

Interviewee: Nancy Greenberg
Interviewers: Julia Bitzas & Corin Mahan
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Overseen by: Dr. Cinzia Pica, Assumption University

Abstract:

Nancy Greenberg is the Cultural Arts Director of the Worcester Jewish Community Center. In this interview she discusses past life experiences working at multiple Jewish Community Centers [JCC], traveling experiences, her children, and more. She has been a major part in the JCC community working at several of them to finally remain in Worcester. She describes the way in which the JCC has not only shaped her but her children being of Jewish descent. She likes the way the JCC encourages the Jewish community to incorporate it more into their lives in which she did the same with her family.

JB: We have permission to record you for the Worcester Women's Oral History Project?

NG: Yes.

JB: Could you state your name and the date.

NG: Nancy Greenberg, March 10, 2023.

JB: So where do you want to start? Anything specific you want to talk about?

NG: Oh dear. So, is it supposed to be about my entire life? Or my life in Worcester? Or what?

CM: It's honestly whatever you want it to be.

JB: Yeah, like whatever you're willing to want to share or want to talk about. I feel like a good thing for us to start with is what are some of the most positive things that have come up while working here in Worcester?

NG: Well, let me just say I have always worked at JCCs my entire career. So, I have a master's degree in social work, and I thought I would end up doing something clinical because I wasn't... I grew up somewhere that didn't have a JCC. So, I didn't really know – though my mother's family is from Worcester, and all of my cousins and grandparents were here. I wasn't really aware of the JCC and the role it played in the community. So I grew up in an area, or I should say in a town where we were one of just a few Jewish families. So, it was not on my radar at all. And even when I went to graduate school to get an MSW, I went to the University of Michigan which has, a very – there's a big JCC in Detroit. But I didn't know about it to ask for a field placement there. So anyway, I ended up working at a JCC serendipitously when I got my first

job, which was in Denver, Colorado and I loved it. I just really liked the environment. I was working with teens because I was young, I was in my – I was like 23 when I started. I really just liked the whole... I liked being at the JCC, I liked that it served people of all ages. I really liked I was working with Jewish youth at the time. And it just kind of... that was the beginning. I've worked at two other JCCs since that.

JB: I didn't realize they were like all over the country too.

NG: There are JCCs all over America. In fact, we are all connected. When I go on my email, I have a list—there are lists of people doing similar jobs to yours. And I have colleagues that I know and some I don't actually know them sometimes, but I know them from being just connected to them. I know what my colleague in Cleveland, Ohio might be doing, and I know what my colleague in San Francisco might be doing, and I know I have a colleague in fa- well there's no JCC there but she's part of a reform there like a temple. Now that there's the whole virtual thing, we have done a lot of virtual programming together. When the [Covid] pandemic started, well first of all, I thought I might lose my job because we work with people, and you couldn't work with people! But we just kind of - everything kind of morphed on to Zoom as you know. And because I have colleagues all over the country, I was doing programs with people in Atlanta, and Florida, and Cincinnati, and just people who wanted to do like similar kinds of programming. In particular, I do an author series, a Jewish author series, and Jewish meaning the author could be Jewish, the content could be Jewish or thematically it could be Jewish, it doesn't – or it could have a non-Jewish author but it be something like about World War II and of interest to the Jewish community. So, I plan these book things and it's a thing, JCCs all over the country do these book things. Once we were on doing virtual stuff, we could all sort of partner together and get a bigger audience because anyone could get on the Zoom. Anyway, so that's been sort of, of late. So, from Denver, when I was – so I was young, I was in my twenties, I was offered a position at the JCC in Boston and since I'm from this area, when I got this offer, I decided to take it. And I was again doing youth programming teens and children. And I was there for a long time, I think I was there for... let's see, maybe, [murmuring] yeah about I think I was there for like 10 or 11 years. And I ended up, as I got a little bit older, I ended up working with older adults, instead of teens and children and then I discovered I really liked working with older people. I – so I was working with seniors at the JCC in Boston. And then I married, and my ex-husband is from Worcester, so I was commuting to Boston, which was not really a like easy commute, but I liked my job. So, I was commuting and then I thought, then I had my son, so I had maternity leave, and I thought I would go back to work, but then I realized with an infant that I would not be doing this commute, was just not doable. So, I didn't work for a few years, then I had my daughter. I didn't work for a few years, but I became active here because my kids went to preschool here, so my kids did all of the - so cause of course I know about JCCs. So, there was a JCC down the street, so my kids went to preschool here, and they did like "Mommy and Me" groups here, and I became – I actually became a lay person, I served on the board here in the beginning of my being in Worcester, because I knew about JCCs because I had been working at them now for quite a bit. And at some point, someone was retiring here who had been working with older adults, and I had been working with older adults and I took over, on a very

