Susie Tanchel Transcript

Mitchell Israel: This is Mitchell Israel. I'm an MA [Master of Arts] student at Brandeis University, and I'm interviewing Dr. Susie Tanchel. She's the Vice President of Hebrew College. Today is November 19, 2021. It is 11:30 AM. We're having this conversation over Zoom. The interview is part of an LGBTQ oral history project for Professor Jonathan Krasner's class in partnership with the Jewish Women's Archive. How are you doing today, Susie?

Susie Tanchel: Very well, thank you. How are you?

MI: I'm doing pretty well. I'm excited. So, I put my questions into four categories. I was thinking over the course of this interview, we'd spend the first part of it talking about basic biography questions, just learning a little bit more about your upbringing. The second part is questions about your queer identity. The third and fourth part were both more job-focused. The third part: I'll be asking you about Gann Academy and your time there. The fourth part: I'll be asking you about JCDS [Jewish Community Day School], your hiring process, and what it was like to be the first openly gay head of school.

ST: Right, bring it on.

MI: All right, let's go. So, what was it like growing up in South Africa? What was the Jewish community like there?

ST: I sort of don't know how to answer that. What was it like growing up? Well, I went to a Jewish day school my whole life. I felt very connected to the Jewish community. I, in fact, advocated, apparently, according to my mother, to go to the Jewish day school because she didn't want me to. She wanted me to go to what in America would be a public school. When I went to the public school interview, I apparently pretended that I didn't know how

to speak, read, or do anything. So, I guess that was my first act of activism, but it was at the age of five to make sure that I got enrolled in the Jewish day school. It was complicated growing up under apartheid or during the apartheid years, because my growing sense of justice and fairness was confused by what was happening all around me. So, for example, when I was asked by the director of Judaica at my high school to coordinate the seder, I couldn't understand – how can we do a seder in South Africa, in the midst of apartheid, when people around us weren't exactly enslaved, but they certainly weren't free. So, I chose to begin the seder using a negro spiritual from the United States, which was the song [“Oh Freedom”]. "And before I'd be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free." So, as you might imagine, not everybody was thrilled about that. As a consequence of my behavior, I met with the director of Judaica, who was supposed to be educating me about something. What he ended up teaching me about, actually, was Abraham Joshua Heschel. He gave me the writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel when I was sixteen. It changed my life and informed my educational philosophy throughout.

MI: So, it seems like you were very inspired by the American Civil Rights Movement to raise awareness within the Jewish community about apartheid in South Africa. What was the Jewish communities' [involvement]? Were they involved in activism at all?

ST: Yes. I mean, first of all, it's not a monolith. So, it's not like – so there certainly were parts, segments of it. It was sometimes like the only white person at the Rivonia trials of Nelson Mandela; when Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, the white people were all Jewish, who were a part of that process. So, the Jews sometimes didn't really fit with being white and certainly didn't fit with being Black. But they were – Joe Slovo, who was the head of the South African Communist Party, was Jewish. So, there was a lot of [inaudible]. Helen Suzman, who was head of the Progressive Party in South Africa when I was growing up, was also Jewish. So, there was a lot of Jewish activism happening. Then I would also say there was a lot where Jews just benefited from the apartheid

system because they were white. So, both things were true. It happens, actually, that the first [inaudible], that the judge in the United States who passed gay marriage was also a South African and was compelled by her life under apartheid, I think, to extend gay marriage to LGBTQ people in Massachusetts.

MI: This was when [inaudible] gay marriage became legal in Massachusetts, which was the first state, was it not?

ST: It was, it was. Well, I hear that was, but then I also heard that Hawaii did it first. So, I think it probably was, but you would have to check on Hawaii.

MI: Okay. We can talk more about that later. Why were you so passionate about going to Jewish school rather than public school?

ST: I don't know. I mean, I went to a Jewish preschool for one year, because of when I was born in South Africa. The school year starts in January. You know how in America, the cutoff was, like, August 31st? I think in South Africa, the cutoff is later than that, obviously, because a year begins in January. So, the preschool that I attended and the one my brother attended didn't have a class, I guess, for kids who were born in the latter half of the year, who had to wait a little bit to start school. So, in my last year, I went to a Jewish preschool, and I guess I loved it. It connected to my soul very quickly, very early on. My first cousin went there. My brother, my older brother, went to a public school. My first cousin went to the Jewish day school, and I guess I just loved everything about being Jewish. I guess, from a very young age, it was just in my soul. I can tell you that when I finished high school, the director of Judaica, who was close with me, gave me a letter of introduction to the head of Solomon Schechter [Day School] when he heard that I was moving to Boston. He said, “Give this letter to Rabbi Josh Elkin because he's going to want to hire you as a Jewish educator.” I was eighteen. I said to him, “What are you talking about? I am going to Brandeis, and then I'm going to law school. I'm going to become a divorce lawyer. I'm not going to be a Jewish educator.” He said, “Take this

letter with you because you're going to be a Jewish educator."

MI: I guess he turned out to be right

ST: Yes, he did. So far, anyway. So far, my career has been in Jewish education. Yes.

MI: So, going back to your childhood in South Africa, what activities were you involved in growing up, either inside of school or outside of school?

ST: I was involved in – [in] elementary school, I was the only girl on the boys' tennis teams, as there weren't enough girls to play tennis, and I really wanted to play tennis. So, I was the only girl that – there were four teams, and I was the lone girl. Sometimes, there would be an occasion where you're only listed by last name. That's how they did it. So, they would call "Tanchel," and I would stand up. They would say, "Tanchel," and I'd say, "I'm right here," and they say, "But you're a girl." I would say, "Well, yes, but I'm also your tennis opponent." So, I was very involved with tennis. I played a sport called netball. That was my summer and my winter sports. Then, outside of school, I was part of a youth group called Habonim and very, very involved in that.

