rural at the time.

Mel Freeman: They came over from Europe to Canada. Uh, transverse boys transversed the Canadian Pacific Railroad to the US and then came down to Bellingham. The story is that they sat for the whole trip, which is 2 or 3000 miles on wooden benches for the whole journey. Actually, two of the boys came first, the two older. Right. Dick's father and his uncle. And then the younger brother, Charles, came a few years later.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And what brought them to North America, where they are unfortunately experiencing some form of persecution as well? This was before that, in the middle of it. They wanted to come to, quote unquote, the land of milk and honey, North America. They did not talk much.

Mel Freeman: So it's interesting that the brothers did not talk much about their history, as so many of the immigrants didn't want to. It was obviously not very pleasant, even in Latvia, which was certainly better than Poland or Russia. But the sisters did talk quite a bit. And so on the basis of that, I have the information on what was going on, as I had mentioned, they were well-to-do. They were in the liquor business. The actual name was Ahm. Oh.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Ah ah ah.

Mel Freeman: Ah ah was her name. Uh, Ahm, as you know, means poor in German, or equivalent of that. And so obviously, for business purposes, you don't want to be poor. And so they changed to Ahrensburg.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Interesting. Interesting. Okay. So then, Dick, where were you born, and what was life like in the eyes of a child in your community? On Capitol Hill? In your youth? Oh, I think we're okay. I'm a little ahead of myself. I'm sorry. Your great-grandparents were from Holland. So that's interesting. So from Holland to Latvia. Can you elaborate on that at all?

Mel Freeman: Uh the uh, the folklore is that they went to Latvia because of business opportunities, and they were in the liquor business. So it made good sense. And if you look at some of the history of Europe, Jews were allowed to be innkeepers and were allowed to be distributors of alcohol until the Russians of that turn of the century decided that was too lucrative a business for Jews to be involved in. So that's probably one explanation of why they went there.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay. Your mouth. You want to read that out or add to that, maybe.

Mel Freeman: Oh, conscripted.

Mel Freeman: Yeah. That was as Joe as.

Jacquelyn Estrin: The three boys wanted to avoid conscription.

Mel Freeman: In Latvia, of course, the Russian.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Right. So they became.

Mel Freeman: Imperial armies.

Jacquelyn Estrin: In America. There you go. Okay.

Mel Freeman: And if one of the boys was conscripted, then the others had to go to. And that was to assure loyalty to the Tsar.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh my goodness. Really? Wow. That's really interesting. So they hightailed it to America. And you had an aunt in Bellingham, right? So they came. So they came to Bellingham. And then, eventually, your parents met and raised a family in Capitol Hill. So what was life like for you as a youth in Capitol Hill and in the Jewish community? What are your fond memories of that as a teenager? Oh, look at the smirk on his face.

Mel Freeman: I assume his fond memory was the fact that he was two years older than I, and therefore, he drove, and he had to take his younger cousin everywhere socially. So to Hertzel, to Temple for all types of social events.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And it was a tight-knit community back then.

Mel Freeman: At that time.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Everything.

Mel Freeman: I would say that we probably knew every Jewish boy and girl within the community. One of the interesting things about the community was that for the High Holidays, the synagogues were very close to each other. And except for Temple, which was a little farther away. Temple de Hirsch. And so between services, the young people would migrate between the different synagogues. So everybody really got to know everybody. And that was sort of the ritual for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Jacquelyn Estrin: So that his state was raised in a what neighborhood, and something I can't raise in.

Mel Freeman: A Catholic neighborhood.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh, you were raised in a Catholic neighborhood?

Mel Freeman: Yeah. So Capitol Hill, where Dick's home was, was right next to Holy Names Academy and a number of churches. So it was a.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Whenever you see a synagogue, there's a Catholic church around the corner, right? So then, where did you go for fun? Was fun circulated in, you know, around the shul? The synagogue. What did you all partake in during that time? What were the big fun things that you guys did as teenagers?