part time basis, her position which was working with the retired men's group that she had started. And that was like just like one of my – like the happiest things that happened to me workwise. So, I took over that group probably around... well when I started so it was 1998, actually December of 1998. So, my son was six, and my daughter was four and my daughter was still in preschool here actually so I could like do my job and see her in preschool and whatever, it was very part time that I was working. But what happened was that I was doing this retired men's group, and it was in 1998, those men were all World War II vets basically, and so "The Greatest Generation" and there was a big group of them, so there were probably a pool of 80 of them and we met every Tuesday morning at nine am and on any given day there would be anywhere between 30 to 40 something who would show up that morning. And they were just – I can say I just adored this group of men, there's nothing like them I am still to this day, like including yesterday, I meet with the four-remaining group – the four of the remaining of this group.

CM: That's awesome.

NG: Who, so, 1998 to 2023, there's four of them left. One of them is 100.

JB: Oh, wow.

NG: And he gets on Zoom, yup, he's 100, he gets on Zoom. And his memory is clear as a bell, he has no physical disabilities, he lives at The Willows, which you know because it's right over there, which means you live independently, you have no need for help, because he has no need for help. I went to his 100th birthday party when he turned 100 in October or November. But anyways, he's been in my group since day one 23 years, cause right, he would have been like 70-something then, and then there's three others and they're all, the youngest is like 80-something and then there's like 90 and I think 93, and then 100, and that's all that's left of that group. And, you know, I still love, like it's a highlight of my week when I meet with them on zoom. Cause now like the 100-year-old doesn't drive, his daughter took his car away, so he doesn't drive, and the 93-year-old doesn't drive either, so two of them drive. And so, we just meet on zoom because it's easier. That happened because of the pandemic, because we were actually still meeting in person and there were a few more of them at that point, pre-pandemic, but this is what's left basically. So, that was like – that has been like sort of the one of the like wonderful things about my working here over all that time, that I had this fabulous, retired men's group. And my daughter would say "Mom! Sy's on the phone!" because they would call me, and you know it was just-. So, in the old days they would - when I had this huge pool of them, we'd have a speaker every single week. One of them would, well he called me his "right hand man" he literally would sit next to me at the table on the right side and he would arrange for these speakers to come, I didn't have to do anything. And another set of them would get the breakfast so they would go out and get the bagels that morning and cream cheese from Price Chopper so they would be fresh. Once I had to start getting the bagels myself, I'm not a morning person, so I would get them day before, and they'd be like stale bagels. So, anyways, that's been like a highlight of my working here - but. So, everything's changed, like I'm now older, I was like you know still kind of a mom, young, well I was an older mom, but you know, my kids were little

when I started, now my son is 30, he was six when I started, so that's how things change. And that population just doesn't exist anymore so, the people who are like senior adults are like babysitting their grandchildren, or bringing their - dropping their grandchildren at preschool because everyone's working and you know, childcare is very expensive, so grandparents do that or they are on their computers, or they just do - and especially since COVID, older people do different things that there's no such thing as a retired men's group, it's like a vestige because I know that from my colleagues across the country that everyone's like "yeah how do you... what do seniors do now?" It's different. So, they do different things, so people travel, it's just a whole different thing. So, I've kind of seen like different trends I guess, in just kind of ages, like seniors now are baby boomers, I'm a baby boomer, on the young end of the spectrum. But it's different people are - there aren't like retired men's groups like for newly retired people who are baby boomers are just doing different things. So, so that's been a highlight of my working here. And then eventually, at some point, I figured out that we should be running the book/authors series and so that's how I started with that. There's something called Jewish book council, which is a, it's an organization that organizes authors who have new books that want to just talk about them and promote them through JCCs and synagogues and so that's something that's been a big part of my job here. So, I would have like one a month, one author a month who would come and do an in-person program. Now, I do like - sometimes I do in person and sometimes I do virtual because it's hard to know what people will want to do. Because my population tends to skew older and older people are not totally back into in-person things. More and more so, but not in like pre-pandemic in other words. The other thing I do, is I run here, I run a Jewish films festival. So, that has been virtual for the last like three years because of COVID. And I've just started, like next week I have a film in-person here. And sometimes I do them other places, like I do them at St. John's high school, or other places. So, so and then I have a lot of other miscellaneous things I do here. So, we're planning a Good Deeds/Earth Day coming up in April. A lot of times I do Jewish holiday programs, so we've been partnering for the last three years, or, actually, maybe four years, we started before the pandemic, so I think this might've been our fourth year with the Worcester Art Museum, so we do our Hannukah celebration with them. Good Deeds Day, we're sort of partnered a little bit with the Ecotarium. So, just trying to find partnerships within Worcester that are mutually beneficial and making it a more of a community wide kind of thing that we do. So, I do some of our holiday programming. That's kind of what I do at the JCC.