MI: Did you have a leadership role in Habonim?

ST: I didn't. I didn't even become a counselor there. I was just a *chanichim,* they called it one of the – like a kid, a participant. Then we also traveled a lot.

MI: Where did you travel?

ST: Really kind of all around the world. The big joke in my school was that I would miss – we had winter vacation in July, because the other side of the world did, and so three weeks of winter vacation, but my parents invariably took us on vacation for about six weeks. So, people knew that we were just never in school for the first three weeks after vacation ended. The first place I went to was Israel, starting at age six, and I went to

Israel for five years in a row. Then we went to the States. Then we went – well, [the] first time I went to London, I was ten. We went to London many times; it is my mother's favorite city, probably. That was, actually, when I was ten, and London was the first time I remember my parents – my mother took my brother and me aside and said, “You're going to walk into a restaurant where there are going to be Blacks and whites together. But don't worry, because that's how it is in the rest of the world, and that's how it should be.” So, I remember that. So that was London. The next year, I think we did Scandinavia. We went to Italy. We went kind of all over Europe. I went to Japan and Thailand. I've been to a lot of places. I think that's actually part of how I became such a pluralist, in my heart, I think, because I got to see that there are many different ways of being in the world. No one of them, no one religious part is better than another. That, in essence, if you care about other human beings, and you're not harming them, and you're helping make a better world, and the path to getting there. Isn't that significant? I think I translated that lesson, as I was growing up, into how I then became an educator who was so committed to pluralism. I think the Jewish community of South Africa was really one of – first of all, there was only Orthodox Judaism as a shul when I was growing up. In the very later years, Reform Judaism arrived. The idea that men and women sat together was just beyond what people could imagine. But nonetheless, there wasn't a lot of judgment in the community. Nobody looked down at anybody else, and what they did; it was just different. So, I think between the travel and between that experience of going to a school that had all different kinds of Jews in it, as I did for twelve years, just meant everybody did what they did. No biggie.

MI: That's really cool that you mentioned the lack of judgment. How observant was your family growing up?

ST: Well, not that observant at all. I mean, here's the thing in South Africa, most of the community goes to the Jewish day school. So, we had Shabbat dinner every Friday night. We didn't have pork or shellfish, or treyf stuff in our house. So, I guess in that

sense, we were kind of observant, but I would not describe us as observant. Shabbat dinner was a very important family time, and we always saw my grandmother then, and we wouldn't have thought to have bacon or pork or shellfish. But we wouldn't think twice about having – oh, and the meat was kosher. But we wouldn't have thought twice about having chicken for dinner and then ice cream for dessert. That would not have been an issue.

MI: Makes sense. So, the next thing I want to ask you about was your experience as an undergraduate student at Brandeis. I know that you said that you had traveled a lot. But was this also your first time living in the US?

ST: It was my first time living here, yes. It was not my first time [living abroad] because I left South Africa ten days after I finished high school, and I lived in Israel for six months. Then I came to Brandeis. So, it was my first time living here. Yes.

MI: Can you tell me a little bit more about that, about the gap semester that you were doing in Israel? Were you there to study or were you there just to live?

ST: I had always wanted to live there. I was a very strong Zionist, and the deal with my parents was that I could go after finishing high school for a month, and I just loved it. So, I ended up staying there for six months. I did learn some in different Yeshivot, but also, I had a tremendous amount of family there, and it was just the best time; it was amazing. I loved being in that land. Then, when I got accepted to Brandeis, it was very clear that I would obviously come to the United States. But it was an amazing time of learning, of being with people, of not having major responsibilities, and it was just so fun. Then I came to Brandeis, and the advisor that Brandeis had assigned to me, I guess, was Reuven Kimelman [in] the NEJS department [Near Eastern and Judaic Studies]. But I was very interested in psychology. So, I actually declared psychology as my major and was happily going along in psychology. Then in my junior year, I met with Reuven Kimelman, as I did every year, and he said to me, “You only have two courses left to

finish your Judaic Studies, your major in Judaic Studies." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes. So, you're going to declare." I said, "I guess," and he said, "Yes, I think you should take this course, with this amazing, young – this course with Professor Marc Brettler. I think it'll be an amazing experience for you, and you've got to stop avoiding texts. I don't know why you're not engaged, more deeply interested." So, I said, "Okay," and that course with Marc Brettler changed my life, obviously, in Bible. I also finished my major in NEJS. I also ran for, as a write-in candidate, for the Hillel board my sophomore year, as education – as whatever the designation was. I can't remember. It was Vice President for Education, something like that. Anyway, I ran a write-in campaign, and I won that campaign. So, I served on the Hillel board my sophomore year. Then I was a resident advisor my junior year, and I also was president. I became president of Brandeis Hillel my junior year. So, then what was I to do my senior year, because I'd already been president? So there, I worked on orientation stuff in my senior year, and it was fun. It was great. My Brandeis years were amazing. My senior year, I also did an undergraduate fellowship with Marc Brettler on teaching Bible. So, I guess that there, my future began.

MI: Can you tell me a little bit more about the impact that Marc Brettler had on you when you were an undergrad?

ST: A huge impact. I mean, I think I'd always loved Jewish text and Jewish stuff, but he gave me an intellectual path to discovery, and also is a deeply, profoundly dedicated teacher, and to the craft of teaching. So, he really taught me a tremendous amount, both about the content and about what it means to be a teacher. So, by the way, did David Wright, who now just retired from Brandeis, but he also had a deep impact on me. Marc's impact continued because when I was a graduate student, I stayed at Brandeis to get my PhD under his leadership, and he was on the board of the New Jewish High School. So, he was the one who encouraged me to get involved with the New Jewish High School, which is what Gann Academy was called in its early days. So, I was close to Marc. I was close to Marc's whole family. He's just been an amazing, amazing supporter of mine and

my growth and development. For decades now, I guess, holy cow.