Mel Freeman: A lot of the activities were family-orientedamily oriented. To go out for dinner at a hotel or to a restaurant was a rare occasion. The social activities revolved around the family, so we would go from different homes. Dick had mentioned Zelma lady, his aunt, had a summer home way out in 33., and we would drive the hour, an hour and a half on US 99, the two lane road between Seattle and Tacoma, and we could spend an an afternoon picnicking on the beach at their summer home, which closed during the winter because it was too far from Seattle.

Jacquelyn Estrin: So a whole bunch of Dick and his friends would gather up in the car and hit the road. And these were all friends from the community, from the neighborhood, from the synagogue.

Mel Freeman: Yes.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Lovely. Three.

Mel Freeman: Three. Point.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Point. So, some very fond memories there.

Mel Freeman: The other great activity. Was the Roycroft Theatre. Saturday matinee. I would take the bus up 23rd from Montlake to Dick's home, and then we would walk the three blocks to the theater, where there was always a matinee, and they would always leave you dangling at the end of the show. So you would come back the next week, right?

Jacquelyn Estrin: That's on the sound below. Burien is three tree points. Okay, great. So you spent a lot of fabulous summers there with your friends and family, and your cousins.

Mel Freeman: And Dick's greatest pleasure was learning how to drive on 33. He would sit on his father's lap and steer while his father worked the gas pedal and the brakes. Fortunately, there wasn't a lot of traffic on the 33 road. And no chance of going off into Puget Sound. And that's how Dick spent many a happy summer weekend.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Was there any mingling with any of the kids from the Catholic schools or the churches in your social circles or or a little bit, but mostly it was just immersed, you know, your niche was within the Jewish community, or what's the experience there?

Mel Freeman: Dick went to the public schools. And so, of course, since a large part of Capitol Hill was where Catholic families who weren't going to parochial schools. So he had the opportunity of really mixing with the people living on Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill was a very nice residential area with very large homes, and then to all people.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Nice.

Mel Freeman: And then the junior high school was Meany. And he went there, and again, that was a mixed group. There were some from the minority communities there, but it wasn't until he went to Garfield that he really had the opportunity of meeting a lot of people from all over, whether they were from Broadmoor or the International District or from the at that time, the Negro, which is now what we call Afro-Americans. And a lot of Jewish people, because a lot of Jewish people lived around that area, the Cherry Street area. It was unusual that Dick actually lived on Capitol Hill. And we were in Montlake, which was really sort of outside the traditional area where most of the Jewish families had resided.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh, how interesting. Okay. And our uncle and your uncle built your home. Oh. What's that?

Mel Freeman: Uncle Charles, one of the three brothers was a that was the youngest of the brothers, was a contractor. And he built your home. And he also built your brother's home in Montlake. Years and years later he built two apartment buildings on Capitol Hill. And again, how ironic it is when the sisters came over, some of the time, they actually lived in those apartment buildings.

Jacquelyn Estrin: That was built.

Mel Freeman: Built by the uncle.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Are they still? Are they still?

Mel Freeman: Uh, all of those buildings are still there today.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Holy cow. Have you had a chance? Has Dick had a chance to go back to that neck of the woods in recent years? And what were your thoughts and feelings about going down memory lane there? Some buildings on Roosevelt. And he built two QFC Markets. Wow.

Mel Freeman: And that was on 65th and Roosevelt.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Impressive.

Mel Freeman: 66.

Jacquelyn Estrin: 66.

Mel Freeman: I stand corrected.

Jacquelyn Estrin: I stand corrected. Uncle Charles' home was at 25 Grant, 1947. What? Okay. Perhaps now. Oh, 20 oh 25,000. In 1945 oh, it cost $25,000 to build his home. In 1947. He built homes in general. Right. He's a builder. So he built a lot of substantial properties around that area in Seattle. Commercial. Residential. Wow.