CM: Wow, that was a lot! You're very involved, very involved!

NG: I've been here a long- so the funny thing is, I've been here since 1998, but I have other colleagues here who have been here longer. There are two people who have been here, one 30-something years and one 40-something years and we're all the same age. It's just that I worked at other JCCs too before that, before this one, so. Yeah. So, the JCC has very seasoned and very dedicated staff. So, yeah. It's kind of a life.

JB: Yeah, so in total, with all of the locations that you've been in, how long have you been at the JCCs?

NG: So, I finished social work school in 1980, so I started working at the JCC in Denver in late 1980.

JB: So that's... almost 43 years?

NG: Yeah, well I took off those few years when my kids were little, I started working part time here in 1998 when my kids were little. So, in between when my son was born, so he was born in '92 and '98 I probably was a slacker. I wasn't working and I was on the board here, so I always like had a connection to the JCC and my kids went to preschool here, so I was always in the building. But I was not actually working, so I had a few years off, so I got a few years off to be with my kids when they were little. But just because you can see I'm not the only person who is like that, it's kind of that working in a JCC is, I don't know, there are other, like if you were to examine the staff at other JCCs, I'm sure there would be a lot of long-time employees because it's that sort of thing. Although I think it's changed. I think the JCC has changed as an institution. It's sort of consumer driven and these populations like the seniors that I worked with. Like in some ways I feel like really fortunate because I got to work with the Greatest Generation. And let me also say back when I also had two retired women's groups, I did a Red Hat group here at the JCC. I don't know if you know the Red Hat thing. Oh yeah, there was this whole like it was some kind of like fad of like older women wearing red hats and doing these, going these, doing, just like doing things. So, I would organize like going out to lunch, or going to Tower Hill, or just various you know, going, the art museum and having lunch there and then a tour. Just like things for like the retired women who were red hatters. So, they dress in red hats and wear purple, and I was so young I wasn't allowed to wear a red hat, I got to wear a pink hat, that was the rule, so I would wear a pink hat and something like pinkish purple because I wasn't old enough to be a red hatter. So, I had these women's groups, but again, those like greatest generation, that's who they were. So, in terms of it being like a Jewish community thing, there wasn't anything in particularly Jewish about it except for who was in it. And this particular generation, they were like first generation usually or even had been born elsewhere but had come here as a young child. So, a lot of them spoke Yiddish, a lot of them understood Yiddish, a lot of them grew up in religious homes though they weren't religious. So, it's a special group of people, there aren't, there's no one like them now. There's just no one. So, I feel privileged to have been able to work with that group because I just loved they had this traditional background and even like my 100-year-old, you know that group of people, of my men, my four men, they come from that tradition. They're not religious or totally secular but they grew up with this, if you talk to the 100-year-old, they grew up where there it was just the beginning of cars, there were no roads with, there were no traffic rules, and you know, people would run each other off the road, the cranking the car up, and things they remember, it's just, you know, who knows that stuff? It's just really fascinating, and their families were immigrant families. So, it was you know they had really Americanized, and these guys were thoroughly Americanized totally. And you know of course they all served in World War II. Well, my younger men in this group were Korean War vets, so they were the babies. We call them, in the old days when I had the giant men's group, my Korean War vets sat in the back of the room, and we called them the

kindergarteners because they were so young compared to the World War II vets. But it was like if we had like a discussion that wasn't with a speaker and we were just talking, they would tell me things like about being in the army joining as a volunteer, volunteering, because WWII was a compelling war. People- it was a huge Jewish constituency that served in WWII and about how it was the first time they didn't have kosher food. And like when he, like one of the guys looked and he was served like pork chops, you know like, that's not kosher for sure. I mean it wasn't kosher food but like bacon and pork chops don't do that. So, he was like you know like either he ate it, or he didn't eat food. So, there were like, no one was going to make a concession and like get him something else. So, you know, just like hearing their stories about like you know the first time they encountered, because they lived, like if they grew up in Worcester, they were living on the east side and they lived in these neighborhoods where everyone was Jewish. And there was Water Street where all the Jewish shops were. So, you know then they might be stationed in Alabama or, you know, sent to Normandy, or whatever with their, you know, on a ship and they'd be like one of three Jews out of whatever and you know that was how they became exposed to you know, like real America. So, anyway it's been very influential as you can see, that group of men.