MI: That's cool that he had such a big impact on you. So, transitioning from your time at Brandeis to your time in the professional world, where were you working and living after you finished Brandeis before you started at Gann?

ST: I was living in Somerville, and I was just in graduate school. So, I wasn't working. I was getting my PhD.

MI: So, you went to do your PhD right after you finished undergrad?

ST: Well, I started my coursework for my PhD, then I took a little bit of a break. When I started working at New Jew, I took a break. Then I went back. I basically went back, and then I finished my coursework; I was ABD [all but dissertation]. I started working again, took a leave of absence, and then went back in early 2004, I think 2003, 2004, to start working on my dissertation.

MI: Makes sense.

ST: That's actually a whole story in itself, but only because I went to Marc and I said to him – he started as Professor Brettler, but over the years, it became Marc. So, I went to Marc, and I said to him, in probably 2002, 2001 somewhere around there – I went to him, and I said, “I think I want to write my dissertation on something to do with education and the Bible,” and he said, “What are you –? You can't do that here. There's nobody to do that with. You’ve got to do a Bible dissertation, like a regular one.” Six months later, I went back to him, and I said, “I really think that if I were to write my dissertation, I want to do something with education and Bible.” And he said, “Well, in a few months, this professor named Sharon Feiman-Nemser is going to come to Brandeis and come and be a professor of education. Maybe she will help you.” When the Mandel Center at Brandeis opened, Sharon Feimen-Nemser also took me under her wing and taught me so much about education and teaching and learning, and she agreed to serve on my dissertation

committee, and I ended up writing my dissertation in two fields: in Bible and the ancient Near East as the first part of it, and the second part of it actually isn't Bible, and then education and teaching. So, I had to learn a lot in a short amount of time. Sharon was so incredible. Between the two of them, between Mark and Sharon, their impact on me has been immeasurable, basically. I'm still close with both of them, which I feel very grateful for and honored by.

MI: So, it seemed like your passion came to be teaching Bible. So, that makes sense. Why do you think that you chose Jewish Day School as a career to pursue that passion?

ST: I think because I realized I didn't want to write an article that just ten people in the world read. It just wasn't – the academia in that way was not for me. I really wanted to share my love of Tanach, but also have relationships with kids and help them. My educational experience had been so instrumental and important to me. I think I just wanted to pass it on. The school was starting, and so I didn't even realize what it could be. I mean, I was there for fourteen years. But when it started, I was in my mid-twenties. So, I had never had a job before. It just seemed like an exciting opportunity. I didn't know yet that I was going to spend my whole life in education, that was 1997. So, I didn't know. I was just kind of doing it and making some money while I was going to start working on my dissertation. It just all got changed.

MI: We'll talk a little bit more about your time at Gann later on in the interview. What I wanted to do now was transition from the biographical and your educational background portion of the interview to some questions about your queer identity. Does that sound good to you? All right. So, the first thing I want to ask is, what was your coming-out story? Feel free to take as much time as you need with this one.

ST: My coming out story happened in stages. Because, actually, towards the end of my senior year of college, I had occasion to spend Shabbat with someone who was a lesbian, and there was definitely some chemistry there or whatever. She decided very

quickly that she had very strong feelings for me. I went to Alwina Bennett, who was the head of Residence Life at Brandeis at that time. I said to her, “What do I do, cause I'm straight? What do I say to this person?” She said, “You just say you're very flattered and honored, but you're not interested.” So, I did that, and I didn't think anything of it. I had dated men, and continued to date men at the beginning of graduate school, and it wasn't – and then I met another woman who was a Bible graduate student at Harvard University, and it became clear that I was attracted to her and she to me, and so we started having a relationship. We had a relationship for a few months, and I couldn't figure out how – this was, what year was this? This was the late ‘90s. I couldn't figure out how to be Jewish and gay, how I would come out to my family, what my future would be like, and so I broke up with her, after a while. It definitely was a significant relationship after a while, and [I] said, “I'm not going to do this,” and I got back together with my very serious boyfriend that I dated the last two years of college. So, we started to think about – should we get married? Should we not get married? He was excited about it, I was excited about it, but I started throwing up, actually; I start getting sick. He said, “It's me, it's me.” I said, “What are you talking about?" I said, “I'm very happy with you.” He said, “I think you should go and talk to a counselor, talk to your therapist about this.” In that context, my body was saving me, I think, from doing something that I didn't really want to do, and in that context, I sort of figured out, “Oh, maybe I didn't want to marry a man, and maybe there was a different life in store for me.” So, when Gann [inaudible], so we broke up. Then, in my second year of Gann, so 1998, I fell in love with a teacher who had started at Gann that year. She and I were together for about a year and a half, maybe two years, and in that period, I came out to my brother, who said, “I’m not surprised, okay, whatever.” In retrospect, I see how this was possible. “But please don't tell Mom and Dad because you're going to kill them.” I said, “Okay, I won't.” I started sort of coming out to people around me, and my parents, who are living in South Africa, so it's not actually that hard to not – I'm sure that there are people in the United States who live, even in the same community, as their parents and all that. So, it's not hard when you're