Mel Freeman: And Charles was the youngest of the brothers. And two older brothers, Dick's father was in the wholesale furniture business. True. Furniture business, Leather, and furniture. And the oldest brother had an equivalent of Best Buy today in downtown Seattle, where he sold such modern things as radios and phonograph records.

Jacquelyn Estrin: My goodness.

Mel Freeman: Our phonograph record players.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Wow.

Jacquelyn Estrin: So what was the name of that store? Um, that was what he built. That was the equivalent to a Best Buy that had a job on the market, and do you recall? And where was the location? Oh, perhaps Dick has it. I have a friend who lives in the home that was built. Okay, nice.

Mel Freeman: I don't recall the name. For some reason, reliance comes to mind, but it was essentially between Fourth and Fifth on either Pike or Pine.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And it was a it was around for a number of years.

Mel Freeman: It was around three years, unfortunately. Uh, he was killed in an auto accident in Seattle. Hit by a car.

Jacquelyn Estrin: But there were Radio.

Mel Freeman: Coast Radio.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Coast Radio. Wow.

Mel Freeman: And, uh, so this.

Jacquelyn Estrin: It was a precursor to, like, a Radio Shack or something.

Mel Freeman: This was but an upper end. An upper end? More like a.

Jacquelyn Estrin: On Pike Street. Okay. Very nice.

Mel Freeman: Oh, no. See, he has a better memory than I do. So. But then he's older than I am, so that explains it.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Very innovative. Family. Radio. Uh, Zenith.

Mel Freeman: Is the big?

Jacquelyn Estrin: Uh. Yeah. Zenith Appliances, GE Appliances. Oh, okay. All right.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Yeah. Yeah. So modern technology for the late 40s, early 50s.

Mel Freeman: Actually late 30s, late.

Jacquelyn Estrin: 30s.

Mel Freeman: Early 40s.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh my goodness. Fantastic.

Mel Freeman: Seems like it was only yesterday.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh my gosh. Fantastic. The war broke out, so he had to close. There you go. Okay. I triggered a lot of memories here. This is great. Um, his Uncle Jake went to the Coast Guard. Okay. Okay. Was your Uncle Jake with the Coast Guard? Oh, okay. Wow. Very different backgrounds in your family. I'm going to flow through to my next question, if I may, Dick. And is there an object from your family life as a youth that you still have? And what is the story behind it? Your father's rocking chair. Now, was it built by? Oh, are you going to show me? Can you show me in a few minutes, so we can just carry on with a couple of questions? But that's great. You still have it in your next room. So not only were your family members builders of homes, but building also built furniture. Oh, they didn't build the furniture. Okay. It was just a special chair that your father had. So you had some special memories from it? Right in the room next door. That's fabulous. Was there a moment in your life that you wish you had a photograph of? From your youth. From a teenager. As a young married man. Anything that triggers a memory. One important one. Okay, he's going to show it to me. Okay. He's going to bring it.

Mel Freeman: That's one of the very nice things about having these interviews, at least from our perspective, is that it allows us to think back upon the good times that we remember and the challenges that we remember. So it's sort of nice that you're doing this while we still have mentation to be ability to recall these things. And so that's very much appreciated by both the Aaronsburg and the Freeman.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Right.

Mel Freeman: Family.

Jacquelyn Estrin: So did you. Well, it's our pleasure. This is why we're here. You grew up with Dick as a young man as well, right?

Mel Freeman: Uh, we were about a mile apart. And, uh, the two.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Is that a Cessna? Oh my goodness. So what inspired you? I understand you had your pilot's license, so that might have been a bit unusual in the circles that you traveled in as a youth. As a young man, what inspired you to get your license and fly? And what was the experience like flying over, Lake Union or Lake Sammamish, and how things have changed since? You always enjoyed aviation and you took your brother up twice. Wow.

Mel Freeman: And how many times did your mother go with you?