CM: So, with all those experiences, and just all of it under your belt, and just the relationships you've built, how has that shaped you as like the person you are today?

NG: Oh, well, I think for one thing, working in the JCC and especially working—the JCC has changed drastically, like our membership's maybe like 40 percent Jewish and that's because people have died and left. Partially Worcester's school system has pushed people into like suburbs where it's a little bit kinder and gentler. So, people who have school-aged children, I think people are moving back to the city like I know, because I just sold my house recently, I know like a bunch of people my age called me and said, "My kids are moving back to Worcester can they look at your house?" So, and people with, they're like people in their 30s who have young children. And I was like "Wow that's like a new thing, Worcester's a place that people want to live in now! Not like maybe you know I'll live in Holden, or you know, maybe I'll move to Westborough, or maybe I'll move somewhere where the school system's better." People are moving back to Worcester so that's kind of cool. How has it shaped me? Well, I have to say that since I grew up in a place where there were not a lot of Jews, myself didn't know about a JCC. Like it, my identity, my Jewish identity, like I rudimentary like went to Hebrew school kind of thing as a kid. But back when I was a kid, girls didn't have a bat mitzvah because you weren't allowed to be called up to the Torah, it was, that is not now the case, but it was the case when I was a kid. So, so I've had to learn so much Jewishly, or I absorbed it, I shouldn't say "had to learn," it just I learned about not religious things, but Jewish life, through working at the JCC. Like my kids in preschool when they were here would celebrate the Sabbath Shabbat on Friday when they'd be in preschool and like I just decided we're going to do that Friday night at home too. And we did not do that when I was growing up. We were very assimilated, and I would say a lot of people who were my age who are, you know, they're unquestionably Jewish, but secular in a way, not religious. I'm secular also, but it's like a very important part of who I am. And that came from working at the JCC absolutely, but it was my own personal journey, not, it had

nothing to do with what was happening at the JCC, I just wanted that, and I wanted to instill that in my children, so I made a lot of conscious choices for my kids that were not made for me. So, my kids went to JCC for preschool, and it's just preschool, not a Jewish preschool. My kids went to JCC camp, and then when they were old enough to go to sleep away camp, they went to Jewish camps. I mean, this was very intentional on my part, like wanting this for my children. And then they went, each of my children has been to Israel, so it was just like, I wanted to make sure my children had a very strong Jewish identity because I didn't, but I do now. So, I wanted to make sure I made very intentional choices for my kids. And not, and I mean in a cultural way, not in a religi- yes, they went to Hebrew school because I wanted them to be educated but it was reform which is the most liberal branch of Judaism. So, those were things I wanted, I just wanted to make sure my kids knew who they were and that their Jewish selves were strong as I was able to make it.

JB: Yeah, so, I know you just said like you feel more in with it now as you were making those decisions for your children. Like how does like the cultural impact like from you and like your colleagues affect or like work here? Like what kind of cultural impact do you guys have on the children that come here?

NG: So, we have all kinds of programs here. We have summer camp, after school programs, and our preschool. Some of it is like, really, like afterschool care is you know, it's a service because people need it. We always will do like, because we're a Jewish institution, on Friday we always have challah, which is the braided bread that's part of like the Shabbat celebration. I'll do, I don't know, like they do the blessings that go with it but they- you know, the children will be taught about this Friday being the Jewish sabbath because we're the JCC, so you kind of get that by signing up for it. But it's more cultural, it's like about the food and you know what it means to you know be Jewish and how we celebrate basically. It's not being imposed on anyone. In the preschool, there's more. If you send your kid to preschool here, there would be more like ha- and I would say that's true for the afterschool too. They do all the holidays so they might learn about Hannukah and eat potato latkes which are the potato pancakes or the jelly doughnuts which are you know how Israelis celebrate Hannukah and learn that you know you light the Menorah and that it lasts for eight days and like you know learn the very elementary story about it. So, you know we do then Passover of course we'll be serving matzah and we ask the families not to send in anything with bread products and things like that in the preschool and the after school. So, we'll only have like Passover snacks during Passover. So, I mean there's definitely, you know you're, you know, in a Jewish institution. In fact, one of my friends said that she was always the Hannukah mom at Flagg Street school, so she said one day she was going to read a story and bring potato latkes to her child's class and she said "does anyone know what Hannukah is?" and she said one little kid raised his hand and said "I used to be Jewish when I went to the JCC preschool" [laughs] "I used to be Jewish." So, it's just like, you know, there's definitely you know, kids absorb information and it's that he used to be Jewish when he went to the JCC preschool, so I always loved that story. So, yeah so, here, I mean we have basketball programs on Sundays... there's nothing Jewish about basketball really. So it would just kind of be being in a Jewish environment. Some of the things we do are just you know what the Y does. We do the