living halfway across the world to not be out to your parents, but I was increasingly out in my life in Boston. At some point, in there, I met Idit Klein, who became a friend of mine, who was the head of Keshet, which is working as an organization working for full inclusion of LGBTQ Jews across the United States. So, we became friends. I was talking with her and then, at some point in there, or maybe it was a little later, but at some point in there, I broke up with the person I was dating at Gann, and then started soon after that, dating another person, another woman, and it became clear to me that this was my future, and that I needed to come out to my parents. So somewhere in 2000, 2001, I came out to my parents on the phone. That didn't go so well. My father was totally silent. My mother said, “We still love you,” but couldn't really engage beyond that. When they came to visit, they would still say things like, “Oh, this is probably a phase you're going through. You'll marry a man.” So then, even though I was out to my parents and I was out in life in Boston, I wasn't out [inaudible]. We started forming the Gay-Straight Alliance at Gann, at New Jew, which now is captured in the movie, *Hineini*, subsequently. But as we started going, I really wanted to be a role model for my kids at Gann, who were struggling and who were trying to figure this out. So that's really what pushed me to come out publicly. First at Gann, and then in the movie, *Hineini*. Then for years after that, people saw *Hineini*across the United States, and I would be kind of the gay Tanach teacher, the lesbian Tanach teacher. So, it just kind of stuck. There was no going back. I mean, once you're in a national movie, you actually know. So, yes. So, that's what happened.

MI: Cool. I'll definitely ask you more about *Hineini* later on. But one thing I realized you didn't get to was: how did you meet your wife? When did you get married?

ST: Oh, yes. Well, that was long after I came out. I met my wife because I was doing some work with Keshet. I was on the Safe Schools Task Force. It was a task force that they created to work on making Jewish day schools and Jewish camps safe for LGBT – at that point, LGBT, I think, was actually GL [inaudible]. I think at that point, it was like gay, lesbian, bisexual. I don't think there was a T in those days. So, I was working on a

task force. We would have meetings, they trained us, we had meetings, and all this stuff about how we were going to go into different camps and schools. So, this was probably in March or April 2004. At one of these meetings, there was a rabbi named Steve Arnold, of blessed mention, who, the day after the meeting, called me up and said, “Are you single? Are you interested in dating?” I say, “Yes, I am,” and he said, “Oh, I know, this woman that I think will be a great match for you.” It turns out, though, that my future wife didn't know that it was a date; she had just broken up from a significant relationship, and really kind of had told him, “I’m looking for friends,” meaning actually friends, not romantic partners, as she was coming out of this relationship. But she was living in Connecticut, it turned out, so we started sort of talking on the phone and had a good connection. We met July 4, 2004. We started dating July 11, I guess, technically, July 11, 2004, and very quickly knew that this was going to be – and so she moved. I happened to be working on my dissertation that year. So, I was able to travel to West Hartford, she was able to – she's a documentary filmmaker – and she was able to travel to Boston to see me. So, we did long distance for a year, and then she moved to Boston, and we bought a house together, and so far, so good, some seventeen years later. I love her very much, and I'm deeply, deeply blessed to be sharing my life with her.

MI: I'm happy that you're so happy. So, what I wanted to ask a little bit more was, I know that Massachusetts was one of the earlier states to legalize same-sex marriage. Did that impact you at all, like when you guys first got together? Were there limits on that? Your decision to get married – was that independent of that?

ST: Oh, not at all, we got married in [inaudible]. So that was definitely in the wake of –

MI: Could you say the year again? I wasn't sure [it] came through.

ST: 2005. We got married in 2005. Gay marriage had become legal in May 2004. Just a few months before we met, actually. It was very important to me that we got married before we had a kid. I really wanted to do that. Also, it was – my parents did not come to

my wedding because I think they just didn't know how to handle it. At the time that we did it, gay marriage, now it's maybe a little difficult to imagine, but at the time we did it, gay marriage was so new. It was just like a year old basically, and it was only happening in Massachusetts. So, we didn't know what would happen. Would it be overturned? We had no idea. So, I kind of wanted to get married a little more quickly. Even though we'd bought a house together and were living together, I wanted to formalize it in case it changed. So, my intention was always that we would have a ceremony in our home, and then we would have a bigger wedding, a Jewish wedding, later on. But as it turned out, Rabbi Josh Elkin, the guy who I had been given the letter, had subsequently become friends of ours through a long story. So, we were the first gay marriage that he did. We got married in our living room in 2005, but did not sign a Ketubah until gay marriage was legal throughout the United States. So, the day that gay marriage passed as a law, that was the day that our friends came over, and Josh came over, when we signed the Ketubah.

MI: So, you waited all the way until June of 2015 to sign the Ketubah?

ST: I guess we did, if [that] was the date. I don't even remember the date.

MI: It was definitely June of 2015. I remember it quite well, because I was working at a Jewish summer camp at the time, and when the news broke, it spread very quickly around camp.

ST: Yes. So, yes, we waited all the way until then. So, the date of our Ketubah is the date of gay marriage being passed nationally, which is kind of cool. [Interviewer’s Note: June 26, 2015, the day of the Obergefell vs. Hodges ruling].

MI: I would say so. So how would you say that your Jewish and queer identities intersect?

ST: I mean, that is a difficult question for me to answer, only because they both make me who I am. So, I would say they are each central to my being, how I live, what I care about, what I invest my energies in, everything about me, and I predominantly live in Jewish circles. So, I don't frequently come out as a Jew. But to this day, I have to come out as part of the LGBTQ community regularly. I have to say to people, “my wife,” and I made choices still about when and how I come out for people who just don't know me at all.

MI: Do you feel like that has become easier and more casual over time, or can it still be difficult?

ST: I would say generally, almost always, it is unless I'm in Orthodox settings, and I tend to be in Orthodox settings as a Jew; I really am a pluralistic Jewish educator. So, I sometimes am in Orthodox settings, [then] it's a little tricky.