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh, okay. So she wasn't around at the time when you got your license. So you flew around. What the. The Lake Union all around. You know, I'm just curious. You know, you look around now and. And what year was that when you did the majority of your flying? What decade was that? You flew around Washington and Oregon in the 80s. Okay. And you had your pilot's license for 40 years. Wow. Wow. So you must have seen some different, totally different perspective of the state when you're up there in the air. So getting back to you know, who came with you on the plane, and you mentioned your wife when you were married as newlyweds. Did you follow the same traditions in your home as perhaps your parents did? Did you carry them on? And can you elaborate a little bit about that with customs or traditions, you know, with your children, perhaps, Mel, you can, you know, come into this conversation as well. Just maintain the same traditions.

Mel Freeman: I can remember Passover dinners here in this home, where the table wasn't long enough. So there was an L at the table. And Diane would.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Beautiful.

Mel Freeman: Would have to serve people around the corner. She did make a very good Matzo Ball and does still, I assume, make a good Matzo Ball.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Maintain the traditions of your parents and perhaps their parents and so on and so forth. Because, as we know, sometimes as life carries on and there are different interests, different things that take away from us and maintaining traditions that perhaps our parents or grandparents did. So the fact that, you know, that was maintained from generation to generation, you only had your grandparents and your mother and father, right? Okay. Very nice.

Mel Freeman: But the family was always involved with Temple de Hirsch from the turn of the previous century, and they were always members, uh.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Involved in community events.

Mel Freeman: Zelma taught Sunday School. His mother, his aunt, his aunt his mother's sister taught Sunday school at Temple for four decades.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Five decades.

Mel Freeman: Five decades.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh my gosh. Five decades. So, what were the most important values that you wanted to teach your family as a young husband? Father? Um, you know, from that you wanted to carry on with your new family in the community. You raised your your when you married and you had your family. You were in what neighborhood were you in Capitol Hill at that point or did you move on?

Mel Freeman: They moved here and then during their third year of marriage.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay.

Mel Freeman: Way out to Bellevue.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Right. Which was quite remote at the time. Right, I would imagine. In the boonies. In the suburbs. The suburbs of suburbs.

Mel Freeman: 405 was two lanes and the Mercer Island Bridge was free. It originally was a dime or a quarter to go over.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Were there a lot of other young Jewish families moving in this neck of the woods at the time? The block was empty. So you were perhaps one of the first families in the neighborhood. Second. Okay. So were there other Jewish families moving in this area at the time? Leaving leaving Capitol Hill area, the city, the heart of the city, into the suburbs.

Mel Freeman: A lot of the central area families moved to Mercer Island. And then those who were more adventurous moved all the way over to Bellevue.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Yes. Okay.

Mel Freeman: And as you can recall, the Northern bridges didn't come in until 1960, so.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Howard Shapiro was on the corner. Okay. Can you clarify for people who may be watching this video later, who Howard Shapiro is, was. Or you can elaborate to Mel whenever you can. Are you okay?

Mel Freeman: But Dick will tell you that there was another neighbor who was quite well known to this community.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay.

Mel Freeman: And he'll give that name.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay. So, Howard Shapiro, it was another Jewish family who lived in the house. Oh, a Sunday child. Okay. All right. There you go.

Mel Freeman: Dick was a very famous neighbor of yours.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Here. In this. Here? Right here.

Mel Freeman: Across the street.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Across the street. Okay. We're eagerly awaiting. Lenny Wilkins. Lenny Wilkins is something with sports.

Mel Freeman: He was the very great basketball manager of Seattle.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Or the Seattle Sonics. My goodness. The celebrity on the street. Aside from you.

Mel Freeman: World champions one.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Year. Wow.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And Bob Blackburn, was he another basketball player?

Jacquelyn Estrin: So he was a TV announcer. Wow. So he had a plethora of celebrities in this neck of the woods at the time. My goodness. Wonderful. So, what was your first job and what was your profession in your working life? Dick. And feel free to interject at any time. Mel.

Mel Freeman: I'm learning.

Jacquelyn Estrin: I'm.