same thing except we are a Jewish institution so if it's Passover and it's like the Seder we might be closed that Sunday that they would normally have basketball or something. So, so sometimes if it's like a real program where we're seeing kids a lot like childcare or preschool, that sort of thing, we will definitely be doing anything Jewish and then sometimes there's basketball or swim lessons or whatever and it's just like the Y. It's a place to come and do those things.

JB: Do you guys do like celebrations and stuff for like holidays?

NG: Well, we do, like, so that's why like, for Hannukah we did, for the last 4 years, at the Worcester Art Museum, so which is great because we are both on Salisbury Street and we are both on the west side, and they want to bring people into the building who don't know anything about Hannukah and we want to bring our people into the building who want to celebrate Hannukah with us at the Art Museum, so it kind of works for everyone. But yeah, so we, we are actually closed for some holidays, like our Rosh Hashana, which is our Jewish new year, so those are the holy days of our year, so the building is closed but like one of the things you do, is have apples and honey because of the sweetness of the new year or challah with honey, but because of the pandemic we don't do that like apples and those little honey sticks for those people who are coming through the building. Last week was Purim which is not really a holy holiday but it's a holiday that is equivalent to Halloween, so all the preschoolers dressed up in costumes because we don't allow them to do Halloween. It is a pagan holiday, so we don't celebrate like Valentine's Day, Saint Valentines, we don't celebrate Halloween, so for us its Purim, which is when you dress up in costume and when you eat these triangular shaped cookies, so that was this week, and all the kids came in costume for that. So, and there's a story you read and whenever they say it's like a melodrama whenever you say the villain's name everyone has a little noise maker and so, yeah, they would do that at the preschool.

JB: That's really cool!

NG: Yeah.

CM: So, what else do you do outside of just the JCC? Do you do anything just at your home or just anything you like to do?

NG: I'm an avid jogger. I have been jogging for 40 something years so I do that literally every day. It's nothing big. My children call it slogging (slow jog), but I do it every day, like literally 360 days a year. I was just in Marocco where I couldn't go jogging because it wasn't really safe like, just because of the no sidewalks and things like that. I couldn't really run because I was on a tour, and I had to be on a schedule and there just wasn't always time. That is the longest period I haven't run, except when I broke my ankle. So, I'm a runner, what else do I do? Let's see, what do I do for fun? I like to bake; I like to read cookbooks [laughs], I'm very crazy like I really enjoy reading about food. And so, I'm all about food and this goes back to work, but I used to teach cooking for 12 years at our Hebrew High. So just to circle back to our men's group, so when I taught cooking at Hebrew High, when I first started, I'm not really an educator I'm a

social worker, so I work with groups. But I had to try and figure out how to teach kids about Jewish cooking, so I had my men's group every week so one week I said to the men, "Please name every Jewish food you can think of." So, within 5 minutes or less, I had a list of like 100 Jewish foods and then the next week I had my Hebrew High kids, so I'm like, "Please name every Jewish food you can think of." Only like 12 things, like matzah, bagels, potato latkes, and they were just really basic things. Whereas the men had grown up with this whole tradition of eating Jewish food and I was just thinking "Wow that's what gets lost in a generation of assimilation." Right? The kids knew nothing. I'm like, "What do you guys eat on Sunday nights?" because I used to go to my grandparents on Sunday nights. They were like, "That's sushi night!" I was like "I had never heard of sushi until I was like in the 1980s, so I was like in my 30's and these are like 12-year-olds. So, anyway, just how life has changed and so I taught Jewish cooking for 12 years because I really love imparting information about food. So anyways, I'm just a food major, major foodie. Let's see. [pause] Oh, I love Broadway musicals. I grew up with, I love Broadway musicals. I grew up with that in my house, but I love them. I forced my children when they were in long car rides to listen to all my Broadway musicals, so they know all the Broadway musicals too which I'm very happy about. I've been a Beatles fan since 1964, like Paul McCartney. I'm a big, big time Beatles fan!

CM: Have you ever seen a Broadway musical in person?