MI: Have you had [inaudible]? Is there an example of where you've come out in an Orthodox setting, and you've been given a hard time?

ST: Oh, well, yes. Do I need to detail them? I mean, they're in situations where people – it will be easy to know who the people are. So, I am reluctant to talk about those only because I don't want to do *Lashon Hara* [Transcriber’s note: translates to “evil tongue,” and refers to speech that can cause harm to someone, even if it may be true] against people who live in Boston.

MI: I understand. We can talk about, instead, either when you were coming out, or when you were younger, did you have any Jewish queer role models?

ST: No, I don't even – no. I don't think I even – I never thought about that. But I don't even think I knew anybody. I knew one gay person I met when I was fourteen. He actually had been a tour guide of the tour that we took in the Far East. We only took a tour once in our whole lives, of going to different countries, and that was in the Far East.

That was where I met someone named (Nick Bodley?), who became very important to me because he taught me a lot. I was fourteen years old, and he took me very seriously. He treated me very seriously as a thinker in the world and modeled what it meant to take adolescents seriously. I think that was why I was all ready when I met the director [of?] Judaica of my high school when I was sixteen or fifteen. I was more open to that because I had (Nick's?) example of what it meant to really respect young people as thinkers. I think that has impacted how I am viewed as an educator. So, he was gay, but that was really it. Other than that, I had seen gay people in Hyde Park, on a Sunday in London. I'd seen them kissing, and I was like, “Oh, what's that?” I didn't understand it. That was it. That was all I had.

MI: So, it really wasn't something you grew up being exposed to at all. So how did this impact [inaudible] because I know something that you said is, during your time, especially at Gann, you want to be a role model for others? Can you give me an example of how you've been this role model for others?

ST: Sure. I was the faculty advisor for the Gay-Straight Alliance, which became known as Open House at Gann. I basically had a lot of kids who came out to me, and I would help them navigate that process. In some cases, I was the first adult that they came out to, or I was the first teacher that they came out to. So, one or the other, it was a meaningful moment in their lives, of how to navigate school, how to navigate their lives, how to have conversations with other people, what did that mean, what did that look like, and for some of them, they were conversations about “How do I be Jewish and gay?” and not have to choose between those two things. Then I did a little bit at JCDS too, but the kids were much younger. So, it was much more prevalent at Gann, I would say. I was in *Hineini*, and so when *Hineini* came out, there were some presentations and talks, and so kids would come up to me there, too.

MI: Now that you brought up *Hineini* again, I think I'll go ahead and ask you a little bit more about that. How did you become involved in it, and how did you make that decision? Because I know you said when it was happening, you weren't publicly out. How did you decide to put yourself out there for this project?

ST: I think it was because I realized the potential impact it could have, in really elevating the conversation about what it means to be Jewish and gay, about getting the Jewish community to confront it. I guess I felt ready. I felt it was a leap. I remember thinking, “Oh my god, this is the thing that people are going to know about me before they know anything else,” which it was. I even met somebody just three days ago, for the first time, and she said to me, “Oh, I feel like I've known you for years. I watched you in *Hineini*.” So, I think it was – the woman that I was dating at the time also was very encouraging, and I knew it was the right thing to do. I wanted to make it easier for kids who would come out after me. I wanted to – in *Hineini*, I think I talked about how I want to make the ground more fertile for people like me, and for the people who would come after us. That the Jewish community wouldn't be so difficult to navigate, and that no longer would people need to make a choice. So, I think [inaudible] and also, I had lived through the experience. In the early stages at Gann, I wasn't out. There was a very famous, for me anyway, a well-known – and it's talked about in *Hineini* – the first Beit Midrash discussion we had about Judaism and homosexuality. I moderated that conversation, but I wasn't out when I moderated it. But subsequent to that, there were conversations in the formation of the Open House. So, then I came out in that process. So, the movie was made a few years later. So, I was already out in many more places. I wasn't out nationally, but I was out in my community, and so that made it easier also.

MI: So, it seemed like when it was being produced, you weren't as out as you were when it came out. So, when the film came out, you were much more comfortable with your identity.

ST: Correct. By the time that happened – because the film only came out in 2004. So, once I was – I think it was in the fall of 2004, that it was shown in film festivals everywhere. Once I had come out to my parents, which I had done a few years prior to that, I was almost not in the closet at all except with my extended family, which took until basically I got married to come out to everybody. But yes, I was significantly further along in that process by the time the movie was actually produced, because it was discussing things from the late ‘90s, and it was being made in the early 2000s.

MI: So that film came out in 2004, and I know you said you got married in 2005. Then it only took a decade from there for same-sex marriage to go from basically something that not a lot of people supported to something that was legal across the country. What do you think it was that made [inaudible]? What do you think it was in the national environment that allowed for that change to happen?

ST: I think more and more people coming out. Number one, I think just visibility, number one, and number two, my guess would be the work of the Human Rights Campaign, which my wife and I support, and also the work of Keshet, which my wife and I support. So, I think those two organizations, along with really, people wanting to be out, and once you know somebody who's LGBTQ, it makes it much harder to be homophobic, because the otherness of people disappears as people actually get to know individuals, real people. They learned, “Oh, they're just like us.” I think the courage of the judge in Massachusetts, who passed gay marriage, and then heterosexual people across the world, all across the United States, got to see, “Oh, actually, if gay people are married, that means nothing about my marriage. There's no threat here.” I think that also had an impact.

MI: So, it seems like a lot of what changed the perception, was that a lot of the arguments against same-sex marriage were undermined by the fact that same-sex marriages were happening, and that literally the only thing that was changing was that

these couples now had a right that they didn't have otherwise. It didn't take away from anything else.

