Althea Diesenhaus Stroum Transcript

PBL: This is the oral history interview of Althea Diesenhaus Stroum. Today's date is July the 23rd, 2001. We are at the home of Althea Stroum at 1301 Spring Street in Seattle, Washington. My name is Pamela Brown Lavitt and I am oral historian for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words project in Seattle. And before we begin, I just need to have your permission that you are being recorded today.

ADS: You have my permission.

PBL: Wonderful. So I think we'll begin at the beginning, and that's your beginning. Can you tell me where it was that you were born and when your birthday was?

ADS: Yep. I was born in the Bronx hospital in New York City, and I was born June 14, 1922. [phone ringing] That makes me 79 years.

PBL: Tell me a little bit about the situation into which you were born.

ADS: My mother and father lived in New York. My mother was born in America, she was born, in fact, I'm not sure whether it was Highland Falls, New York, or Newburgh. And her father came here when he was 5. [phone ringing] And in fact they both had the same kindergarten teacher and first grade teacher, which was very unusual in my day, amongst my Jewish friends in New York. My father was in the plumbing and heating business and we always lived close by to his office and his — the place that he worked out of. And at that time, we lived in — let's see, what was the name of the street, all of a sudden I can't — I was going to say Kingsbridge Road, but it wasn't Kingsbridge Road. It will come to me. It was Boston Road!

PBL: We'll fill in the blank.

ADS: And my father and my mother had three children. My oldest sister was Hazel, who married Ben Cole in Seattle. And she was 12 years older than me. And my other sister was Julia Diesenhaus and she became Julia DeLorraine, she was seven years older.

PBL: Can you spell that name?

ADS: It's D-E capital L-O-R-R-A-I-N-E. Lorraine Jewel Diesenhaus was her name on her birth certificate. She never liked Lorraine particularly. My mother didn't like Lorraine. They decided they weren't going to call her Jewel, so they called her Julie or Julia, and that's the way she grew up. And when she divorced her husband, she put the De for Diesenhaus, and then Lorraine was the other name. I never could understand it, it was so Italian.

PBL: It's very interesting, the story of people's names, and I'm wondering what's the story of Althea?

ADS: Well that's interesting. My mother was pregnant with my sister Julia when my parents moved to Detroit. My father had business in Detroit. Six years later she became pregnant again. Their next-door neighbor's daughter's name little girl was named Althea. I was going to be the third child, although those days, you never could tell what you were going to have, and she really wanted a boy to please my father. She was planning to name her third child if another girl after my great-grandmother's name whose name was Alta Sapera, which stands for old bird. My mother did not want to give me the name of old bird. Or old. And so she thought hm, if it's a girl, Althea is very close to Alta. And that's how she came up with the name Althea. Althea is a Greek name, it's a Greek goddess, I believe the Goddess of Fire if I'm not mistaken. And that was all that she ever told me about it, but the interesting thing is that there's someone in Seattle and her name is Alta Bear, and when I first met her I said, "Alta, you're the first person I've ever met with the name Alta." And I explained to her the Hebrew part of it and what it meant. And

then later on in years, I found out Sapera was Moses's wife's name. And so I'm very important. Greek goddess and Moses' wife.

PBL: All the powers that be.

ADS: Mmm Hmm.

PBL: Did you also have in addition a Yiddish or a Hebrew name? Did your parents give you the name Alta as your Hebrew name?

ADS: Yes. That was — Alta Sapera is my Hebrew name.

PBL: How do you feel over the years you've embodied the name Althea? As the Greek goddess or —

ADS: I've always loved my name. And I never knew what it meant until later on in my life. I did research at the library and found out who Althea was.

PBL: So going back to your family, in New York, can you describe what family members of yours were already settled in the United States, you said your mother grew up in New York, so were you surrounded by her family?

ADS: My grandmother, father's mother, came to the United States with three children. My grandmother on my mom's side had a brother lived in New Jersey and he was a doctor. And in fact he was a very prominent man because he was one of the first to do abortions and his name was Sherman, Dr. Joshua Sherman, and he even wrote a book that was very famous but I have tried to trace it, I cannot find the book, because he changed his name. But I have an article that I've kept that I found in a — in the Seattle newspaper, when the abortion article came out about Wade and the argument, and lo and behold, it says there was a Dr. S that came from New Jersey.

PBL: New Jersey?

ADS: I think it was more like Atlantic City. And they mentioned the whole thing I knew it was referring to my uncle, who would have been a great-uncle, because it was my grandmother's brother. And I met him once, and for some reason the names of these cities are just slipping through my mind I'm usually very good at remembering those things. But anyhow, not that I was proud of the fact, but it was very interesting and even as a child, I thought it was sort of fascinating, the book he wrote— was a play. And I think it was on Broadway. The play was about a woman who could not give birth. She couldn't get pregnant. And so she chose her brother-in-law, I think, to have intercourse with, so she could have the baby. That was what the play was about.

PBL: How did you learn about his activities?

ADS: My mother was a pretty open-minded person. I learned a great deal because I was 9, my sisters were grown up already, twelve and seven years difference, years from 9 and up. One thing that she did was to expose me to all the arts and the theater. She loved music, opera, symphony, and even though we weren't in the means, especially because of my father's death, she managed to take me by subway and we'd go downtown and that's the first time I went to the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the History Museum and then I remember going to shows and my uncles, her brothers, were all in choirs and so music and art was very, very prominent in our family. And then because my father was a plumber contractor, I was always very good at measuring, because he used to give me the rule to measure with. And in fact my father's company did the plumbing at Sing Sing in New York.

PBL: Do you remember the name of his company?

ADS: It was — I have a picture here and I can show it to you. I think it was George Diesenhaus Plumbing and Heating, or Diesenhaus Plumbing and Heating. And I remember when I was 5 years old, he took me to Sing Sing and he had me sit on his shoulders and he showed me all around. That was before it was built. And so those

things, you know, stand out in your mind. And I believe because I was the baby, and that much younger than my sister, he took a lot of pride in my being there.

PBL: So can you describe a typical day in your home as a child? What are some of your earliest memories of your childhood?

ADS: Well I remember my mother keeping the Sabbath on Friday night and she was always very committed to Judaism. She kept kosher, and observed all the holidays. My grandparents were very religious. I always went to cheder as a child and especially when my father died, and I went, I was 9 then and I went there to learn the prayers and to this day, I can say the morning prayer from top to bottom.

PBL: Was that something that you learned as a result of your father's passing at age 9 or was that something you had already learned in cheder?

ADS: No I think I learned it after he died. I'm pretty sure that was when it stuck in my mind.

PBL: What do you remember about your parents and their relationship?

ADS: I remember— that my mother helped my father in the business. She did a lot of his accounting. See, he was not American-born. He came when he was 18 and he came from, and I never got the city straight, but I was always told it was on the borderline of Germany and Poland. And the name Diesenhaus came from — that was my grandmother's maiden name and when she left her husband with her three and her children, which my father was the oldest — she came to America and she changed her name back to her maiden name at Ellis Island. She did not give her married name.

PBL: So her children bore her maiden name.

ADS: That's right.

PBL: What do you think of that?

ADS: Well, today it doesn't bother me because women carry their maiden name. But I was forbidden to tell anybody that story as a child because it made you sound like you were illegitimate, that my father was. And not until I was 40 years old, I went to Israel and I had my grandmother's name in my book for notes because she had a sister that lived in Israel and the sister of another — relative of hers. And I asked my guide where this part — to help me locate them I was going to call these people and inquire about how I can get in touch. The guide looked in my note book and he said, "Diesenhaus, why we have a Diesenhaus travel agency, spelled the same way. D-I-E-S-E-N-H-A-U-S." And I said, "Oh, I'd love to meet them." He says, "Well I'll take you, it's right in Tel Aviv." So he took me there. And my husband and I walked in and he introduced me as Mrs. Stroum and I said my maiden name was Diesenhaus and he introduced me to the couple, and the couple's name was Esther and George Diesenhaus, exactly my mother and father's name. I was stunned, you know, such an unusual thing. And I didn't say too much and they said, "Well, tell me, how did your father have the same name as your grandmother? What was your grandmother's maiden name?" And I looked at them, and I had never told it before, and I said, "Diesenhaus." They said, "Diesenhaus?" I said, "Yes, I fibbed, she married a cousin." That was the first time that I came out with it. People who today live together for 10 years and have children and it doesn't mean anything, but in those days it was a no-no.

PBL: Did it feel liberating to actually be able to tell that story to the Israeli couple? ADS: Well I didn't tell the story to them. I just said she married a cousin and it was when I returned to United States then I became open about it.

PBL: Did it ever make you feel illegitimate in any way?

ADS: No, no.

PBL: I'm curious, there was an article in 1997 in the Seattle Times in which your parents are mentioned. And I don't know if it was a quote from you, but it says that your parents were quote unquote "community activists." Does that ring any bells or can you explain why they might have been called that?

ADS: I don't know why they said my parents. I would say I wouldn't know about my father because it was — he was just involved with his business and he was 49 when he passed away in New York five years before my mom, and sisters and I came to Seattle, so I don't really remember how involved he was, but my mother was always involved in the PTA and all children's projects and the synagogue and then it was temple, she was there at the temple or a home. When I came to Seattle, I became involved my mother was an excellent example. And in high school, at Garfield High School, where I went, I — I remember— [coughs] excuse me — I did it for twofold reason. One to be helpful, and one to earn some money. I worked in the gym and I took care of the students who were practicing after school hours.

PBL: So then would you then — I'm sorry Althea. Continue.

ADS: And then the other thing was, you know Child Haven, have you heard of it?

PBL: Yes, very well.

ADS: Well, I went to work there. And I used to walk from Garfield High School up to Broadway and help with the kids.

PBL: This was when you were in high school?

ADS: Uh huh. I was 14, 15 years old. I lived in Capitol Hill. That was another thing, when we came to Seattle, my mother didn't want me to go to a school where I knew no one — we lived on Capitol Hill, 16th North, and Broadway High School was the school I should have gone to. But because my cousin, the only relative I had here in Seattle, she was my

age, about a year older, Elaine was going to Garfield. She lived with her grandparents who were my great-aunt and uncle, the one that I showed you a picture of, I'll get into that, that was instrumental in our being in Seattle, she — my cousin Elaine lived right near Cherry Street and Garfield High School, and that was just a few blocks away. So my mother used that as her address — my address, so that I could get into Garfield.

PBL: Why did she want you to go to Garfield?

ADS: Well because I had a relative there and she heard that a lot of Jewish kids went to that school.

PBL: I'd like to go back a little, because there's a number of things I think that we might have skipped over. First of all, I want to ask a little bit about your — still in New York, still in the Bronx, but you were there until you were 14. Did you consider yourself, your mother a role model in other ways? How was she a role model to you and then your father's death, how did that create a relationship between the 2 of you that you mentioned before was very unique?

ADS: Well, I really don't think I thought about it in that way, but when I look back, I realize what a tremendous person she was. But even when I was little, I was born on Flag Day and my mother told me that Betsy Ross made the flag for me. And I was 9 years old when I found out it belonged to the United States of America. And she always had a philosophy about everything. Forgive and forget. What's the one, one in the hand is worth two in the bush. I can remember thousands of little things that she would quote. And her education was just grade school. But she was a very bright lady, as I said she did my father's accounting. And she was interested in the arts. She kept herself very involved in all the organizations. And that, I think, is what stemmed from my doing it. And my sisters too.

PBL: What was your relationship with your sisters like, given that they were quite a bit older than you?

ADS: Well I had three mothers. [laughter] No, I had a good relationship with my sisters. And we were always very close. And I would say that we were closer when I got married, I was treated as the kid. You know my sister Hazel would say, keep your head up. Don't wrinkle your forehead. And my sisters were always telling me to be more involved and always felt that I didn't do enough. [laughter]

PBL: Can you describe a little bit about what the things in your childhood you felt were important? What things were important to you.

ADS: That's interesting. Well, I would say that I loved going to the theater and being involved with the orchestra— I mean going to the activities. And I remember going to the parades downtown New York. I mean, from the Bronx to Manhattan was quite a schlep, I should say. But my mother always made sure that I was part of it and I remember all those things. I remember all the travels. I remember going to visit this uncle that I mentioned, Dr. Sherman. And that was after my father died, he had us over?

PBL: I'll pause for a second.