NG: I see as many as I can, yes.

CM: What has been your favorite so far?

NG: Well, I'm a big fan of Stephen Sondheim—died about 2 years ago, maybe. So, my favorite musical, well it's not my favorite of all time but it might be. My parents took my sister and I to London, I think it was either 1971 or 1972 and London has a big theatre, thing you know. It's like there's theatre everywhere there so we saw a Stephen Sondheim musical called the *Company* when I was probably like 15 or 16 maybe and I still love it, that musical. I have seen it many times, whenever they're doing a redo of it, I see it and I pretty much see anything that Stephen Sondheim has, like he wrote *Into the Woods* and yeah but what else would you know, *Into the Woods* was a big one. You probably know that one so I love Stephen Sondheim, but I love pretty much, I'm not such a fan of recent Broadway musicals as much. I mean I've seen like *Rent* and you know those sorts of things and in fact one of my favorite songs is "Seasons of Love" but so yeah. I love Broadway musicals and have instilled that in my children. They don't love them, by the way, but they know them. They know *Company* by heart because they listen to it in the car. They also know the Beatles by heart and I'm like "okay, who's singing, who's the lead singer" and my daughter, well my son is not so good at this, but my daughter can say Jon. Like she knows who the lead singer is on a Beatles song 'cause she's listened to enough of the Beatles to know that. 'Cause I remember when I, well before I was married, I worked at the JCC in Boston and I used to supervise social work students and in particular they were Jewish communal service students from Brandeis and also MSW students. I remember I had this student, grad students, they were all grad students and I had a big poster on my door of the Beatles and I'm

like, “Eric, can you name the Beatles?” “No, but by the time you leave here, you will know the Beatles, trust me. You will know who each of those people are.” [Asks interviewers] Can you name the Beatles?’

JB: “John, Paul, Geroge and Ringo! I’m an avid fan as well.

NG: [gasps] WOOHOOO!!!

JB: What is your favorite song? Or maybe a top three or something?

NG: Okay so, being a Paul McCartney lover, I like “Every Night”, maybe “Maybe I’m Amazed” as one of my favorite Paul McCartney songs, number one and then I like early Beatles, so I like things like “Can’t Buy Me Love” and “I Should Have Known Better.” I can go all the way up like, I have to like “Hey Jude” and things like that but I can go all the way up or down. What about you?

JB: “Julia” of course!

NG: And so tell me about that song?

JB: It’s about me. [Laughs]

NG: You know it’s about his mother. Right?

JB: I did not actually

NG: Yes, his mother was, John's mother, was named Julia so that's yeah.

JB: No, I did not know that my middle name is also Sadie so they have the song.

NG: Yeah!

JB: Yeah!

NG: So, did a parent of yours like The Beatles or was that accidental?

JB: My grandmother loves them.

NG: Your grandmother!!!

JB: My mom does too and my dad but my grandmother is a huge fan.

NG: So, my mother took my sister me to see The Beatles in 1964 when I was eight my sister was five and my mother was 31, 31 my mother had these two children, she, we went to Boston, Boston Garden and we saw The Beatles where everyone was just screaming and crying. That was just and then they were escorted on and off by the police that's like mostly what I remember. I was only eight so, but I did see The Beatles in person and I have seen Paul McCartney a few times like I saw him at the Centrum and I mean they don't call it the Centrum anymore but I saw him here in Worcester.

CM: Is it the DCU Center?

NG: Yeah, yeah. And then I saw him at Fenway and they have seen them...

JB: He's on tour right now, isn't he?

NG: He might be. He's 80.

JB: Yeah, he maybe, I think he was selling tickets to go on tour.

NG: I think so too.

JB: I looked! They are so expensive. [Laughs] So expensive.

NG: Yeah, I think we got them through one of, I mean I hadn't planned to go see Paul McCartney but a couple of my Beatle-loving friends just said, "Yeah we gotta do this." So yeah, well I was married to Paul McCartney when I was little. My sister and I used to play house. Paul was my husband George was her husband and we were just talking about this actually because I said, "Yeah didn't I live over on the fireplace? That was my house and you lived under the piano?" My sister said, "No I lived under that table" because we would have our little, my panda was like my child and my sister had Bam Bam but from the Flintstones so we would play Beatles

JB: I love that!

CM: Do you only have the one sister or do you have other siblings?