ST: Right. I think there were seeds of it happening already. So, it just kind of exploded. But it didn't explode out of nothing, right? Keshet was working, Human Rights Campaign was working. Same-sex marriage was in Massachusetts, and it was in Iowa; it was in a few states already. It wasn't just Massachusetts by 2015. So, there was a grassroots bubbling, and people who live on the [inaudible], who sit on the Supreme Court, at least in that age, I'm not sure about right now, but in that age, wanted to be on the right side of history.

MI: Right. Thank you so much for being so open on this topic. I'm now going to move on to asking you more specifically about your time at Gann. So, I noticed that you spent over a decade there. Why do you think you stayed as long as you did?

ST: It was an amazing place. It was very exciting. It was doing cutting-edge educational work. Danny Lehmann, who was the founder of Gann, really, is just a visionary. I think it was just a wonderful place to be, and it allowed me to continue to grow and change and develop, because I was on the founding faculty, along with your teacher, Jonathan Krasner, by the way. There were six of us who were teaching there in the first year. By the second year, I was Department Chair. I was in my late twenties, mid to late twenties, [and] I was a department chair? That's not how things happen. But it was a new school, and so there was a lot happening. Then, five years or six years after that, I became Associate Head of School. So, within my time, my fourteen years, I had different roles and different responsibilities. I also had gotten my PhD in that time, got married in that time, so there was a lot happening.

MI: What was it like for you to be given a position of leadership so early in your career, as a department head?

ST: I didn't really know anything different, and so it was exciting. But I didn't know enough to be nervous. Yet that came when I was named as Associate Head of School, a bit, I knew enough to be humbled by the experience. Also, I was worried as an out Jew that that would cause harm to Gann. There was one family that didn't come. I know of at least one who didn't come because of that. But at that point, Danny Lehmann said to me [that] he thought that I was worth the investment, and it didn't matter that I was married to Jen. Yes, so it happened. I think that was much more when I had a sense of like, “Wow, there was a lot on the line,” because I was becoming a face of an organization. This was 2005. It wasn't like there were so many gay people in leadership positions in the Jewish community, and I represented Gann at various places, and I was very publicly out. So, it wasn't like Gann would be able to hide that in any way, and Danny wasn't interested in hiding it. But still, that was what I was much more nervous about than stepping into the leadership position as a Tanach department chair, because we were having so much fun, it was an experiment, this school was one year old. By the time I became Associate Head in 2005, we were in our Gann Academy place, and it was very different.

MI: What was it like for you to help build Gann, from the bottom up? Because I know you were there, basically, right from the beginning, weren't you?

ST: I was. I was, I think, something like, maybe the third, fourth, fifth person hired. It was incredible. It was an amazing, amazing experience. First of all, because Danny Lehmann gave me a lot of room to experiment and to grow. He is such a provocative and inspiring educator, and he hired amazing teachers and people who thought so deeply about this subject matter and cared so much about kids. So, it was a happening place. It really was that the potential of the Boston Jewish community was being realized in this venture. So, I'm so honored and so fortunate to have been a part of that.

MI: Well, can you tell me more about Danny Lehmann as a leader and his impact on you?

ST: Yes, well, he was really the first one to teach me about pluralism as an ideology. I was always pluralistic, but I didn't have any language for it or knew of its significance. So, that was really the beginning of my developments. He really was courageous in how he set out. He confronted things, and he talked about things, and he pushed himself to grow, and he pushed other people to grow. I'm really fortunate that I met him so early in my years, so that he could have such an impact, because it's so much harder to unlearn than to learn. So, I learned from an expert at the outset.

MI: Who were the people other than him that you felt best supported you while you were working at Gann?

ST: Well, (Rabbi Harry Sinach?) was the Talmud department chair when I was Tanach Department chair, so we worked together a lot, and it wasn't so much like there was active support as much as there was just an environment that was hustling and bustling, and the kids were engaged, and the faculty was engaged. There were forty-eight kids when we started, and six teachers. So, it was [inaudible]. We were involved in an enterprise. We were involved in a startup. So, it wasn't so much that there was that much support around as there was drive, passion, and excitement to make something happen.

MI: Why do you think you guys were able to succeed so well, to the extent that you did, because I know, obviously, Gann is still around today, and I'm guessing it's gotten much bigger?

ST: Yes, it is. It is much, much bigger. There are hundreds of kids that go there now, and we have graduates who are doing amazing work in the world. I think it really was Danny's vision of excellence, and Judaic studies being as serious as General Studies, and that he hired well; he knew what he was doing. That was the blueprint. Then, Marc Baker, who also is a charismatic, thoughtful leader, took over. So, I got to work with Marc for a few years. So, I think the leadership there was just great.

MI: So, it was very much about the people for you.

ST: Yes, very much. About the kids and about the teachers. Yes, very much, and the parents, who were willing to take a risk on a new school.

MI: What do you think inspired the parents to be willing to take that chance, especially when Gann first opened?

ST: I think they wanted a Jewish environment for their high school kids and didn't want it to be Orthodox.

MI: That makes a lot of sense. Why was pluralism so important to Gann? Was that a niche in the Boston area that had not been filled, that there was an opportunity to?

ST: Well, that's for sure that that was, but also, I think it was Danny Lehmann's vision of what he wanted a school to be. He wanted a school that was serious about grappling with differences in the Jewish community, not just push them under the rug or pretend we were all the same. But he wanted to highlight that and really show how that was a strength for us.

MI: How was Gann able to do that? Because I feel like it's much easier for any Jewish institution to define themselves with one movement or another. Why did Gann decide to go with pluralistic, and how did that end up working?