Mel Freeman: I'm learning more of the family history than I realized.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And look at that beautiful smile. I think it has some good memories. Know you saved souls. You were a man of the cloth. Okay. So elaborate.

Mel Freeman: A man of leather.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Of leather.

Mel Freeman: Can you elaborate? They were in the wholesale shoe-finding business, which was all types of leather in the days when we didn't throw away our shoes after wearing them once. So people resold them. And all types of shoe fitting, whether it was polishes or the leather that went on the bottom of the soles or the heels, um, and at one point, I think you actually had some saddles and things like that. Never did, their competitor had the saddle part of the business.

Jacquelyn Estrin: What was the name of the business, and where was it located? Okay, we're getting there. Okay, I still need to know what your first job was, though. Dick. As a youth. You supply shoe repair and shoe repair stores, right?

Mel Freeman: So he would go to the individual stores and take orders, uh, as his brother Bill did, too. And then he would stock what the orders were and deliver them.

Jacquelyn Estrin: So it was a family enterprise.

Mel Freeman: It was a family enterprise.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Started by his father.

Mel Freeman: Started by the father. There was only one competitor, McPherson's.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay. And where was?

Mel Freeman: No.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay.

Mel Freeman: More and more competitors.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And where was the store, and what was it called? Mel, maybe.

Mel Freeman: It was, um.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Yeah. The first job you had was sweeping a floor. You got to start somewhere.

Mel Freeman: How much did you get paid?

Jacquelyn Estrin: Yeah, that was my next question. And where was this?

Mel Freeman: The store was on Fourth Avenue, where the present Seattle City Hall is.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh, my. $0.30 an hour sweeping the floor. Overpaid, overpaid. And where was this? This was. And how old were you at the time? So now I'm jumping back. So the store was where the.

Mel Freeman: Where the Currency Hall is.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Okay. And what was the name of the business?

Mel Freeman: Uh, J.M. Aaronsburg.

Jacquelyn Estrin: J.M. Aaronsburg.

Mel Freeman: I think it didn't change.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Fourth and James. Okay. Fourth and James. So it was a thriving business for decades, I would imagine.

Mel Freeman: Shoe finding.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Was finding.

Mel Freeman: It was the yeah, the customers who were obviously the shoe-finding people were, uh, somewhat, uh, ornery type of customers. And, uh, they had.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Started in 19. I'm sorry.

Mel Freeman: They had to work pretty hard to, uh, convince them to buy and, uh, bargain over price and that. So it was a hard business, but successful.

Jacquelyn Estrin: But built into a thriving, productive business, which started in 1917 by your father. So then you carried on. You carried on the business with your brothers. Is that. Is that it? You took it on.

Mel Freeman: The father passed away during the war, the Second World War. And, Bill then returned from England, where he was an officer. Okay to pick up the business. And then, Dick, who was a decade younger than became part of the family enterprise.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Nice. So you serviced,the business serviced department stores, your brother Other. And you and your son. Lovely. So it's serviced department stores, department stores, and mom-and-pop stores.

Mel Freeman: Um, with laces. And they actually have their own brand.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Wow.

Mel Freeman: Uh, JM Aaronsburg laces. Oh, nice.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Is that still around? The laces are still around. Fantastic.

Mel Freeman: They're good laces. They last.

Jacquelyn Estrin: There you go. Wow.

Mel Freeman: And actually, I still have a pair of unused ones with the logo, wrapper.

Jacquelyn Estrin: That's beautiful. So was that something that you were involved with, Dick? Is is is the manufacturing of the laces, you know, like the designing of it with your name on. No. Okay. The shoe repair and shoe store supplies. Right? Right. Okay.

Mel Freeman: Dick, did you supply the early Nordstrom when they were shoe stores?

Jacquelyn Estrin: Nice.

Mel Freeman: No.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Wow.