NG: I have one sister. We are very, very close. In fact, I was sitting in the car when Andrea called me, talking to my sister, I'm like, "Oh I have to go I said I'm actually here early so I'm not late yet but I have to go." So she lives in California. Oh, I should say I like to travel. I didn't say that. I haven't done much traveling, though I just came back from Morocco. That was like my first trip in a long time. The last trip I took was to Israel in 2017 and then before that I had gone pretty much well, I think I went to Italy, I actually did this with my daughter when she was taking a junior semester abroad. So, I like traveling but I don't do all that much of it but I like traveling.

JB: What's it like going to Israel?

NG: So, I've only been to Israel twice. Once was in 2017 and then before that my first trip was 30 years earlier or whatever the date would be on that so like '87 I want to say. It was, I couldn't really imagine what going to Israel would be like. It was always like on my bucket list and then since I was working through the JCC, there was a JCC trip that I went on in '87 with like maybe 15 colleagues. It was really great because it was an educational trip. It wasn't really your typical sightseeing trip, it was a tour set up where you were learning, learning, learning and I loved being in this ancient place that is so complicated and is kind of a place that is beloved to Armenians, Christians, Muslims and Jews. It just has like it's a you know it is important to the three major religions anymore. I really love that very complex history and also, it's very complicated politically of course too but I loved learning about it and understanding it from like learning on the ground. So that was when I went in '87 and then I hadn't been back in 30 years, though my kids had gone to Israel as teenagers. So, I went in 2017, it was another educational tour that I went on. The JCC sent me with another group of JCC colleagues like they were my colleagues from other JCCs. And again, it was an educational tour so I was learning inside and there's it's just like so there's it's so layered and complicated to understand but being there on site and like having an educator or like kind of putting it into context what you're seeing it was really amazing and I'm hoping to go back pretty soon cause my boyfriend has - is Jewish and has never been to Israel so, so, he needs to fix that I need to fix that for him.

CM: So, with this next Israel trip if it happens would you wanna take him on one you've already been on like the educational one or would you wanna take him just like on a vacation just like to see it?

NG: I feel like well Israel's complex and I feel like the best way to understand anything is kind of like if you go to an exhibit at the Art Museum. If you take the acoustic guide tour or read what's on the wall about each you know painting or whatever it might be what's on display you get a lot more out of it than just like looking at it yourself and just like, "Ohhh that's a pretty picture." Personally, that's how I am. So, I feel like understanding the history, the context, the politics, is really important and a place like that it's, well to me, it would be important to anywhere. So, we were just in Morocco but we were on a tour and we had a tour leader so we were hearing from someone you know a native person who's very knowledgeable about what we were seeing. I find that I like that piece of it. Like that would be better for me than just like going and like you know seeing whatever but not really knowing what it all meant. It's just the understanding what's behind it and the traditions and the history and whatnot I think so. I'm going to make sure that it's not just like, "Oh yeah let's go to you know the museums" it's good to do that but to have someone who's knowledgeable helping you understand what you're seeing is important for me, that's how I am.

JB: What are like the cultural and religious differences while being there versus being in Worcester, if there are any?

NG: Well, you're living in a Jewish country which is a Jewish society and it's imperfect. I mean there's a lot of problems, even within like the Jewish world because they're the ultra-religious and they want something different. Like right now there's a kind of a more right-wing government because of the coalitions that were formed and, and so part of that's like the right wing ultra-orthodox too and what they want versus other things. But you're living in a culture where everything's Jewish like the world stops on Friday because it's Shabbat and nothing's open. People don't really drive cars or do anything like there's a rhythm to life that is Jewish. Like all the holidays are celebrated and you know it's Passover and you're in this realm whereas you might not know it's Passover if you're in the US. You have to kind of make that happen but it's a Jewish country and it's really diverse there, like being in Morocco used to have like 250,000 Jews but when Israel became a country in 1948, they went to Israel. They immigrated so Israel has a huge Moroccan population. The Moroccan Jewish population is like 15% of the entire population so it's really diverse. There're Jews from all over the world in this realm, it is just like amazingly diverse and here in the US most, not all but most Jews' backgrounds especially here where we are Eastern European but there are Jews from everywhere. They're Jews from all over North Africa and you know the Middle East and they all have they have different traditions than you know than like we Eastern European Jews. So Israel's a really diverse country on top of which there's the Palestinians and the Arabs and the Muslims and just like the Christians and the Bedouins. It's just a really you know it's a really diverse country though it's a Jewish state but really different. You should go sometime.

JB: Maybe I will, very interesting.

CM: Since you mentioned you saw there were Moroccan people in Israel, did you choose to...