ST: They hired Danny Lehmann; that's how they decided to go with pluralistic because [that] was what he wanted. It was very clear that this was an experiment in the best sense of that word. I think Danny was very influenced by John Dewey's vision of education, of really integrating things. The kids were part of this experiment. I remember, in the early days, we had a three-hour meeting with the six of us, with Danny, and with Leah Solomon, who was kind of an administrative type person in the early years. We sat with the kids, and we tried to figure out what would it mean for us to do Shabbat together.

How are we going to –? We're going to have a Shabbaton – how we were going to do that as a community. It was a Friday, late morning, early afternoon, when Shabbat was that night. We sat around, and we thought about it, and we talked about it, and we thought about it. Those conversations were amazing, and they strengthened community, when you didn't just say to the kids, “Okay, this is what was going to be,” but you actually talked to them about what they wanted and why, and how do we navigate different people needing different things? What were the decisions going to be?

MI: So, it seemed like there were a lot of questions that needed to be answered, and it was the group of people that was there that was able to answer those questions. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the GSA at Gann. Did no such organization exist? How was the need for that recognized? Did students come to you? Did they tell you that they thought that this organization should exist?

ST: Yes, there were four of us who were, I think, out to each other and there was Shulamit Izen, who was a high school student who was adamant that we were going to do this and so she – the people in the movie were the people that were really around, so Jon Krasner, (Jess Kimowitz?), Gina Fried, and I. They basically went to us and said, “We want to do this." So, Gina really took the lead, and she met with Danny and talked with Danny a lot. As I had some ambivalence, because I always held the Tanach department, and I was aware that there was a difference between General Studies and Jewish Studies. Everybody else was on General Studies for school, and I didn't know if that was going to be different, and I was scared, but I really did want to serve children. I mean, that's part of being a high school educator, is that you facilitate children's journeys and their lives and their learning. I wanted to play a role in that, and I couldn't, being in the closet. So, as I was coming out, this Open House, the GSA, was forming. We got the name Open House from the Open House in Jerusalem, the place in Jerusalem, the LGBTQ place, is called Open House. So, we named ourselves Open House also and started having meetings. Then, as you know, Gina left the school, and other people

moved on. So, I became the lone person. Once, I would say, the world calmed down a little bit about LGBTQ stuff, it was like the Open House, the GSA, and Gann. We weren't allowed to be called the Gay-Straight Alliance in the beginning.

MI: So, you called yourself Open House, right? You called yourself Open House rather than a Gay-Straight Alliance?

ST: Yes. We weren't allowed to because they were worried about what are we going to be. Where are we going to be? What advocates? In the beginning, there was this whole discussion about not advocating but being allowed to kind of be together and talk, and so it was all an evolution.

MI: So, would you [say] it went from being primarily about support to being more about advocacy later on?

ST: Yes.

MI: What was it like to make that change? Did it just happen over time?

ST: I think it happened over time. As people sort of got used to the idea and saw that it wasn't a threat, and that kids became more and more confident in themselves, and impatient. We wanted to do it. When in my later years, the GSA did a day of silence, kind of as a symbol of what it means when LGBTQ people are in the closet, and we don't hear their voices, and what that was like. It was a very powerful, meaningful day for me, and, I think for other kids, to see what that meant.

MI: What was the reaction of other students to this Day of Silence? I've seen it done in other places, but I'm curious what it was like in a Jewish setting.

ST: I would say most were kind of untouched. Some found it very, very powerful, and a very small minority were mad about it, were angry about it.

MI: So, other than your work with *Hineini* and in founding this organization, Open House, what was something else that you worked on at Gann that you feel proud of?

ST: The Tanach curriculum, the whole Bible program.

MI: Can you tell me more about how that came to be?

ST: Yes. I mean, in the early years, it was just me. So, I started [inaudible]. I wanted to do the teaching of Bible in a different way from how it's generally done in Jewish day schools. So, in the first year, kids did a lot of really Biblical Hebrew grammar and getting into the literary aspects of just the text itself. Then in tenth, eleventh grade, they did traditional Jewish interpretations, like Rashi and Rashbam and Ibn Ezra, and then in twelfth grade, I introduced critical biblical scholarship, source criticism, and the idea that people wrote the Torah, not God. Once exposed to that, we then sort of put everything together, put the literary stuff in the close reading, along with the Jewish interpretation, and along with critical studies, and kids present, [they] did a final project that brought all of it together.

MI: Did your own upbringing at a Jewish day school inspire you to help create this new curriculum to teach Tanach?

ST: Absolutely not. My day school experience was kind of traditional in the sense of we didn't even know what was Rashi, and what was actually the Tanach like; they were all taught one of the same. A Hebrew teacher taught it, not a Bible person; an Israeli who had some background but wasn't trained as a Bible person.

MI: So, you'd say that your time at Jewish day school as a student inspired you more with what not to do rather than what you wanted to include?

ST: In terms of pedagogy. I think it helped inspire my love of Tanach, but not in terms of the methodological approach. That was much more informed by my graduate experience,

and not wanting kids from Jewish day schools to go to colleges and learn this idea that people wrote the Torah, and feel like they had been lied to and betrayed in day schools.

MI: That makes a lot of sense. So, you wanted to have that concept introduced before taking a Jewish history class at a college or university?

ST: Exactly. Our kids went off to colleges, and I wanted to introduce this to them while they were still in a Jewish setting that actually cared about that.

MI: Before I move on to JCDS and your hiring process for that, are there any other stories from Gann that you wanted to tell?

ST: I don't think there were any more stories. I just think it was such a creative, bustling place, and ideas were so encouraged. I mean, it really was amazing. It was an amazing time.