Mel Freeman: Or orthopedics or specialty.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Yeah. There you go. So did you feel. I'm just going to ask this question while you keep writing, Dick. But did as as a thriving business, did you feel any obligation to the Jewish community to give back to your community from your business? To some degree.

Mel Freeman: They're a little modest, but they always contributed to the Federation, fundraising in the 40s, the Federation published the list of who the donors were and the amounts. Yeah. Uh, the Arensbergs always contributed.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Was there pressure at the time to do that? You know, it was still a very.

Mel Freeman: I was very young, and I so I don't know. But I think it was an obligation.

Jacquelyn Estrin: It was an obligation. Yes.

Mel Freeman: I remember my father was a member of both the Baker and Herzl. And, uh, but we went to Herzl and I said to my father, Why do you still pay dues at the club? He says, we never resign from a Jewish synagogue.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh, my. Wow.

Mel Freeman: And that's also what the Arensbergs, feeling was. You didn't. They were always involved with Temple de Hirsch.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Every Tuesday, you were in the Nordstrom office. Oh my goodness. The central Nordstrom downtown store with Mr. Nordstrom.

Mel Freeman: And again, to just show what a small world this is. Um, my first real job was at Rhodes Department Store selling children's shoes. And that was owned by the Nordstroms.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Wow.

Mel Freeman: So again, he was at the higher level. I was at the basic level. And they're interesting stories to tell about the Nordstroms.

Jacquelyn Estrin: I'm sure.

Mel Freeman: Good. All very positive.

Jacquelyn Estrin: You are. You are a friend. You're friends now with Bruce, Bruce. Nordstrom. Fantastic. So you've maintained relationships, friendships tight connections. That's tremendous.

Mel Freeman: It's as long as we're talking about Nordstrom stores. Uh it's extremely interesting that generation the the second generation of the Nordstroms. All the boys started on the floor, taking their turn with.

Jacquelyn Estrin: The ground.

Mel Freeman: Up with the other employees. Uh, no, they didn't go into management. They started at the door. They stocked. They took their turn selling the shoes.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Right, right. Right, right. Quite fascinating.

Mel Freeman: An interesting story on Nordstrom's. Uh, when I worked there, a lady came in with a pair of shoes that obviously had been worn extensively, and she wanted her money back. And so as an employee, I went up to Mr. Nordstrom and I said, What do I do? He says, Give her back her money. I said, but that's crazy. She's obviously worn them for at least a year or two. Why? Why were you doing that? He says, You must understand. I spent $100 for a full-page ad in the Seattle Times, and maybe it reaches a few people. This lady will tell everybody she knows what a wonderful store Nordstrom's is. I can't buy that type of advertising. And that sort of was really their philosophy to treat the customer, even if the customer was unreasonable.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And I'm sure you brought some of that knowledge and business that very tight. I'm sure he brought some of that knowledge and business savvy to Ahrensburg and Sons as well. You know, they acted somewhat as a, you know, a guideline, a

mentor, maybe.

Mel Freeman: And also just in life.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And yeah.

Mel Freeman: It's.

Jacquelyn Estrin: A different generation.

Mel Freeman: Dick was always a very thoughtful, a very loving, a very kind person and always treated everyone nicely.

Jacquelyn Estrin: And they like to eat hairy.

Mel Freeman: I don't know how that fits in with being a nice person, but.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Dick. What was.

Mel Freeman: No pickles.

Jacquelyn Estrin: When you look back. What are some of the proudest moments of your life? Earning the respect of other people through your work, through your business practice, through your kindness, all over.

Mel Freeman: Heard Dick say an evil word in the 80 years that I have known him.

Jacquelyn Estrin: My goodness.

Mel Freeman: I can rarely say that about other people.