[break in tape]

PBL: Do you remember then if you felt like you grew up in "immigrant New York" or what was the neighborhood like in the Bronx? Who were your neighbors and what do you remember was distinctive?

ADS: Well, I remember they were all — well, see, I wasn't aware that they were all Jewish at that time. And my realization came when I came to Seattle. When I was 14, and it was September, and it was the Jewish holiday, Rosh Hashanah was coming up. Now in New York, the school that I went to just closed.

PBL: What school was that?

ADS: It was P.S. 86. I went to P.S. 40, P.S. 44 and P.S. 86. I started at P.S. 40. When it became close to the holiday, my mother sort of inferred that I ask one of my classmates I tapped this little girl on the shoulder and I said, “Tell me, what do you do for the Jewish holiday?” And she turns around and she says, “I resent that.” And I didn’t ask her any questions. I went home and I said, “Mom, she was really mean. And I don’t know what she meant.” And my mother said, “Well, what they call that is antisemitism, she probably doesn’t like Jewish people.” And so she says, “but don’t worry about it. You’ll just stay home from school.” And so I stayed home for Rosh Hashanah and I came back and the little girl probably realized that I was Jewish. And so she turns around and she says, “I want to apologize. I didn’t realize you were Jewish.” And I said, “but why did you say that?” And she said, “Well my parents always told me the Jews were very cruel to their children.” I said, “Really? What do they do?” She said, “They circumcise their boys.” I have never, never forgotten that. And that was my first introduction that I was different. So when you ask me what I remember about New York — there wasn’t that feeling. I remember having book sales, I would have book sales outside of our apartment building. I remember traveling with my father, going to Coney Island, and different things like that that were very pleasant, going to the beach, you know, in the summer. And then as I said, my grandparents had a home in Highland Falls, and we visited them a great deal, and so that’s my memory of New York, really, as a child. I was not upset about moving to Seattle, which you must remember in those days was 3200 miles away and it was really different. But the kind of kid I was, I told all my classmates that I was crossing the continent. Not the United States, but the continent. I really impressed them. And when I got here, I didn’t realize that I had a different accent. I found out that I had an accent when I visited my girlfriend Jean Moires.

PBL: About the different accent that you have.

ADS: I suggested, “Let’s call some boys.” Now I didn’t say anything to her. I went to her house. When I think of it now, this was 65 years ago. I didn’t think that we even had telephones then. And I called this boy, I remember his name, Kenny Rose, and I said, “I bet a quarter you don’t know who this is.” And he says, “I bet a quartah I do, because in Seattle we say ‘quatter.’” Now that is my recollection of having an accent and being Jewish.

PBL: So did you have to make a conscious effort in your move to Seattle, did you make a conscious effort to squelch that accent, the marker of your birth?

ADS: As I grew up, I think I tried to speak more Seattle-like and I dropped “watah” and “quarter” and in New York we always said “a bag” and in Seattle you said a — sack, what’s the word, terminology, when you want — when you want someone to give you —

PBL: To pack something up for you?

ADS: Uh huh. No I can’t think of it now.

PBL: Well, also it’s set, from our conversation before you said that you grew up with some Yiddish in your home. So can you tell me a little bit about that?

ADS: Well, as I said before, my grandparents — and when my father died, we had my grandmother and grandfather live with us for a little bit, up until we moved out of New York. And, at that time, we lived on Cedric Avenue in the Bronx, and that was a little higher class. And that I have a cute story about — I went to a wedding in New York of my girlfriend’s — this is about 25, 30 years ago — I went to my girlfriend’s daughter’s wedding in New York, and I’m in the elevator with my husband and these two portly — I thought they were elderly — get in the elevator and this one says, “I remember you.” I said, “You do?—I said, “Well have you ever been to Seattle?” And they said, “No.” Because, by that time, I had lived most of my life in Seattle. And I said, “What about Palm Springs?” “No.” I said, “How about Florida?” “No.” I named all the places that I’ve had

relatives at. And so I facetiously said, “Well I was born in the Bronx Hospital, but I don’t believe we met there.” And she said, “Oh, where did you live in the Bronx?” And I didn’t want to say Cedric Avenue, because I figured they might not know the name of the street, so I said, “Kingsbridge Road.” And she says, “Kingsbridge Road! That’s where we grew up.” What school did you go to? I said, “P.S. 86.” They said, “We went to the same school.” They remembered me. And I just couldn’t believe it. But I know they were at the same wedding they were from the groom’s side. And I never was able to track down the relationship or their name never meant anything to me.

PBL: So when your grandparents moved in with you, did you speak Yiddish or did you understand Yiddish?

ADS: I understood it pretty much — you know, as I told you, my grandfather on my mother’s side had been here since he was five, so he spoke English, and my mother was born here. So basically they all spoke English. My mother and father would speak Yiddish when they didn’t want us kids to know what they were saying. And at that time I didn’t understand it.

PBL: Are there any specific phrases that you remember that stand out in your mind in Yiddish?

ADS: I’m going to have to think about that one.

PBL: We can come back to it. I’m curious a little bit about how holidays were celebrated in your home when you had both parents there. Do you remember Passover or Sukkot or Rosh Hashanah, and where did you celebrate those holidays and how were they celebrated?

ADS: Usually my mother did the — the dinners. And my grandparents would be there, from both sides. And my father’s mother, her name was Esther Diesenhaus — she had a blind man that she took care of and she had a business, a dry goods in the — what do

they call that district where they used to sell, where they sold —

PBL: Like Orchard Street?

ADS: Yes.

PBL: Which, what are you describing?

ADS: Yes, a street.

PBL: Is it in the Lower East Side?

ADS: Yes.

PBL: Orchard Street?

ADS: Yes, that was about Orchard Street, or there's another name for it that I can't —

PBL: Rivington, Essex, Delancey —

ADS: Delancey, would be — it was Delancey. And my grandmother sold her products there. But she wasn't as religious as my grandparents on my mother's side. My mother came from a family of seven children and she was the oldest.

PBL: What were the expectations concerning religion for you or your sisters for that matter as three girls. You said you went to cheder, where did you go to cheder?

ADS: It was in the Bronx and I don't know the name of the synagogue.

PBL: Do you remember the experience? Going to cheder?

ADS: Yes, I remember I enjoyed it. And I mean I felt a little bit unique because there weren't too many girls. You know, this would be an Orthodox synagogue. And I don't remember my teacher or anything. I don't know for how long I went, either. PBL:

Can you detail the things that led up to your father's passing? Was he ill for a long period of time or was it a sudden passing?

ADS: Yes it was sudden. He had an accident. It was — sad.

PBL: So that must have been a very difficult time for your family. How did you cope through it together?

ADS: Well, I was still young enough that it didn't — I mean, I missed him and I felt terrible about it. I remember having dreams about it. But my mother was a pretty terrific lady and she tried to make it as easy as she could on us, even though she suffered a lot in the death of my father.

PBL: Can you be a bit more specific about how she helped you get through it and how you learned? Did she tell you about your father's death?

ADS: Not really right in the beginning, but afterwards. And it was something that I had to realize and understand. And all I remember is I felt sorry for myself that other kids had a father and I didn't. And that the one thing that stands out in my mind was I remember borrowing a book from the library, in public school, and I didn't bring it back in time. And I think it was 50 cents or something like that, and that was a lot of money, and this was way after my father had died. Maybe it was a year later. I didn't keep the book a year, but this incident happened. And I remember standing there and looking at the librarian and telling her that my father died. I wanted her to feel sorry for me. And she did, she says, "Oh you won't have to pay anything." And I sort of half felt guilty and half felt good that my father saved me from paying the money. And I don't know whether my mother would have approved of it or not. I don't even know if I ever told her that I had done something like that. When I grew up, I might have told her.

PBL: Well I imagine that resourceful is something that you had to be when your father passed. So what were the decisions that were made, your mother, was she working or

did she make decisions to go to work, did family help out?

ADS: No, it was — what money was left, she managed. And she had child support because of my age. And we received that until I was, I think it was 18 or 21. And I remember that things were difficult. Coming from New York to Seattle — was very expensive to take me, and I happened to be a very little girl.

PBL: Can you explain the decision that led up to your move to Seattle?

ADS: Oh yes. My sister Hazel, who was 12 years older, corresponded with a cousin, a second or third cousin who lived here in Seattle. They thought that was really cool in those days, and it was. Sylvia got married, her name was Sylvia Goodman, and she married a judge, Reuben, and moved to New Jersey. And she knew my brother-in-law Ben, who had a collection agency here in Seattle. And so when Ben had called her or looked her up — I forget whether it was in Seattle at the time, or she was already back East, and she said you know, I have a cousin that I've only seen pictures of, and I'd love you to meet her. Now my brother-in-law Ben was 15 years older than my sister. My sister was 24 or 25 and Ben — which was old in those days — and Ben was 40. And he met my sister — she was a beautiful woman. When he met her, he fell immediately in love, proposed, and of course at first she said she couldn't think about it. She only knew him two days. And he came back to Seattle and corresponded with her and she did some research with my aunt and uncle that lived here, and they all encouraged her to go ahead. Well we couldn't afford to pay for the wedding or come out here, so she came out herself and I guess my brother-in-law must have sent her the ticket, and my aunt and uncle gave the wedding, and shortly after that, she asked for my sister Julia to come and find a job and work in Seattle. And then when she got pregnant, which was like a year later, she had my mother and I come.

PBL: What year was that, when you came out to Seattle?

ADS: That was in 1936. I was just going to say 1932, but no, that was the Depression.

PBL: So it was 1936. So you were — it was also the Depression as well.

ADS: Yes. It was the Depression. And 1936 I came, yes, that's right, because Igraduated high school in 1940.

PBL: What are your first memories of Seattle?

ADS: My first memories of Seattle?

PBL: At that time.

ADS: I loved it, right from day one. I had to walk to school. We had our apartment on Capitol Hill, on 16th North, and the reason I went to temple was that it was the one place that I could walk, because no one had a car. I could walk to temple, and temple was like five blocks from where I lived. Maybe more, a little bit more, because I was like, John and 16th to over to 14th and — what street is that? Union?

PBL: So some of your first memories then are of going to temple.

ADS: Oh yes.

PBL: Can you talk to me a little bit about your introduction to Temple De Hirsch? Did your whole family go? Was it as a — school?

ADS: Oh yes, yes. We all went for services and holidays. I was very impressed with it because it was the first time that men and women sat together, and of course — what I had remembered was the Orthodox synagogue. And at that time it was Rabbi Koch was the rabbi. And I graduated from temple.

PBL: So when you say graduated, do you mean you went through to confirmation?

ADS: No, I started after confirmation.

PBL: That's right.

ADS: Yes, 14 is after confirmation.

PBL: So when did you graduate?

ADS: I graduated in 40.

PBL: What do you remember about the differences in your mind between what you grew up with, you said much more Orthodox traditions, and the Reform. Did your family make a conscious choice to go to reform, or was it for convenience sake?

ADS: It was for convenience, on my mother's side, but she still kept kosher at home. But that was about the most. We still took a bus if we needed to go downtown, or whatever. But other than being observant as far as the holidays — and I was always very well-trained as far as my Judaism. And temple, I thought, was excellent. I remember my teachers real well, Sy Wampold —

PBL: Can you spell that name?

ADS: W-A-M-P-O-L-D.

PBL: What did he teach?

ADS: He taught just the history and Judaism, and they all were different. I remember one of the funny things is we kids were told to call him Mr. Wampold. And one of the students — I still know her, she lives in Bellingham — and Phyllis would always say, "Hello Sy." And he would be so furious with her, and he said, "Miss Birnbaum, my name is Wampold." [laughter] But that's how formal they were in those days.

PBL: What do you remember about your learning at temple? Taking through to graduation, you said you went to cheder and you made an effort to learn Hebrew and the prayers when your father died.

ADS: Well, they didn't really go through Hebrew as much at temple, and they just did the Bible and the 10 Commandments and the basics of Judaism. And I just remember having a very good association with the kids and we grew up together, and I wrote poems for the Temple Tidings — 25 years later I wrote a play of our graduating class.

PBL: Can you be more specific and describe what — you wrote a play?

ADS: Mm hm.

PBL: Tell me about that.