NG: Moroccan Jews who moved to Israel. Like in other words, Jewish community, so the Jewish community in Morocco came either with the Romans so thousands of years ago or two because they settled in Morocco. The Romans, they came from the expulsion in Spain and Portugal and King Ferdinand said all Jews have to leave or convert to Christianity so the Jews fled Spain and Portugal. Those are called Sephardic Jews, whereas like the Eastern European are called Ashkenazic Jews. The Sephardic Jews who were expelled in 1492 of Morocco was hospitable and you know a lot of people went to Morocco Jewish people so they have a completely, they have not a Holocaust community at all. There's no Holocaust history from there and their traditions are different from like Eastern European so like worldwide Jewry is different so those Moroccan Jews. When Israel became a country in 1948, a lot of them left and went to Israel for this new state and so there are very few Jews left in Morocco though there are lots of Jewish reminders like there are Jewish cemeteries and old synagogues and things like that because they were mostly Jews that were there for 1000 years and there were Jews that were there for like 500 years so it was a very old tradition of Jews being in Morocco but most everyone is now in Israel but they come back to Morocco because they're Moroccan but they're Jewish so yeah so anyway.

JB: Is there any other places that like you really want to visit?

NG: I'm trying to decide what's on my bucket list actually and I have I haven't seen like a lot of the world that I have to say so I'm like pretty open to seeing going anywhere and seeing everything. I mean I've been to Europe on our way home from Morocco we went to Madrid and I was like you know, I'm really happy we are in like a big European city because now it's like showing me like wow Morocco's like really so different than being in Europe. so Europe's kind of Europe it's different country by country but it's familiar in a way that Morocco was not familiar. You know, an ancient way of life that still exists in modernity, like they've got the Internet and things are modern but it's very traditional. It's like you're seeing something that is not like being in Europe. So, where else would I want to go? Just like everywhere! Even back to some of the places that I've been because I went for just a semester in Italy when I was in junior college, and I loved it. I loved Italy as a consequence, and I will always go back to Italy because I love it. So as many times as I can go, I will want to go but I haven't seen so much of the world that everywhere sounds I mean I don't have any desire really like to go to like Antarctica or not but you know sort of like more conventional places. Yes!

CM: You also mentioned a bucket list, do you have anything else on that bucket list other than traveling?

NG: Well, you know what my bucket, I kind of feel like because I'm getting older, my mom just turned 90 about three weeks ago and I just I'm very family oriented. I'm really close to my children and my sister and my mom that's like my little nuclear family and my boyfriend gets nutty because I talk to myself. I can talk to my sister for like three hours on the phone. She lives in California and when we're still not finished like that you know there's just more to talk about and I talk to my kids all the time because I like talking to them all the time. So doing like some kind of family stuff I like and also my boyfriend's very family oriented too so we're always doing like family gathering kinds of things so those that would be good like I would like to take a trip well I'm actually I'm planning one for my mom's 90th birthday. My sister, my mom and I are going to go somewhere, though we can't figure out where but we're going to do a trip. Then we have family weddings this summer, so we'll all be gathering for those. I'm happy I'll get to see and we'll get to travel and be together so that's good. We like family gatherings and then like Thanksgiving is like any excuse doubt like family gatherings and food and it's all good so yeah that's my priority really yeah, family.

JB: Where do your children live?

NG: Well, my son's in New York so that's not too bad and my son just got married so in the fall. he and his wife now have been together since college so a long time but anyways they just got married they're in New York. my son's been in New York pretty much since college since he graduated and my daughter is in Austin, TX which feels really far away. She was home for the pandemic so that was special so even though the pandemic was the pandemic it was good because she was home and so that she wouldn't have been if it weren't for the pandemic so that was good so we got to spend time then! Anything else?

JB: We could wrap it up yeah it was really nice talking to you yeah!

CM: It was nice getting to know you!

JB: You're very interesting and you do a lot!

CM: You are just very involved in the community, not just here at the JCC and all the other JCC's you have worked at.

NG: Yeah, it's kind of been my life. When I think about it, it's been my entire career for sure but it's not just a job in the way people have jobs. It's kind of a world, its own little world. I feel lucky because this is not what I thought my career would be. I thought I would be sort of you know, in an office—well I have an office—I would be seeing clients every hour or in some kind of social service agency. This is a social service agency, but not one of that source. I thought it would be a much more clinical kind of thing that I would do, but I realized that wasn't where my heart was. Like I said it was serendipitous that I ended up at the JCC in Denver. It was not planned, it just kind of happened. It turned into my life.

JB: Well, that's great!

CM: Thank you!

JB: Yeah, thank you for letting us talk to you!