Jacquelyn Estrin: So, Dick, if you could share with your family the most important values that you have, what would you convey to them? That's the trail you leave your kindness. That's beautiful. So if you could share again with if you could share with your family the most important values, what would what would you? That's it. The kindness. The love. The respect. As you alluded earlier. When they hear your name. Meaning your name. When they hear your name, they think of your smile. Your. Your smile. Your kind heart. Your love. Wow, that's so endearing. I don't want to cry. That's beautiful. So that's the memory you want to leave behind? Yeah. Well, that's. That's genuinely beautiful. Look at that smile. It's so funny. It's like he has something up his sleeve. And while he's doing that, perhaps I notice that you have a book of photographs there. If you could.

Mel Freeman: Have a collection of the family photographs of the family. Dick has never seen these, so I wanted to share them. And I don't know if we can actually maybe move the camera up a little bit so we can get his responses on this.

Jacquelyn Estrin: But I can't read that. I'm sorry, though. The government gets the rest. Hallelujah. Ain't that the truth? Well, we'll look forward to seeing these photos. Thank you for bringing them and showing them.

Mel Freeman: Okay. Because to actually see the photos, um. Oh, well, can you just actually hold it?

Jacquelyn Estrin: Maybe we can take it off.

Mel Freeman: Take it off the tripod.

Mel Freeman: Nick, this is something you've never seen before. Uh, this is the family photographs. As you know, I tend to collect things, and this is your great-grandparents. And as you can see, this is Wolf and Molly Starin Weinberg in Latvia between 1880 and 1890. Here Dick is a family portrait from a window, Latvia. And this is Joseph Moshe Yitzhak, your grandfather. Uh, Charlie is seated. Uh, Jacob is here. Your uncle, uh. Your grandmother. And Aunt Fanny, the oldest of the sisters. This is your Aunt Selina Aaronsburg, 1915. Uh, that is Raleigh Aaronsburg, my mother, circa 1912. This is, Minnie Weinberg on the left and Fanny Ahrenberg on the right. In Latvia. Here, Dick is again in a family portrait. Uh, Moshe. Yitzhak Aaronsburg. Fanny is the oldest. Selena. Your grandmother and my mother. Raleigh, 1910. This is after the First World War. Uh, in their home in Raleigh. Selena. Moshe, Yitzhak, your grandfather, and Fanny. Here is the boat that they came over and, uh. And here are actually the three sisters with the name Arm when they got to immigration. The. The official said, What is this sister's Arm going to brother's Ahrensburg. Oh, no. No. Our aim is Ahrensburg. They didn't want to have any problems. So this is the actual manifest from that time. And that was 1920. Uh, here is what you supplied me with. Your Arm. Because when they. When they booked the passage, it was Arm. And so that's how the manifest for the boat. So when they arrived at immigration, the immigration authority said, Well, what's this

sister's Arm going to brother's Ahrensburg. There must be something wrong. Oh, no, no, no, you misunderstood. The name is Ahrensburg, and that's how they changed their name. Here is a picture of, um, uh, a family portrait on the Ahrensburg side. And again we have them numbered. This is Jacob Ahrensburg, his wife, Rose. Number two is, this is your father. Very handsome man. And, Charlie. The builder. You. Oh, that's Jake, okay. Did I get that wrong? That's Charlie. Okay. I made a mistake. I will correct it when I get home. And then, um. Here, um, is. This picture is of my mother, Raleigh. Uh, Selma and Selma and Fannie. And here is 33. And here's your mother. That's Aunt Fanny. This is your mother right here next door. And this is 33.. Where is Alma? Which is there? My mother and Selena. And here in 1922 is your mother.

Jacquelyn Estrin: I, on behalf of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society, I thank you so very much for your time opening up your home, sharing the story of your life, which is rich and diverse and ever so interesting. And thank you, Mel, for contributing. How wonderful that the dynamic between the two of you is just delightful.

Mel Freeman: Well, you know, he had to take care of his little cousin. I thought when he was asked what were the highlights of his life, he would have said, driving my little cousin around on his dates.

Jacquelyn Estrin: Oh, we missed that one. What do you have to say? Thanks for your interest. Oh, it's our sincere pleasure. Thank you so, so very, very much, Dick. Thank you kindly.