ADS: Well, it was about the graduation from temple and I did — I got the whole thing here and my biggest disappointment was when temple had its hundredth anniversary last year, was it last year or two years ago, I called and told them that I had this and I would contact all of the people that were living — it must have been about seven of us that were graduated together. And that I still had the play that I wrote 25 years ago. And everybody thought it was wonderful, never went on stage.

PBL: What was it about? What was the play about, Althea?

ADS: Well it was just the different phases of why — I'll have to get it out and —

PBL: I'm curious what inspired you to write a play about that class.

ADS: Well I think there was a program and I was called, to do something. And so I wrote about our group. I think it was — oh I know, it was the anniversary of our graduation. You know, it was 25 years later.

PBL: What do you remember of your classmates? Because Temple really at that time allowed a lot of difference, different types of Jews into study and go through to confirmation and past.

ADS: Well, a few of them have passed away so the — three, three or four have passed away. And the two or three that are still living, one is really sick and one —one guy never got married, and it was just a different set of circumstances. Would you like me to get the —

PBL: We can look at it after, I'd love to see it. Well I guess what I'm getting at is asking you a little bit about your experience meeting Sephardim in Seattle. You had mentioned a story to me earlier about your first encounter with difference of your own, and I'm just wondering at temple, where there other — were there Sephardim that were in your classes?

ADS: Oh sure.

PBL: Tell me about them.

ADS: Like all the Alhadefs and Benaroyas were there, Jack, Becky, Behar, but I never felt that there was any significant difference other than that most of them did not go to temple. But most of my classmates did. Most of my friends did attend temple.

PBL: So where were you then at the same time at public school? At Garfield High?

ADS: Yes.

PBL: Can you talk a little bit about your experiences at Garfield and what was most formative?

ADS: Yes, well, I was active in — as I said, but earlier I was very active with the Girl Scouts. And that I got from Garfield. I think one of my teachers had a Girl

Scout league and I used to go to that and I was very, very into it.

PBL: Do you remember why or what the activities were that the Girl Scouts did that you so enjoyed?

ADS: No. Other than the fact that we had to be — there were so many things that were expected of us as far as being proper and being helpful in your community and things like that. And that's when I got into Child haven, was through the Girl Scouts.

PBL: Tell me — tell us a little bit more about that. What is Child haven?

ADS: Child haven — well, I don't remember whether it was called Child haven then, but when I go past the building, it says 90 years that we've been Child haven and it's the same little building. It's on Broadway and —Yesler? It's right on the corner there. And we used to just help the children— they didn't have day schools in those days, so any parent that had to work or couldn't take care of all of her kids, they were young, younger. They were not of school age. And we took care of them, played with them on the different toys that were out in the playfield, and that was — I remember going once a week and it was very important to me. And I really have never gone back and every time I drive past it, because I've gone on my way to Mercer Island, I go that way, I think, gotta go in. And even look up, maybe they might have articles there about, you know, people that work there.

PBL: And I think of Child haven today as very active also in kind of keeping children in homes that there might be potential violence or — and I'm wondering, was that part of —

ADS: No.

PBL: — the conversation back then?

ADS: No, no, it was just a play area for kids to be there while their mother or father was working or whatever.

PBL: What does it mean to you that you did this type of early volunteerism in the community? When you look back?

ADS: When I look back, I didn't know too many people that were that active of my friends and I think that was part of my continuing to be active as I grew up and I'm sure it came from my mother and my sisters and it was part of a family tradition. And I always felt — was proud of the fact that I could do it and give my time and I — to this day I look at people that cannot find something to do, you know, and they'll be complainers or — they've never done one single thing to help another person. I mean they might be good mothers and good daughters and good sisters, but as far as the community is concerned, there was no participation. And you'll find those same people are not philanthropic. If they don't share with them their own time, they can't share with their money.

PBL: Were there other formative volunteer experiences that you had besides Child haven? Or other activities that you had that were formative for you? You mentioned working in the gym, what did you do there?

ADS: It was just being at the desk and registering people coming in and I said earlier that it was after school and I'm not so sure it was after school, whether it was during class hours, but I felt that it was something that I wanted to do and I also felt it was very little pay, I mean it was something like $1 a month, and I did that.

PBL: What do you — do you associate Jewish values with that kind of early volunteerism? I mean the Girl Scouts is a secular organization or a non-sectarian, but do you associate Jewish values with that kind of work?

ADS: Yes, I think so, because at Temple, I was active in everything and in fact I wrote a column for them and —

PBL: Where did you write that column?

ADS: It was for Temple Tidings and I would do it in poetry and I've never gone back to Temple to look them up and see the columns, but I do remember it very well I did it also in the service, when my husband was in Great Falls, Montana, I did it for our women's division — wives of the Army.

PBL: So you wrote for the newsletter. And this column, what was it about or was it a weekly, a monthly?

ADS: Oh it was just funny little things that I would come up with about a different person, I would — make a poem out of it, and then if I was asked to do something on something, then I wrote about that.

PBL: Was writing something that came naturally to you?

ADS: I think so. I never pursued it, you know, in my latter years, other than the poems that I would write for people on a birthday or special occasion. And that too stopped oh I'd say about 10 years ago, 15 years ago. But even at my husband's funeral, I brought out the poem I wrote for his 65th or 70th birthday and they had it printed and [inaudible] and they loved it, because — but I did, then, I would write more or less a documentary of the person and their background and their history and it was one of those things that I enjoyed doing.

PBL: Was there someone in particular in school or at Temple that inspired you to do poetry? Or an author, even.

ADS: There was someone and I can't remember who it was, but I remember we had to do something, some program, and they more or less showed me how you do it. But they did it, in rhyme, they were like couplets. And they did it toward music.

PBL: So I'm just curious then, going back to the — well, a parallel about the men in your life as a youngster, when did you start dating? You had all these opportunities, school and in Temple?

ADS: I dated pretty early. I think I started dating when I was 15 or 16. And, of course you had to be with someone— someone that could drive, you know, if you went out on a date. I would say, 16 for sure.

PBL: What did you do on dates?

ADS: Oh we went to parties. And I remember one party we went to Tacoma. There was someone that had a birthday in Tacoma. And the weather was so terrible that the Seattle kids had to stay at the home there and stay overnight. And everybody jammed up into one bed, you know, as many beds as they had, and it was really something else. But it was parties and then there were activities at Temple, there would be dances and also for high school programs.

PBL: What were the expectations or apprehensions around dating in terms of adults within the Jewish community, non-Jewish community, Sephardic, Ashkenazic, who are you expected to date?

ADS: Jewish boys. And I don't remember any others.

PBL: Do you want to tell the story about the time that you were asked out on a date by a Sephardic boy for the first time?

ADS: Oh sure. There was this young man, do I mention the name?

PBL: I don't see why not.

ADS: All right, he was Morgan Varon and he asked me out and he was very handsome young man and he was a few years older than me and I was so excited, I

went over to my girlfriend's. I must have been about 16, and Morgan might have been 18, which was old at that time— that's really quite a big difference. And I told her my girlfriend that Morgan Varon had asked me out. Instead of saying that's terrific, she said "Morgan Varon? You can't go out with him." And I said why? And she said, "He's Sephardic." And I said, "What's Sephardic?" I might have been younger, because for me not to have had the experience of knowing Sephardic and regular Ashkenazic, so she said, "Well, they are different." And I said, "Well are they Jewish?" And she said, "Yes but they are — they lived in basements," and she went on and on, telling —

PBL: What other kinds of — when you say she went on and on, do you remember any of the other images that she conveyed to you about how the Sephardic lived that was so different?

ADS: No, most I remember was that they lived in the basement and she said that they had different kinds of food and they spoke differently and they observed differently, and that was the extreme part. And she was very anti-Sephardic. But I didn't let that stop me. I went out with him. And to this day, he was proud of me. [laughter]

PBL: So was that really such an exception, that you dated this Sephardic boy?

ADS: I think so. Because most of the Sephardic people my age married other Sephardic. Very few that I know, I only know one girl that married —

PBL: When did you learn for yourself about those differences? And similarities?

ADS: I never really felt that there was any difference other than the fact that they didn't go to my — our — synagogue even when we got older.

PBL: Do you want to get a drink of water?

ADS: [inaudible] oh she took it, oh no there it is.

[break in tape]

ADS: I felt — well there was something I was going to bring up about — oh I know. My first real awareness of it was with fraternity and sorority. And in the fraternity, the Sephardics were not accepted.

PBL: Are you talking about at the University of Washington? Were you at college there or you knew about them otherwise?

ADS: No, I wasn't at college, but I knew. Because either the young men mentioned it to me, or the women did, and I knew that there was that division. But as I say, like Becky was a friend of mine, we weren't close friends, we weren't girlfriends in the respect that some of my other friends, but it had nothing to do with the fact that she was Sephardic and I was Ashkenazi. And I don't remember any of the others. And I don't remember having any real close relationship with any other girl that was.

PBL: And yet there were Sephardic students that were at the Temple school?

ADS: Yes, but not many. There was one or two.

PBL: Did you think about at that time how it is that that helped define who you were as a Jew or how were you and your family, your mother's a single mother, living out your life Jewishly. You're going to Temple, are you having your holidays at home with family? What are you doing in other ways? ADS: In other ways of —

PBL: Yes besides going —

ADS: — Judaism?

PBL: Mm hm.

ADS: Well I was always interested in the museums and Jewish Studies programs. And I read a lot about Judaism and I try to focus in on a lot of — the things that my grandparents had taught me.

PBL: How did you do that? Do you remember who you read? Any authors particularly?

ADS: No.

PBL: Did you think about what you wanted to be when you grew up in high school? Did you have a vision of what you were good at and what your goals were?

ADS: No, I wanted to be either a nurse or a lawyer. Can you believe that? Two different things. A lawyer, in those days, that was unbelievable. For a woman to be a lawyer?

PBL: What gave you that inkling?

ADS: I don't know. I don't really know. But I know that and I know the nurse. The nurse part, I think, came from my mother. Because my mother had done some nursing. And I think a grandparent of mine did too. And someone pointed out to me that they're both serving people. Nurses and a lawyer. And I don't know why, I think it was something in school that I learned and it sounded very exciting, but I never pursued it.

PBL: Were there any teachers that kind of edified those desires or helped you steer you in a particular direction or advocated on your behalf?

ADS: No. I remember writing a thesis— we were asked to write a thesis on any subject we wanted to. And so I decided to do a trip — a fantasy trip to Europe. I had never been any place out of Seattle or New York. And I did it as a cruise. I went to the library, and I got every book on every famous piece of art in Europe. Every museum, I should say. And that was where I got my first understanding of Leonardo DaVinci, Michelangelo, of Van

Gogh, you name the artist and I studied where their art was displayed. And I wrote this — I bought a diary and I wrote it in diary form, day by day, I took this trip to Europe and I went to every museum. And I want you to know that that little trip I took, fantasy trip, was what I remembered on our first trip to Europe. And we went to every place that I had recognized. Now I got an A- for that and I was gutsy enough to ask my teacher why she gave me a minus. And she told me that I wrote sculptor for sculpture — T-O-R for T-U-R-E. The artist and the work. And that is why I got a minus.

PBL: What do you think of her criticizing — her critique of your —

ADS: Today I think it was ridiculous. Then, I guess I accepted it. But when I've told the story to anybody, whether they're a teacher or not, I've told it to a couple of people at the museum, and they couldn't believe that that was the reasoning. PBL: Well, I'm wondering Althea, I just want to make sure we have enough time on this tape. Actually I'm going to switch tapes because I have a question for you about that.

[END OF CD 1]

PBL: This is the continuing oral history of Althea Stroum. Today's date is August the 27th, 2002. We are in the home of Althea Stroum and that is at 1301 Spring Street in Seattle, Washington. My name is Pamela Brown Lavitt. I am oral historian for the Jewish Women's Archive, Weaving Women's Words project in Seattle. And before we begin, I just wanted to ask if I have your express permission to record this interview.

ADS: You do.

PBL: Wonderful. So I think I'd like to move on from where we were at the last time we met, which was almost a year ago at this point, and ask if you could start with the story of how it is that you met Sam, your husband.

ADS: Well, I had a very close friend, Sylvia Kaufman that was working at the USO, which was the Jewish USO in Seattle. And I don't know whether it was on Cherry Street or exactly what street it was, but it was between second and third, and anyway, she called me one day to tell me that there was this handsome, wonderful guy that was in the — the facility of the USO. And she wanted me to come over. And I was working for my brother-in-law at the time. It was in December, I think it was around our Christmas vacation. And I was 18 at the time. No, I think I was 19. Yeah, I was 19. And it was right before Pearl Harbor, and I went, walked up a couple of blocks to the USO office and there I met the Sam Stroum. I was impressed, but I didn't think he was. [laughter] Because he never asked me for my telephone number, and we chatted for a while and then I left. And all the way back to the office I kept bemoaning the fact that I had cut my hair — it had been long, and I had it in this short hairdo. But, at any rate, I kept thinking that Sam would have much more been interested in a longhaired gal and — a feather cut, that's it — it was called a feather cut that I had. But the interesting part is throughout our marriage of almost 60 years, every time I cut my hair short, he would comment how darling it was. And so I began to think that maybe that's the way he always thought of me. But, at any rate, that was the early part of December and then it was right after Pearl Harbor, which was December 7. And on the day before New Year's Eve, this same girl, Sylvia, called me, and she said that she was getting married that weekend, would I take her post? And she gave me all the instructions, "if you don't know who the guy is,— you'd say hello Joe," — that's for Government Issue, Joe, and GI Joe. And I said, "Sure," Not thinking anything about my husband. Or boyfriend, I should say. And while I was sitting at the desk, after several of the officers and [inaudible], and privates came into the building, I got a phone call from my mother. And my mother said, "Sam called. And he wanted to know where you were, so I told him you were at the USO and I gave him the number." Well, it just so happens that I was dating a young man by the name of Sam Lieberman from Canada, who was in the Royal Air force in England. And being as ignorant as I was at that age, I never thought twice that he would get off from London for duty and be at the

USO. So I waited and waited for this other man and he didn't show up. And then this very handsome guy walks in and I didn't know his name and I said, "Hello Joe." He said, "That's my brother's name. My name is Sam Stroum." So then it clicked that that was who he was. I only saw him once. And then what happened, he just chatted with me and he asked me to dance and then he invited me home. Sam Stroum never confessed to the fact that he was the one that called my mother and got my number. And by the time I got home I realized that he was the Sam that had called. And we dated as long as he was stationed here in Seattle, he was on duty — he was a flight engineer and he deported planes to all over the United States to go abroad for the war. At any rate, to make a long story short, so I saw him on and off over the next eight months and then in June, eight months later, he came over and he gets on his knees and he proposes. And of course I accepted. I was thrilled. And by then he was being transferred to Great Falls, Montana. So we were going to make all the plans. And I've always said that I made my best investment in our marriage by buying the license. The license in those days was about 4 dollars and I feel that I got quite a big return. At any rate, when his sister — this is just another funny little story with this. By the way, I didn't mention it but Sam said he was 25 years old when I met him. He was only 20. I was 19 and he was 20. And his birthday was in April and mine was in June. He would be 26 according to his numbers, and I would be 20. And of course my mother thought that this is a real man, 25 years old. And after we got engaged, his sister, who collected every newspaper clipping that ever was until the day she passed away, his dear sister Rose, she sent me this clipping from the Boston newspaper and it says, "Son salutes mother from air. 21 year old Sam Stroum dips plane over Waltham, Massachusetts to salute his mother." Well, I was furious. 21? Because he got his 21st birthday by the time we got engaged. And when he called from back east— he called that night, he was always extravagant, you know, in those days $5 or $6 for a telephone call was a lot. And he called that night just by chance and I didn't say, "Hello darling, hello sweetheart, hello love." I said, "Why didn't you tell me how old you were?" And you know what he said? He said, "Do you want to get disengaged?" So I learned my

first lesson, that you never confront this guy again. And when I decided on that, I learned how to be manipulative [laughter] in other ways. I never confronted him.

PBL: I'm taking a note here so that I can ask you what exactly that means. Unless you want to elaborate right now.

ADS: Well, what I mean is if I wanted to do something, I would work around it. You know, I mean not manipulative in the sense of being an evil person, but I would work around it and maybe put out messages to him and finally he would go along with it. But if I confronted him, god, you just can't do that. In fact you can't even do it to my daughters. [laughter] They have his genes, not mine. And I think that was about the — and then we got married in August 9th, and we got married at Temple De Hirsch by Rabbi Levine— we were his first bride and groom that he performed the marriage ceremony in Seattle.

PBL: Would that be Rabbi Kooh or Rabbi Levine?

ADS: That was Rabbi Levine. And that was in 1942. August 9, 1942. And in fact, my other cute story about when I came back from the — I was — after that particular time and I took the train to Great Falls, Montana to meet Sam, and fortunately he was stationed in Great Falls, Montana, deporting the planes from that area. And I — about two years later I got pregnant with my daughter and I came home with her when I was like — I was just about 23. And I remember meeting Rabbi Levine's wife. And when I was home, after the war, and Marsha was — my daughter Marsha must have been about two months old, three months old, I bumped into Mrs. Levine in the lobby of the Temple and I walked up to her and I said, "Oh Mrs. Levine, I want to introduce myself, I'm Althea Diesenhaus Stroum." I said, "I am Rabbi's first bride." She said, "You are not. I am." So from then on I learned, you never say things like that when you really mean that, "We were the first couple he married." I wasn't his first wife. I found that out. But that's about —

PBL: Tell me a little bit about, I had heard a story that Sam said he wound up at this USO office because he was looking for a corned beef sandwich. What's that all about? Because you tell very different stories.

ADS: That's his line. [laughter] He said he went to the — of course he meant, maybe he did. He went, he asked somebody where he could get a good corned beef sandwich, because there wasn't any real good kosher places in Seattle. And so someone said, "Go to the USO." I don't know. I don't know if it was so or whether that was his line. But he always said instead of getting a kosher — a corned beef sandwich he got me. So I'm corned beef.

PBL: So tell me a little bit about the steps that led up to — you both are from different parts of the country at this point. So how did you pursue that courtship. He is clearly stationed elsewhere.

ADS: No, he wasn't. He was stationed here for eight months and then after we got married — he was in Great Falls, Montana for like a month or so. And then he came back for the wedding and then he went back to his post and then I took the train.

PBL: Tell me a little bit about your wedding and the plans that led up to your wedding.

ADS: Well, my — there was not that many, much family, and none of his family could come in those days. And so we had — I had an aunt that lived here, and she's the one that was instrumental in bringing her family, brought my sister here and my sister met my brother-in-law, I think I told that story. And my aunt Helen helped my mother make the plans, but my mother was very able to do it herself. And being that we all went to Temple De Hirsch, she made the plans for the wedding to be in the temple. It was in the small sanctuary of the Temple De Hirsch in those days that is not in existence anymore. And then we had the dinner at the Four Seasons, which then was the Olympic Hotel. In the Grand Ballroom, which was public, and we had a center table. And I

remember Jackie Souters (sp?) who was the orchestral leader at the time —

PBL: Go ahead, I'm just writing.

ADS: He played "Tea for Two" for us and so that was always the song that we always would request. You know, "Tea for Two." And at that function was my two girlfriends and my sister and brother — my sisters and brother-in-laws, and my mom and my aunt and uncle.

PBL: Do you remember your dress?

ADS: Yes, I've got a picture of it. I wasn't dressed in a wedding gown. I had a turquoise velvet sort of cocktail suit and I have a hat, I had a hat on. And he was in his uniform. And anything else that you want to — PBL: Well, I'm curious about who paid for the wedding?

ADS: My mother.

PBL: So she was capable.

ADS: Well, my mother-in-law or maybe even my brother-in-law helped her. I don't know.

PBL: Were you working at the time?

ADS: Yes I worked for my brother-in-law, not completely full time, but this is —well, maybe at 19 I did.

PBL: What was that work experience?

ADS: He had a collection agency and I learned everything about finding debtors and I credit it to this day that I have a excellent — should I call it resource, or ability to find anything I've lost because by tracing a debtor, you have to go through all these different things that you wouldn't normally think of. And in fact, all my friends call me when they

lose something, you know, can I help them. And I've been pretty successful in tracing where the thing has been. And where the — not the thing but it would have to be something that was important, a piece of jewelry or something like that. And I found that working was a wonderful experience.

PBL: Why?

ADS: Because it made me feel independent, although I didn't keep the money for myself. My brother-in-law gave me $100 a month, which is $25 a week, in those days that was a fortune, but why? He didn't want to just support my mother. So I got the check, and I gave the whole check to my mother. And my mother gave me back 35 or 40 cents a day for my lunch and anything else that I would need. My brother-in-law would pick me up at the apartment and take me down to work so I wouldn't have to spend money on the bus. And then when Sam came into town, while we were just engaged, we would walk up and down, he would come up to the office and pick me up and that was how we got to know each other.

PBL: So when you met him, what year was it?

ADS: It was in 19 — I met him in December of 1941.

PBL: Right before Pearl Harbor. How did Pearl Harbor and the war efforts sort of influence or how were they background to your courtship and your marriage? Do you remember if that played a part in your fears or decisions?

ADS: Not any fears or decisions, but we felt that that's what brought us together. Because no way would we have met if there hadn't been the war. And not that we were grateful for a war to bring us together, but that was — and we felt very fortunate that he never had to go overseas. And that was just one of those things.

PBL: How did your mother feel about Sam?

ADS: Oh she thought he was terrific. They got along very well. And he was always very good to her. She lived until she was 85, 86, so that I think it was right before — right after my grandson — well, no, Adam was, yeah, Adam was like three or four when she passed away but she saw — oh I've got a cute story about — when Adam was born, that's my grandson, Marsha, his mother, my daughter, and I took him to see his grandma, his great-grandma. And she got to see her first great- grandchild. And she's holding him on her lap in her wheelchair, and she said, "What's his name?" And Marsha says, "Adam David." And my mother says, "Adam David? Adam, the first man; David, the first king; maybe he'll be the first Jewish President." Now she said this 35 years ago. And I told it to Lieberman, and Lieberman says, "Well I'm going to pave the way." And I said, "No." At that time, I thought he was going to get it. And I said, "No, I think you're going to steal my thunder." [laughter]

PBL: So you had an opportunity to speak directly with Joseph Lieberman, when he was running?

ADS: Yes.

PBL: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

ADS: Well, he — I thought he seemed like a wonderful man and, of course, you know, when you meet them at a function that's to bring him — to give you more knowledge about the person, naturally they're going to be impressive. But I thought he was very warm and he was very natural and at that time he knew my husband was not well, because my daughter was working on his campaign and — my daughter Cyndi — and when we had — that first time, I saw him alone, because I think Sam was having chemo that time. The second time, Sam and I were there for dinner. He came over to the table, and asked him how he was doing. He says, "Gee, you look good." And I thought it was pretty wonderful. And he remembered me and what I had said about my grandson and what my mother had said.

PBL: He was looking for a running mate.

ADS: Yes but when I told my grandson Adam, when he got older, he says look Bubs, that's my nickname —

PBL: How do you spell your nickname?

ADS: B-U-B-S. And that's only because he couldn't say the Gs. So he called me Bubs, his father called me Bubs, Stuart Sloan and Scott.

PBL: I'm just writing these down so I can check the spelling with you.

ADS: Scott.

PBL: Goahead.

ADS: That's the other grandson.

PBL: Let's go back to the time that you got married. And we can elaborate more on this part of your life as well but since you brought up Cyndi and Marsha, maybe we can lead up to the point that you — it sounds like a few years after you were married, you became pregnant, but in those years before you became pregnant, when you and Sam were childless, what was your life like?

ADS: Well, he was in the service so he was in and out of Great Falls, Montana. And we made many friends and to this day I still correspond with them or email today, correspond with — that's out. Nobody knows how to write. No, we telephone each other and a few of them are gone too. The husbands, and we had a wonderful life because we involved ourselves in the synagogue there — there wasn't a synagogue in Great Falls, Montana. They used to hold their services in a church. And we had a real nice group of people that were not particularly Orthodox or confirmed — not confirmed Orthodox, Reform or Conservative. And we tried to help with the Friday night services and the Saturday

morning services and we kept up as much of our Judaism as we possibly could. We had the holidays. There were a few Jewish people in Great Falls, Montana that we connected with. In fact, one was through a Seattle family here and I was to look up her — her parents I think, the Weinsteins? Don't write it down yet because I'm not sure. I'll have to get you that.

PBL: Okay. So — go ahead.

ADS: And she was wonderful to us and her whole family, she would have us for the holidays and that sort of thing. And the other was — so and we went to all the Army events and Sam start — when I first met him he was a private in the service, and then he became a warrant Officer. We were in Great Falls, Montana, and then when he went off for his warrant Officer degree, that's when I met his family, in Boston. That was the first year of our marriage.

PBL: What were the expectations around your flexibility as far as leaving Seattle. Did you talk about your return to Seattle? And what were your goals as far as location, since his family was elsewhere and your family was elsewhere.

ADS: You know, we really never thought about it. We sort of — and as our life went on, after our marriage and our first child, Sam's aunt invited us, well first he got a job in — well maybe I should go farther back. When I got pregnant with Marsha, the war was coming to an end. Of course I didn't know it. And we were left — stationed in Stockton, California. And there, I met other dear friends. And then to make a long story short, when the war ended, we were in Stockton, and we knew that it was over but the servicemen had to stay on and I was like due in December. And this was probably like November. We got a pass for me to go back to Seattle and Sam was able to take the train with me and come back. No, I think he drove me. That's right, he drove me back to Seattle. To Portland, Oregon. Oh my mind is just slipping. And Portland, Oregon, where I stayed with my sister, and that's where Marsha was born. But before December 27, 1945, Sam was

already out of the service and we lived together in my sister's house and she had one son at that time and we shared a single bed but not a real double bed. And that's where I lived for three months of our marriage, after the birth of daughter Marsha.

PBL: So you gave birth to Marsha, but Sam wasn't there.

ADS: No, he got home in time, yes.

PBL: He was there for the birth.

ADS: Yes, the war was over but he was extended, and he came home like three weeks before the due date. And then maybe a week before the due date, he officially was released from the service.

PBL: Let me ask you a bit more of a private question about your pregnancy. I mean your moving from place to place and — what kind of care did you get then during your pregnancy and during the birthing experience? Did you give natural childbirth? Can you elaborate?

ADS: Yes, but I had very good care in Great Falls, Montana. I had a very good gynecologist that took care of me. In fact, I went to him because I couldn't get pregnant. And he assured me that if I started relaxing, I would get pregnant. And after I did, shortly after that, Sam was transferred to Stockton, California. And I think we also drove down to Stockton. I don't really remember the whole scene, but that's what we did. And we rented a place in this woman's house. We rented a room and we lived there until almost the end of the war. And there again he was stationed in the United States, which was a blessing. When I left Stockton, I had someone that looked after me and that was my sister in Portland.

PBL: I'll shut this off for a moment.

[break in tape]

ADS: But what did I say last?

PBL: You were talking about living in a small — you had rented a place in Stockton. ADS: Yes and we went from —

[break in tape]

ADS: So—

PBL: In Portland, when you gave birth, where did you give birth?

ADS: Well that's what I was coming to. I gave birth at the Samaritan Hospital, god why is my mind so?

PBL: Because these things are hard to remember.

ADS: No, I've said it so many times over the last years. But —

PBL: We'll fill it in your transcript. That's fine, Althea. Don't fret over it.

ADS: And I know it starts with an S, but I can't remember the name of the hospital. But anyway, and I had this female doctor— I don't know, do you call it gynecologist or —

PBL: Like an O/B?

ADS: O/B. And that was really strange, to have a female in those days. I think her name was Lena Horne.

PBL: Like the performer?

ADS: Something like it. I know it was Lena. And she never had any children herself. She was very good. And I had a very — I was very fortunate. I've always a strong resistance

to pain. So I went pretty much all the way without anything until the very last moment, when Marsha was born. And of course I had my sister there and brother-in-law there, and we had other friends that were living and then after Sam got situated with a company in Seattle, it was almost like Fred Meyers at the time, and he worked for them, and he was like a traveling salesman. He came to Seattle and here again we stayed with my sister. My other sister, Hazel Cole. And then shortly after, Marsha was — well she was only like 3 months old. When his aunt from Boston, who had a fish brokerage, which also was very unusual, and she invited us to come to Boston, and she was never married and she was going to teach Sam the business. And we thought this was going to be wonderful. But it wasn't wonderful because she was a very difficult woman and Eva was a very positive woman. She had a lot of resentment toward different members of the family. And so she forbid us to talk to this one and that one, but to make a long story short — we lived in Boston for just a couple of months and then we returned to Seattle and stayed with my sister.

PBL: Since your work experience prior to marriage sounded like a rewarding one, what were the expectations or your hopes that you might work again. Or was that not part of the culture at that time, or your own —

ADS: No, you didn't work. But I did — see, [inaudible]. But I did work, which I didn't mention before, while I was in the service. While Sam was in the service. I had a job with a legal firm and I worked for them and —

PBL: What did you do?

ADS: I was — I just did secretarial work. And that was — gave us a little more money and it was fine. And it kept me busy. But then I kept busy with the Red Cross at the service, you know, the service station, and with many other things — I used to write an article for their paper, the weekly paper. And that was the way I filled my time. And then we went to different events. The Army, as well as our friends. And I learned to have

people over for dinner and on the first part of our stay in Great Falls, Montana, we invited a couple to live with us because they couldn't find a place to live and we didn't know them, they were from New York, and to this day they're our dear friends. And Wally and Ellie Werbitt were newlyweds lived in the same — can I say something naughty? That the first night that this couple — we were married two months, let's see, this was — August, September, October, November, three months, we were married three months, and they were married like two months. And we invited them in. My husband and I got into bed and he looks at me and he says, "We're not going to do it tonight." I said, "No," because our bedrooms were back to back. I know what we thought we were going to happen the rest of the years. And we started to go to sleep and all of a sudden we hear "whirrrr." Stop. "Whirrr." Stop. And my husband and I started to giggle. And we put the blanket over our heads so they wouldn't hear us. We fell asleep. And in the morning, the two husbands went off to service and Ellie's in the kitchen, she's washing some dishes. And I'm sitting and eating my breakfast. This is our first day together. And she says, with her back to me, "Ah, we heard you last night." I said, "You heard us?" I said, "I wasn't going to say anything, but we heard you." She says, "We didn't do anything." So she says, "Well, we heard you." I said, "Well, we didn't do anything either." I said, "Someone's lying." And just then, we hear "rrrrr." The storm window had unhinged from the window. And it was right racking. [laughter] That was my first night — our first night together, the four of us. We still laugh about it. And they live in New York. And Sam and Wally were dear friends to this day.

PBL: Now tell me a little bit more about those early years with — how many years between your first and second child?

ADS: It was four years.

PBL: Four years. So I'm curious how it is that you established yourself as a family and maybe you can describe the different roles that you and Sam took as far as in the

marriage as well as in terms of child rearing.

ADS: Well he was a very good father, and we traveled a lot with our baby. And he was a traveling salesman, so I would go along with him and even when Cynthia was born, we still took both kids with us. And that's why I think I stopped and I didn't have any more, because it would have been too much of a hassle. And even though he wanted a boy — another child to be a boy, of course in those days there was no way of knowing or doing anything about it. So —

PBL: What was it like for you to have to gather the kids and travel when he was on business?

ADS: No, I liked it better than being alone.

PBL: What kind of places did you go to, or see?

ADS: Oh well we went to — Spokane, Canada, when they got older we went up to Alaska. They weren't trips for vacation; they were merely his business trips. And I managed to keep busy with the kids while he was with his customers, and then when he came back, we just were together as a family or his clients would have us to dinner or something like that.

PBL: Can I pause for just a moment?

[break in tape]

PBL: Let me ask you then, on a more personal level, I mean every couple has to negotiate their roles in terms of gender, in terms of who takes on what responsibilities and things like that, and so where did you and Sam find your differences, and how did you work through those. Were there particular choices that you had to make around the home? Or your leisure activities and things like that?

ADS: No, I really can't think of anything. I mean he always made it — made me feel comfortable and when I needed help, he always got help, you know. Or babysitters. And I think the children were quite young when I got my first housekeeper. Yeah, I guess it was Mercer Island.

PBL: When you first married, what kind of income did you live on? ADS: When we got first married? It was 9 dollars a day per diem. PBL: Where was that in the scale of things?
ADS: That was good. Yes.

PBL: So you were pretty middle class would you say?

ADS: No. I mean it was — the Army's pay. Because you got paid extra when you were flying and per diem is extra over your regular Army fare. And it was — let's see, I think we had — the first time we felt like we were making money was when he got his first job.

PBL: The salesman job?

ADS: Yes. That was very important to him. And Sam's best quote was, he always wished he would make so much money that he'd have to give away a lot to taxes. In other words, I think I stated it wrong, he wished that his tax return was so large that meant that he made a lot of money. And I don't know how many people thought that way.

PBL: How long do you think it took him and you to get to that point? If you did.
ADS: To make that much money?
PBL: Where you felt a sense of wealth.
ADS: See, I don't know because we started giving when we were very young. We were

in our 20s or 30s when we made our first big gift to Federation. PBL: Can you elaborate?

ADS: Well I remember — see, when I say big gift, in those days it was $25 a month, you know. Or it could have even been less. But I remember my brother-in-law Ben, who was very instrumental in guiding us and he said cast your bread upon the water and it will come back tenfold. Well, that was Sam's and my philosophy. That the more you give away, the more you'll get back. And I think both of us were sort of in accord with each other. I mean there were things that — I mean I remember many girlfriends that would get just furious when their husbands wanted to make a big gift to something. Never bothered me in the least. And I don't know whether that made it easier for me, or whether it was just my — my make up. And I never felt that I couldn't have something I wanted, because he was giving money away, and it was a very good communication that we had with each other and a respect for each other's feelings. And what he taught me in being charitable, I taught him how to be loving and caring of his family. He had seven — six siblings. Three brothers and three sisters besides. Seven in his family, and he was the second from the youngest. And there was three in my family and I was the youngest. But, not that Sam wasn't close to his family, but I was always brought up to have very close connection with cousins, aunts, uncles, and I kept those all the years of our lives. And he did too. It was wonderful that his — I mean, I think both of us respected each other's opinion and philosophy.

PBL: So it sounds like the philosophy of giving started early on for the two of you.

ADS: Oh yes.

PBL: And even when you didn't necessarily have great means to do so — I would like if you could to maybe just go ahead and even work it up into the present day, but I'm curious if you can then digress from the family for a moment but talk about the relationship that you and Sam had and built starting in those early years around giving, whether it was financially of your time, tell the story any way you wish, but what was your involvement as a partnership, or perhaps as separate individuals?

ADS: Well, I'm not going to go way, way back. I'll go back to the 60s, which is far back for someone like you, at your age. But that's — at that time, my husband owned Schuck's Auto Supply, and I think he was selling it at the time. And he was working with his attorney and tax people and that is when we made our first large, large gift to Federation. It was — I think that was our endowment. And we were both very proud of it.

PBL: Do you remember how much it was?

ADS: No, no but Federation would have the records. And it was interesting, the way it affected both of us. I mean, we were very proud of the fact that we were able to do it, and he always felt that the most important — he made me feel the same way, that the most important thing was to set an example. And we both felt very strongly about anonymous gifts, that they meant nothing. Who could prove what you gave? And that you weren't showing off by giving a big gift, but what you were doing is trying to lead the way into making people see how important it was to give of themselves and give of their money and become a person that's involved, financially as well as working.

PBL: At that time in the 60s that you're talking about, why was it setting an example important? Was it for the Jews in the community or was it for other Jews or both?

ADS: No, I think it was just a philosophy that we both felt that it was important to set an example. And that was what he was known for his whole life. Not only in setting an example, but leading the way with campaigns, one after the other, and he — it was something that he, made him happy.

PBL: Now remember, this is your oral history so I want you to tell me more about how you — what was your participation in it and how is it that people assumed in a more masculinist era also that the approach is to Sam or do you go to Althea. How did you participate in this? Was it an active participation, did you — was it more private, how would you describe your participation in giving and in those early — in the 60s or even

today?

ADS: I just felt that it was the right thing to do, and I felt as pleased as he did and I mean he didn't lecture me or anything. It just — I was more or less raised that way by my mom and her family as far as tzedakah was concerned. And so that was an easy thing for me to absorb.

PBL: Were there particular philanthropies that were your pursuits?

ADS: Oh sure, well it would be ARCs, the Children's Museum here, and the Children's Hospital was something that we both were very involved in. The ballet, the museum. But he — whatever it was that came before us, the one that was involved was approached. And then if I was approached, I'd go to Sam and tell him what the dollar sign was that was involved. And he was always very interested and I don't ever remember him turning anything down. I mean, we have more books of files of our gifts than most people even have a library to read. I mean it's endless. In fact, when he passed away we were discussing some of the matters with one of our attorneys — and, that used to be an attorney, he's now retired. And hadn't realized what we had developed over the past few years and he said Althea, "I would never take on a client with seven trusts." That's what Sam had. I shouldn't say Sam — it was both of us. But now, it's all divided into, you know, his estate and my estate and when he was living it was a community property, which he always pointed out to me. "You know what, this is a community property. We both are giving." And that's where funds went.

PBL: In terms of public recognition, would you say that you received the same public recognition for the work or did you both steer towards that limelight in the same way?

ADS: I think we both received the same — I mean, the things that he excelled in, he naturally got it, and the things that were important to me, like say Hadassah or ORT or National Council of Jewish Women, then I was the one that was honored.

PBL: Would you say that this time, that all of a sudden Schuck's was sold, your lifestyle and your marriage changed significantly as a result of that?

ADS: I didn't see it in the beginning. In fact, somebody came up to me and he said, "Well how does it feel to be a millionaire?" See in those days, to be a millionaire was — that was something. And I said, "Just more zeros, that's all." So I've always had a good sense of humor and always had the ability to come back with a funny remark.

PBL: You're a good storyteller and a joker. You have good jokes.

ADS: [laughter] Thank you.

PBL: You met me at the door with a good one.

ADS: I should have gone on stage? But that — I would say was the main part of our lives — the ability to buy our art and take care of our kids and our family and be able to always give generously. We gave every member of our family, cousins, relatives, the maximum amount a year that we could. And in those days — you know up until he died, we could give $20,000 a couple.

PBL: For what occasion?

ADS: No I mean if we wanted to give them money. So, I mean, we didn't do it that high but we did it maybe $20,000 a couple for an anniversary present or birthdays.

PBL: Well with that generosity, I imagine, comes also a lot of attention. And so I'm wondering how you dealt with that attention. Articles, and people asking about you and your lives and public profiles and things like that.

ADS: No, I don't remember that much. The thing that I know now, now as I'm absolutely besieged with requests from every organization to double the amount, you know, and people don't realize that now, it's a divided amount of money because my husband has

generously bequeathed his portion to go upon my death.

PBL: And when you say that he's bequeathed it, you are saying that upon your death he would like that to go in specific places. Do you know, or can you talk about what his final desires were?

ADS: No, I don't have a clear record now of every single — I know one or two and — but it's the organizations that he felt he might not have given as much before when he was alive. Or felt that the need for them to have more money. But the ones that he really felt very close to — I mean like Brandeis. I mean that was our largest gift to anything and that was 10 million dollars, so—

PBL: Let's talk a little bit about how it is that your — I mean, you almost have a partner — you have such a partnership in almost a career sense as you were career philanthropists together and I'd like to know because in the 60s, also, we're talking about the Jewish community also kind of coming of age in Seattle as well. So how do you see your giving as cultivating the Jewish community here versus non-Jewish organizations and things of that nature. Maybe we can talk a little bit about your work in the Jewish community and your support of the Jewish community in particular.

ADS: I don't think we ever designated what — how much was going to go for this. We started out giving through the Jewish community, but as time went by and they came to us for gifts and what have you, it's like United Way and he opened up the Seattle Foundation that we gave to all. And many times we gave to both Jewish and nonsectarian organizations. It's Jewish and other organizations from the Seattle Foundation and Seattle Jewish Foundation, because we wanted it known that our money was going not only to, say United Way, or public schools, or the University of Washington, but it was also going to Hebrew Universities or health purposes.

PBL: And within the Seattle community, for example, in I guess it was 1982, that the Jewish Community Center, the large campaign kind of came to a head. So there are very grand stories of Sam's participation in that and I'm wondering what was it like for you during this time of the campaign for the — what is now the Stroum Jewish Community Center? How did you take a role in that or did you — was that something of interest to you?

ADS: Oh yes, I was on the Board of the Jewish Community Center and I had been very close to it when we went from downtown to building it on Mercer Island. Then we lived like down the street, off East Mercer Way. And I was just amazed that with what he did accomplish, and then of course we made the first gift and that was another way of stepping up and showing the way. And then people followed in his footsteps.

PBL: Did you also find yourself making phone calls and things of that nature or fundraising as well —

ADS: Oh yes.

PBL: — so what was — what role did you take on?

ADS: You mean on the Jewish Community Center or on anything?

PBL: In the Jewish Community Center.

ADS: In the Jewish Community Center? Well I didn't do the fundraising, but I got people involved and interested. I left the fundraising up to him. And I became active in doing the parties or the things that would celebrate the JCC and one interesting story about our granddaughter, Courtney, when she was like five years old, I was playing tennis downstairs, no she —that was about it. And this must have been in '89, and Frances Rogers asked me if — no, not Frances, my daughter asked me if I would take care of Courtney that day. And I said well we're going to be playing tennis downstairs, but it's

fine for her to come and watch. So the kid is sitting there and watching and she had to be younger than five because she was going to the JCC at the time. It was on a Friday, because that's when we played. And Frances looked at Courtney and she said, "Courtney how come you're not at the JCC?" She said, "I didn't want to go." And Frances says, "Why?" She says, "Well, you too would be embarrassed if your grandma and grandpa's name was on the building." So that was her comment.

PBL: How did you feel about your name being on the building?

ADS: It was all right. At first he was just going to have it Stroum. And I didn't want it Stroum, because there are other Stroums in the city that — how do you designate? And then it was Morris Pollack that was very instrumental in getting it named Althea and Sam.

PBL: Was there any controversy over that?

ADS: With us?

PBL: Or within the community about the naming of the Jewish Community Center —

ADS: I don't think so, no. I don't know if there was — no one ever let me know.

PBL: And I'm curious about how it was within the Jewish community. Were there other families that were also at this time big donors and giving and was — it sounds like there were — from the time that you and Sam started giving, the Jewish community kind of came also into itself and started creating buildings and so can you talk a little bit about the prominence of, I guess — I don't want to just pigeonhole it as being the Jewish community philanthropic donors, but — and who are they and who were your peers and how were you mixing with those who were not Jewish and I'm curious.

ADS: You know, I'd have to think about that. It's something — offhand I wouldn't recall who was instrumental at that time. And, no, I really don't.

PBL: I guess in a backhand way I'm asking about how it is that — one creates kind of clout within the community to have a name on a building. And respect. And things like that. And I'm — I don't know if you want to answer that question or if you can't answer that question.

ADS: Well no, I know — I know that when he — I shouldn't say he — when we decided to give the money, or when he did work on the campaign, no way did he ever think that we were going to be honored by using our name. So it was not something that we pursued. But in the past, when Sam fundraised for Benaroya Hall, he got people to put their names on the building. And in the recent years, they've been using that more for designating large sums of money, and I know — I don't want to mention names, it's not really fair, but there was one young couple that's very charitable now and I had solicited them ages ago on Children's Museum and they quickly responded and they made a very nice gift and they got their name on the door. And I remember he came up to me and he said that Sam was his inspiration. So that in itself is the best — what should I say, pat on the back, or compliment that you can get. It's very rewarding to know that someone — And I had an interior designer that did this condo and one of the things — and he was just so wonderful, I said, "Why can't I have two extra chairs." He says, "Althea, it's too expensive." You know. I said, "Well I'll just keep them down in the storage room." And I decided to do with these four like the dining room ones, except it's not the same color. I mean the fabric's not the same. And Steve later on in years became very, very charitable. He never was married and he didn't have children. And he took me aside once because he made a big gift to the Palm Springs Museum and his name is in the Palm Springs — Steve Chase. And he said, "Sam and you were my inspiration." So and this is not the Jewish community, this is the Gentile community. There I go saying Gentile again.

PBL: It's still an acceptable term. So did you feel that your giving prominently as a Jewish family was important in Seattle in particular? I'm curious about the — the culture of the

big families in Seattle, the Gates, the Allens, and these other folks that are giving to many of the same organizations that you are, supporting candidates that you are and things of that nature and I'm wondering what those relationships are like.

ADS: Very good. My husband sort of — Bill Gates' mother asked Sam to interview him. He was 18 years old and he wanted to quit college. Sam encouraged him to go ahead with his idea. It's in his book, so I'm not making it up, I have it on tape — on our 50th anniversary, Mary Gates his mother mentioned it. And of course Paul Allen was also very close friend of Sam's and mine. I do feel that— many people followed in our footsteps and it's the whole community, not only Jewish people. I know I encouraged many of my girlfriends — to get involved in the Lion of Judah and the different organizations — and I encouraged them to join the boards of various organizations and that's the way they became interested and became involved.

PBL: I'm going to return to this in a moment because I think, I'd like to explore a bit more with you, some of your particular interests in women's organizations, as well as cultivating some of the arts organizations. But maybe we can just go back for a few minutes, I have about — only about two minutes left on this tape, to talk, to go back again into your marriage and family and the era that we started out with. And ask, you know, how it was that the experiences in your growth together as a couple, maybe you can just go back to when your children were young and I can ask a little bit more about what kind of parents you were, you and Sam, and how did you inculcate your children with these values that you're talking about. So that's my question.

ADS: Well I think that we did leave a definite feeling for contributing and both of my daughters, thank god, are very fortunate and have the whereabouts to make large gifts. And they've been very charitable and so have our grandchildren. Courtney had. I can't really count on her, she's only going to be 19. But the boys have been very devoted to many organizations and many things. And when Adam was in New York, and Scott lives

in Los Angeles, but they run one of our private foundations, grandchildren and my daughter Cynthia. And Marsha on her own is very charitable. And that is truly a blessing to both my husband and myself. And as far as contributing anything personal — PBL: Was there anything Jewish —

[break in tape]

[END OF CD 2]

PBL: We're continuing with the oral history of Althea Stroum, this is minidisc tape number 3, and today's date is August the 27th, 2002. So since we got cut off, let me just rephrase that question. I was asking whether or not there's something about giving to you that had Jewish significance or value to it. You mentioned that your mother believed in tzedakah and I'm wondering if that was something that —

ADS: I passed that on to my daughters and grandchildren and they were involved in organizations, as well as participating all through their growing up years, whether they were non-sectarian or Jewish. They were always involved.

PBL: Can you talk a little bit about your relationship as a mother to your children?

ADS: Of course I think I was a marvelous mother. [laughter] Now you have to ask my daughters that question.

PBL: This is your interview, that's what's so fun about it.

ADS: I was very close to my girls and both of them thought I loved the other one more. And I would say that I never showed any partiality to either one of the girls, and that was the way my mother raised her three daughters. And I loved to take them places and I introduced them to the arts.

PBL: For example, more specifically, where did you take them?

ADS: I took them to the museums and whenever we would travel, they went to every known place of that country or city, museums and other outstanding places that were in history. And also I tried to involve them in the symphony, in the ballet, and we always kept all of the holidays and — in a Reform way, not Orthodox or Conservative. And we said their prayers at night. You know, things like that. And one of the great joys was when my daughters got married and had children. And my grandsons are darling. They're men now — 35 and 33. And my granddaughter is 19, will be 19 in September. And —

PBL: What are some of the, both satisfactions and rewards of being a mother, as well as the hardest things that you've had to deal with?

ADS: Well, as far as the rewarding things, it's been their maturing and understanding, family values and what have you. As far as the things that are difficult, I don't think any family walks away without problems. And there have been some that —

[break in tape]

PBL: In terms then of you and your husband, because also in a marriage, you have both rewards and satisfactions and places where you agree and then there are places where there is tension or you grow apart for a time and you grow back together, and I didn't know if — you know, you were married for some, what, 60 —

ADS: 59 years.

PBL: 59 years. And I'm wondering if you can describe a little bit about the arc of your marriage and, you know, what kept you together all those years.

ADS: Well we both always said that it was a matter of trust, a sense of humor, and being forgiving was very important. That there aren't any couples that don't go through good and bad times. And fortunately we never had a financial problem. And we tended to

agree on most of our philosophy and feelings about our family. And if we didn't agree, my husband never interfered with my feelings or how I wanted to handle something. And I never interfered with his. I would try to make him — he was a strong guy and he would get mad and, boy, you'd have a hard time getting back in his track. But I would try. He wouldn't try but he never put his foot down and said you can't do that or you can't have that person over or you can't go out with this one or that one. And that was interesting because a lot of families don't handle it that way.

PBL: Was he the disciplinarian in the household?

ADS: When the children were young, yes.

PBL: Did you become the disciplinarian later?

ADS: No, I don't think I ever was. I was always a very — what's the word I want to use? — I never liked to fight. And oh I could raise my voice and say I don't like this or that with my children, but I never put it before my love for them.

PBL: You said earlier in the interview that you learned a lesson early on, never to confront Sam. That you'd learn other ways of getting what you had to. And I was wondering if there were specific times or examples at different points in your experience together where that lesson was duly needed, was an important lesson for you.

ADS: Other than using my sense of humor, and getting out of a situation that I was unhappy about, I can't think of anything else. I was always the easygoing one in the family. And his strength never bothered me and it never frightened me. But on the same token, I was my own person, and he was his own person.

PBL: So let me ask you then about how your life has changed and maybe we can lead up to the point in which Sam got ill and Sam passed away last — a year and a half ago, which was traumatic for you and traumatic for a lot of people. And I'm wondering now

that you're a widow, maybe you can talk a little bit about, what has that transition been like?

ADS: It hasn't been easy. It's very difficult. And I'm sure that it doesn't make any difference what the circumstances are or your financial abilities. It's — especially if you're married such a long time, it's the loneliness. Even though I have wonderful friends and my daughters are there, my grandchildren are calling me all the time.... I lost my sister two and a half weeks before Sam passed away. The only ones left in Seattle are my two daughters Marsha and Cynthia. My granddaughter Courtney is at NYU in New York. Adam and his wife and baby, my first great-grandchild, are in New York. Scott lives in Los Angeles. And I have a friendly relationship with both my ex-son-in-laws, the divorces created another empty space. And while all that was happening, I always had my husband that I could talk to. And now that's the one thing I find is very, very — even though I have wonderful people to talk to, and right now I have several friends that have lost their husbands, you're not going to burden them with how you feel because all you can do is just console them and say you understand, but you're not going to start telling them how sad you feel or down in the dumps. And going to any of these events that Sam and I were both involved in, or that Sam participated more than I did — and would be the university and Brandeis, I have a hard time going. I go to the ones at the university but I haven't gone to many at Brandeis.

PBL: By the university, you mean the lecture series, the Stroum lecture series? ADS: Oh the lecture series is easy because there's enough people that go. But I'm talking about functions. They have constant functions. And I try to be supportive to all of it and like the President of the University is just a sweetheart and he always asked to be seated next to me and he consoles me and wants to know how I'm doing, but — and I get phone calls all over the country from people that miss Sam and in a way it's a bittersweet moment for me when they tell me about the things that he did or things that they remember or how much they miss him. And I'm not going to come back and say well I miss him more than

you do, you know? And it's different. And my life has changed completely. And —

PBL: What were you thinking of when you just said that?

ADS: I was thinking about Rosh Hashanah coming up, and where normally I always have the family for dinner, or at least there was Sam, before we went to services, now I'm sort of questioning what I should do. I was invited to my niece's — not in-laws, but her husband's children's in-laws, that's Joyce Rivkin. Do you know Joyce? She's married to Sol Rivkin. And they're wonderful family. They have the dinner and all the prayers on Rosh Hashanah eve, but they don't go to synagogue. I have always gone to synagogue the first night. And I feel almost guilty to go to her house for dinner and not go to services, because I'm not going to go the next night because I don't keep it. And then in the morning I would go, I'm just a few blocks from temple. And my daughter Cynthia wasn't sure what she was going to do herself, and to go to temple alone is a tough one. And I've never been a person that needed company. You know, I've always been talkative and I always got a funny story to tell and what have you. But it's just different. And I hope it will ease as time goes by and then I'll be able to cope with it more. But maybe if he wasn't such a outstanding person, I wouldn't be in the same state. We had a wonderful relationship and I say it really even got better in the last 20 years since we've been living in this place. And closer, you know? And it was something that I just never — and also, you know, I look at people that suffer with their husbands with the long-term illnesses, and I was fortunate that I didn't have to go through that, and Sam was not in pain, in dire pain. He was in pain and knowing that he was going to die, which is very painful. And, he made me feel very special and I hope I made him feel special. And I feel that there's nothing can replace his presence.

PBL: You know it's interesting, in having interviewed a number of women who have been widowed either once, sometimes twice, you know, not many of them have people hounding on their doors for social invitations and you probably have almost too many.

[laughter] And given that he was — you both were such prominent people in the community and you still are, that I wonder how much pressure there is on you to sort of step into those shoes and if you've had to make certain decisions in the wake of that to, you know, just say this is something I can no longer keep up or how much obligation do you feel towards that? Keeping up his legacy in a sense.

ADS: Most things I continued. If I can attend, I attend. If I can't —

[break in tape]

PBL: So you just showed me a wall full of invitations.

ADS: And I didn't show you my calendar.

PBL: Oh my gosh.

ADS: You want to see my appointment calendar?

PBL: You show it to me later. [Laughter] But for someone who is so sought after, and you could go to a different, probably even black tie event every night if you wanted to, or at least —

ADS: Well not every night.

PBL: — a dinner or something, I'm wondering what out of all of these activities and leisure activities, what's purely yours. I mean, what's something — what are the things that you really love to do. And I guess I'm asking about your leisure activities.

ADS: Well right now, I'm not really fully enjoying what I did before. I mean, I have wonderful friends that invite me to dinner. And then others that ask me to join their table at different events. And that's fine. But I still don't get the same feeling that I did before. Even getting dressed for an occasion, I don't even care. You know, I always try to look

my best and have my hair done and this and that, but like I used to always do, have my makeup done. But I wouldn't bother now. And I don't care about wearing fancy jewelry or going out of my way, you know. I haven't bought a new dress in almost two years, a new outfit. I better go get something. So I'll remember everything I have.

PBL: Is that because — did Sam really appreciate you in a new outfit?

ADS: Oh yeah, well I think you dress for your escort, you know? And —

PBL: And you're a dancer. You like to dance. So before, I understand that you took tap dance lessons. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

ADS: Well I took tap dancing when I was a kid and then many years I didn't. And then

oh, about eight years ago, nine years ago, it was a tap dancing class on Broadway and I joined that class and I made lots of friends, and we bonded together over the years. And then our instructor got sick and so she stopped her class, but she had substitutes there. And then in the meantime I had problems with vertigo and stuff and so I couldn't twist, turn around. I can tap on my own, because I know how much I want to twist. And I don't know what I would be like now with this back thing, but I always loved to improvise and in fact my teachers always said go ahead Althea, do it your way. [Laughter] But then I had a very complimentary evening, I danced with — oh god, it's — who's the tap dancer, the famous tap dancer? Just February. I —

PBL: Howoldisheorshe?Youngor—

ADS: He's probably about in his 40s or 50.

PBL: Gregory Heines?

ADS: That's who it was. It was Gregory Heines.

PBL: Where did you get to tap dance with Gregory Heines?

ADS: Well, I was at the hall in McCallum Theatre in Palm Springs, and my friend took me backstage to meet the producer — not the producer but the manager of McCallum. I'm sure she wants me to give a nice gift to the center. And we got to talking and he asked me how I liked the ballet that I was there for. And I said, "Oh I thought it was wonderful." I said, "One of the things I wanted to be as a kid a ballerina, a lawyer or a nurse." So he said, "Oh, which one did you become?" I said, "None." I said, "Then I took up tap dancing." And so he says, "Oh, you tap dance?" He says, "We're going to have Gregory Hines here next week — February." He says, "Would you like to go on stage?" And I said, "Sure." And so he says, "Well, when you go home, be sure you bring your tap shoes back." So I did and I called my grandson Scott, who lives in Los Angeles. I told him about it. He says, "I want to be there." So fine, and Courtney was going to be there for Spring Break. So Scott and Courtney came in and I called the producer, the manager of the McCall — I keep saying, "McCall, McCall is here." It's McCallum. And I called him and I said, "Ted, you know, I can be in the group." So he said, "Fine, perfect." I said, "The only thing is I need two more tickets for my grandson and granddaughter." He says, "Don't worry about anything out there. My wife and I will take you all out to dinner and then we will leave for the theater. So we went to the dinner, and he met Scott and Courtney. And then took me to the theater and we had practically front row seats. And Gregory Hines — raises his arm and he says, "Anybody out here tap dancing? Tap dancer?" And so the kids in front of me all raised their hands. And Ted says, "Raise your hand." So I raised my hand. And he says, "Anybody bring their tap shoes?" And a few did. And I raised mine. He says, "Okay, come on stage." Got on stage and I went behind the kids. I was the only really adult there. And Gregory Hines says, "Okay, this half goes this way and this half goes this way." So I backed up and I didn't watch what they were doing. I thought he meant just back up to that side of the stage. And they had big orchestra. And all of — I see Gregory Hines is looking at me and he said — so, I turn around and I notice everybody's offstage. I'm the only one on stage. So I said, "Oops," and I jumped off the

stage. And he says, “Come back.” And he says, “What’s your name?” He says, “When did you start to tap dance?” I said, “eight or nine.” And he said, “And how long did you tap?” I said, “A few years.” And then I said, “I went back to it when I was in my 60s or 70s.” And everybody started to clap because I don’t know whether they didn’t think I was that old or what. And so he said, “Oh.” He says, “Okay, why don’t you go tap?” And nobody else was on stage. And Gregory Hines starts walking off. And I looked at him and I said, “What, no music?” And he looks at me and out of the clear blue sky he says, “How about ‘Tea for Two’?” I told you about “Tea for Two.” And see “Tea for Two” is a softshoe tap dancing and he must have realized that I was a softshoe tap dancer. I said, “Perfect.” And I just swung across the platform or stage like I was in a Broadway musical. And I had more fun and they just clapped and thought it was wonderful and to make a long story short, when we left the theater, my grandson and granddaughter were walking in front of me to go to the car and this lady comes down the steps, a young girl, and she says, “Oh you were wonderful.” I didn’t know her. She says, “You were just wonderful.” She says, “Can I have your autograph?” I said, “Oh what a compliment.” And that was my tap dancing. The last time I tap danced was last February.

PBL: That’s quite a story. You went out with a big bang. So in terms of then your support of dancing, it’s been also — you’ve been a supporter of the arts, of all different kinds. Can you talk a little bit about what particular groups or organizations in Seattle you have supported and have really been close to your heart?

ADS: Well, the Henry Gallery, The Seattle Art Museum, The Children’s Museum.... And I’ve always worked on many of their projects and their parties and their functions. And organizing people to become involved. And offhand, that’s about what I remember. And of course, attending meetings and participating. And getting a better knowledge of the art that’s out there today. And what was that, traditional art.

PBL: How have you educated yourself as such? Because your home here has — in articles, has been often described as museum-like. And you have an incredible collection of a variety of different mediums of art. In fact we just went on a tour and I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about that cultivation in you for as an art collector and I know you've had relationships with people like Dale Chihuly, can you elaborate and talk about that education?

ADS: Well,IwenttoartschoolwhenIwasakid,orIdid—Idon'tknowifIwentto art — I did go to Cornish for a little bit. But I took art in high school and I was always interested in it and I never knew that I could even afford to buy paintings, but when I couldn't afford it, I bought the insignificant ones that appealed to me and I don't think anyone tempted me as far as what to buy and what not to buy. If I fell in love with it, that was it. And if I could afford it, that was another story. But I've never been an art collector where I've gone after a certain name of an artist. And it's just — I mean anything you see around here is goes from contemporary to — I don't have too much traditional, but I do have some modern art and Asian

PBL: Such as?

ADS: Well like the Jacob Lawrence would be modern. And I would say that Rauschenberg is contemporary up to a point and I would say that the AGAM is contemporary.

PBL: Can you talk about which of these artists you've met as a result of your participation in these art museums and on the boards of museums.

ADS: I knew AGAM and Callahan — Kenneth Callahan.

PBL: He's the horses, right?

ADS: Uh huh. Very good.

PBL: And when did you meet Dale Chihuly?

ADS: And Dale, I guess I met him about 12 years ago, 15 years ago, something like that.

PBL: Can you talk more about what that relationship has been because not only have I seen in your home a number of Chihulys that I'm able to recognize, at least — you have a painting on the wall that's dedicated to you. You've donated Chihulys, isn't there a big piece in the Stroum lobby of Benaroya hall.

ADS: But we didn't donate it.

PBL: Okay, so I'm incorrect in there, but nonetheless —

ADS: Well Dale just adored my husband and Sam was like a mentor to him and he even gave five pieces to the Summit House in Sam's memory. And he gave something to the JCC in Sam's memory and that piece, the green one — PBL: The green one.

ADS: — was a gift because he was late for breakfast with his family, and he came up with the vase and I said, "What's that for?" He says, "That's for you." I said, "Why?" He says, "Because I'm late." And I said, "You can come late anytime." But we've always been really close. And for the Hadassah thing, he made a beautiful painting for me, which I haven't found a spot for yet. And we've been with him, he's been up here with his family.

PBL: What is it that cultivates those relationships? Because many of these relationships with artists — I mean you've had great access to people.

ADS: Well, like with AGAM, we just found out that he was going to be in a show here and we were asked to go to the show and that's when we had him come up here to our condo, before it was built, and we showed him around where we wanted it. And I gave him the color scheme. And then he designed the painting. And that was our only real

contact. And then once we were in New York in the elevator and we saw him in the elevator and he recognized us and we had a nice visit and I think we even went out for lunch with his wife but the glass artists, we knew most of them. Billy Morris, Ben Moor.

PBL: Do you feel that you've done a particularly — you've made a particularly concerted effort to collect Seattle artists?

ADS: No, I haven't gone out of my way. In the beginning that's all we could afford so I bought them at the Bellevue Art Gallery, not art gallery, the Walk. And then I would go to different shows and buy something. Sometimes I'd buy it, sometimes Sam fell in love with something. And then when we got to be able to afford, we knew Linda Farris real well, we steadily went — or she would call us when some artist was in town. And then we met Rauschenberg, had him up here to our condo for a small party. And — let's see, who else.

PBL: What about the Warhols. Where did that come from?

ADS: Well the Warhols were in Linda Farris' gallery and she was showing them and my husband went down there to see them and he had me go down to see which one I liked best. And when I saw them I thought it was so wonderful that we both — when I got home, we talked about it, about how hard it was to select, my husband says you know, "Maybe I should see if we can get all of them." And at that time —

PBL: Were they only showing the Jewish artists?

ADS: Yes. That was —

PBL: The Jewish literati, I should say too.

ADS: Warhol's choice, that was the 10 prominent Jewish people. It was his minyan. But it's really not 10, it's 13. Because he listed the Marx brothers as one—there are four

in the painting.

PBL: So who are all the people on the wall? You have —

ADS: Einstein. Gershwin, Golda Mei, Gertrude Stein, Sarah Bernhart, Martin Buber, Brandeis, Kafka, Frued, The Marx Brothers.

PBL: Of all the pieces of artwork in your home, is there one that you particularly find significant or important to you? Has some personal meaning?

ADS: Yeah, well I think the Warhols have a very strong impact. And maybe it's because I go past them every day going to the kitchen or may bedroom.

PBL: How else might you describe that impact?

ADS: Well I think of Andy Warhol and meeting him. Not at the time we purchased it. We purchased it, after we met him, at a function. He wore jeans with a tux jacket. PBL: Is there anything else you want to add about your participation or art collection? ADS: No. I don't think so. Right offhand I wouldn't say there's anything more that I could add to it.

PBL: Then let me ask you a little bit more about any other hobbies or special interests that you have. Are there particular authors or books or television shows that you love in a more private, when you're spending more private time?

ADS: Well right now I really delve into the news and the CNN and CNBC. And I don't watch too many movies or things like that. I'd rather go out to a movie. And books? I haven't been very good about reading lately. I was never was crazy about mysteries after one of my neighbors gives me all of his books. But I've always liked biographies, history and fiction. You know, good books. I can't think of anything right offhand.

PBL: You know, a lot of women will belong to, let's say, women's book clubs and things like that.

ADS: I never did. I went to a couple with my friends, but I never did.

PBL: Can you tell me a little bit about your — I only have about two more topics to cover here. I realize it's getting late, but I was wondering if you might be able to talk a little bit about — I mean, whether it's since your husband has passed or not, what women's networks have meant in your life. You've referred oftentimes to your friends, and I didn't know if you were talking about a set tight group of women or otherwise.

ADS: It's just been diversified. Many couples have been very sweet and thoughtful. I feel very fortunate, they've asked me to join them, and then I have several girlfriends that when I want to go — you know have of extra tickets to the symphony, the opera, ballet, the theater and the Mariners and now it's going to be Huskies. I invite my girlfriends that are widowed or alone. It is my way of reciprocating. . Then there's some neighbors in the building that I'm close to. They have been wonderful including me and offering me rides to some events.

PBL: Have you relied on those friendships for kind of emotional or psychological support or have you sought it, you know, more professionally as you've been going through a difficult time in your life? That's something often of people of my generation were very used to that. You know, seeking help when we're feeling blue or when we go through hard times.

ADS: Well you know it's pretty hard to go through your tough times with someone that also has gone through it. And so you don't want to sort of cry on their shoulder when they themselves have experienced it. You might say something, oh "I'm down in the dumps today" or "today was my anniversary or my birthday or Sam's birthday and I miss that." But on the whole, I think it's just a matter of being with someone. Companionship. It's best. And crying out your problems doesn't solve it by someone saying, "Oh I know, I understand. I've gone through that before. And it takes a little while." Or, "You never get over it," you'll hear some of them say. And so that basically is the —

PBL: In terms of your own health, I mean you just celebrated your 80th birthday and you look wonderful.

ADS: Well thank you.

PBL: You're very welcome. And I'm just wondering, that's a major marker in one's life and I didn't know how your health has been and have you had to deal with as you've been getting over your own husband's passing and I know that you had a friend that passed last week, as well. How has it been for you to deal with some of your own ailments or discomforts?

ADS: Well, I have a wonderful doctor and so I have no problem calling — I can call him right now, if I wanted to, and I'd get immediate answer to anything. And fortunately [knocks], I've been in fairly good health.

PBL: Maybe we can shift this a little bit by — I want to ask you what the process of aging is like. I mean, you've watched yourself change over the years. What's it like to get older?

ADS: I know a 92-year-old lady that went to the Kline Galland Home to help, Muriel Brill (sp?), she once said to me, "Althea do you know what age is?" And I said, "No, what is it?" She said, "Age is a mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." And I suppose I think it's because I've always been active and because I feel that I'm pretty alert, except I forget some things now and then. And I don't think of my age. I'm sort of surprised that 80 could be like this. And I look at others that are 80 or even younger than me, and they have more wrinkles than I do and they are not as well. They have this wrong with them or that wrong with them, and so it is — and you'll hear them say, "Oh, it's really hell to get older." And I just never looked at it that way.

PBL: Have you felt that, especially because you live a very public life and you're going to events all the time — Has there been pressure upon women of your age group to seek out ways of staying young or looking young, plastic surgery, things like that?

ADS: Fortunately, I had good genes. And my mother had marvelous skin and her hair was dark until she was 84 years old. The most I've done in recent — in the recent two years, is my teeth, because they were getting sort of crooked and dark and so I had them redone. And the other thing I did was I had — well that's not plastic surgery, but I was having problems with my eyesight and so I had my doctor do a cataract removal and implants, which magnetized my eyes. I couldn't read all that stuff without glasses. So that has been a plus. And other than being more fatigued, and I don't know whether the fatigue is depression or whether it's normal, I would say that I feel pretty good most of the time. And I always was a good sleeper. I've never been a worrier. A real worrier. And I talked to a couple of my friends that have lost their spouses and oh god, you go over their problems about things they don't have to think about for another month or so. You know, I mean, you don't have to worry about your will or your estate. You know, you've got the whole year.

PBL: So what do you look forward to right now? What, if you can, if you are looking forward to things, what are they?

ADS: Well the only thing I really look forward to is seeing my little great- granddaughter. I really enjoy that. And I will enjoy going back east and visiting my granddaughter that's in college. See how she's doing. But I think my grandchildren give me the greatest pleasure right now. And other than that, I'm not interested — I've taken one trip outside of the things I had to go to and that was very nice and —

PBL: Where did you go?

ADS: New York. And the reason it was very nice is I got to see my little great-granddaughter. I had about three friends that I knew very well that were also on the same trip— but of course New York was the place where I was born, and Sam and I went back to New York constantly, and so I never felt like it was a strange place.

PBL: Is there anything else that you feel in terms of your oral history, your life history, that we've truly missed or we haven't stumbled upon, or things that you want to add that makes you a part of this record of your story?

ADS: I think you've covered most everything. And —

PBL: I do recall one thing that I didn't know, maybe this would be going back to the beginning of part of the interview today, but it was about the Sorrento, the hotel. Did we miss that?

ADS: No, but that was —

PBL: That's in the book. We'll look at that after. Let me finish. Because I can go, when I come, I can take a photograph of that and you can tell me about that. But then let me just say then to close the interview, unless you feel that there's something, a story or something important that we've missed, because there's so much that we could go over, it's beyond — beyond a three hour interview. I guess I want to ask you to broaden out a little bit and think in a historical —

ADS: What time is it?

PBL: It's about 3:30, so we should conclude.

ADS: Oh.

PBL: As somebody who has witnessed the kind of key events of the 20th century, let's just say, and specifically Seattle's growth in terms of its Jewish community and growth in general, I didn't know if there were any specific events that you felt have shaped your experience and in your lifetime.

ADS: What time did you say it was?

PBL: 3:35. Did you hear that question?

ADS: Ah, repeat it.

PBL: I didn't know if there were any particular — as somebody who has witnessed a vast amount — 80 years of history, or at least 70 years of it, the 20th century, I didn't know if there were any events that have shaped your view of yourself, of the world, as Seattle has grown a tremendous amount, the Jewish community has grown a tremendous amount, and I was just wondering if maybe in the closing comments you might — are there any particular historical events or events here in Seattle that have shaped you personally?

ADS: Well, I think Seattle itself — the change in Seattle and the growth of Seattle. Not only the Jewish community, but with all the changes that have taken place —

PBL: Specifically, what do you mean by that?

ADS: I mean the way the city has grown. And also our — how we've come forth in the arts and the theater and we're very well known throughout the country. It used to be, Boeing was the thing that you said, that's where you're from. You know, especially to some foreigner. But today, most people know — I don't think Europeans know, particularly about Seattle, but — I remember once, when we were traveling in Europe, and some foreigner asked where we were from. And we said "Washington." And the person said, "Washington presidente?" And I said, "No Washington, California, Washington, Boeing." So that's the way they — and they understood that I meant the other side.

PBL: And how have you participated in the growth of Seattle? Do you feel that your work in philanthropy —

ADS: Well, in philanthropy, in being involved in the University and the hospitals and the museums —

PBL: When you say in the University, what do you mean by that?

ADS: Well, there's many aspects of the University that we've been involved in. In the school of International Studies, in all the programs, the football and participating in everything and being part of the University and knowing all the people that run it. And being at all the events. That part. Being very close to Fred Hutch has been so special. And being close to the Children's Hospital, we have a wing in our name, the heart wing. And then all the museums that I've already mentioned. Henry Gallery, and the Seattle Art Museum. I remember as a kid sitting on the camels in Volunteer Park, when they were there. I was 14 and I lived on Capitol Hill and the art museum was in Volunteer Park.

PBL: Would you say that you have a personal statement to make to conclude this interview or a motto or is there a philosophy that you have discovered throughout the years that you want to share for posterity?

ADS: Offhand I can't think of anything.

PBL: It's a lot of pressure. [Laughter]

ADS: Yeah, well if you had told me before, I would have written something.

PBL: Did you want to just go ahead and conclude in your own way.

ADS: I find that this interview has been very interesting because it's made me reminisceand think back about a lot of things that I haven't been thinking about for many years and it's a pleasant thought and I hope that the results of all your interviews will be successful.

PBL: Well thank you for your participation in the project and for this very wonderful interview and being so candid about your life. So thank you Althea.

ADS: Thank you, Pamela.

[END OF INTERVIEW]