MI: It must have been, as I started with, the topic that you stayed so long, considering it was your first real job, right?

ST: Right. Absolutely.

MI: So, moving on officially to JCDS, and how you got hired there. Why did you decide to pursue that position after working at Gann for so long?

ST: I decided to pursue the position for a couple reasons. One, I never thought I was going to leave Gann; I thought I was going to spend my entire career at Gann. But I worked with somebody very closely who potentially was leaving, and the idea of her leaving kind of opened up – it sounds weird, but kind of opened up the possibility of like, “Oh, people can really kind of move on from here.” She was somebody I was very close with, and I really respected, and I started thinking, “Oh, well, maybe I should think about not staying in one institution for my whole life.” That was number one. Number two was, I

really was having a growing interest in professional development in general, our faculty, and also in board work and development work. You can't do that as an Associate Head; that really is the work of a Head of School. I wanted a chance to kind of go out on my own. I think I had grown as far as I could in those fourteen years. I had done different jobs, but I had gotten to the end of what was possible in growing. So, I wasn't sure. I didn't necessarily feel totally ready, and I wasn't sure that I wanted to do it. But I kind of just applied to JCDS to see what would happen, to see what it felt like to go through an application process.

MI: What was the hiring process like?

ST: We had to submit an educational philosophy, a letter of interest in educational philosophy. Then I had an initial interview with the head of the search, with the head of the organization, I guess, that had been hired, the consultant that was running the search. Then they weeded out, I guess, people, and so then I became a semifinalist. So, I had a meeting with a search committee, a multi-hour meeting. Then, when I became a finalist, I was invited back for three days of meetings with different stakeholder groups. So, I met the teachers, I met with some kids, I met the parents, I met with the board, I met with the leadership team, a whole group of different kinds of meetings. Then I was offered the job.

MI: How different was it being a Head of School compared to Associate Head of School?

ST: Completely. There was a chasm between being a number two and being a number one.

MI: Tell me more.

ST: First of all, the level of responsibility is entirely different. I worked very, very hard as an Associate Head of School. But the job of being a Head of School is a 24/6 job, thank God for Shabbat, and the level of responsibility of just the buck stopping with you at

every moment. You can never not be the Head of School, wherever you go, whatever you do. Whether you're shopping in Brookline, eating in a kosher restaurant, picking your kid up, whatever you're doing at a party. You always are the Head of School. It's a very, very public position.

MI: I've heard similar stories from people who are rabbis, that they have trouble relating to the people that they work with, because they always see them as their rabbi. Is it similar for you as Head of School?

ST: Yes. I mean, we certainly made some friends in that time at the school who we're still close with. But yes, for the large majority. Yes, you're always on, you're always on.

MI: Does your daughter go to the school that you were the head of while you were the head?

ST: She does. She does. Yes, she was there. She came in my fourth year. So yes, years four through nine, she was there, K through fifth grade. Yes, when I was being considered after, I think after the semifinal round, I said to the co-head of the search committee, “When are you going to ask about me being married to a woman, and being out as a lesbian?” She said, “We're not going to ask that,” and I said, “How come?” I said, “Is it that you all don't care? Or you don't want to care?” She said, “A little bit of both,” and I said, “Okay.” So, it was very interesting. I didn't know whether that was going to make it impossible for me to actually become the Head. Because there was nobody. Nobody had done it in the country. So, it was going to take a school courageous enough to make that choice.

MI: Do you think that's something that Jewish organizations, or organizations as a whole, should strive for when it comes to LGBTQ inclusion? Like, should it be something that is more of an afterthought, or do you think that it's something that should be asked about?

ST: I think it should be asked about not as a function of “we want to exclude you,” but as a function of “it's an important part of who you are as a human being as you walk through the world.” Right? So, the fact that I'm part of the LGBTQ community is a part of who I am. My feeling of discrimination in the world has built my empathy. My feeling of what it is to be accepted has propelled in me a desire to open the doors widely to the Jewish community. So, I think it should be discussed as part of a process, not because of any kind of wanting to, and not out of concern, but just simply out of what it is, in the same way, as you might say to somebody, “What does your husband [do]?” if [you’re a] straight person who's a woman, “What does your husband do?” Wouldn't [it just] be part of the getting-to-know-you process?

MI: Makes sense to me. So it seems like you do think it's important that it's talked about. Do you think when it comes to acceptance of members of the LGBTQ community, within Jewish spaces, what do you think is the best way [inaudible]? Do you think it should be normalized, or do you think it should be treated as something that makes you more [inaudible] – not really more, but different?

ST: I think it should be totally normalized. But normalized and not ignored. Because normalized is straight people talk about being straight all the time. They come in from their weekend, and they talk about what they did with their husband, or their wife, or their kids. They refer to their partner in ways that, for a long time, LGBTQ people couldn't. So, I think yes, I think it should be normalized. I think it should be just part of the conversation. Because, as many, many, many other people have noted before me, hiding takes energy. I was just listening to the “On Being” podcast with Krista Tippett, and the person she was interviewing said, “A shamed mind, somebody ashamed, isn't available. A shamed mind is not available to learn.” So, the more that we can normalize things, the easier it is for people to navigate, the less energy to have to spend on those types of issues, the more creative, the better version of themselves they will be for whatever organization they're working for, and therefore for the Jewish community as a whole.

MI: That makes sense. Something that I've heard that I'm curious if you accept or refute, is that when people come out, should the desired response be apathy, like not caring? Does that show a level of society that it's been normalized, or do you think that could be a problem?

ST: Well, apathy is never – I think if somebody is still coming out, then you want to be met with warmth and support and love. Because the person themself has still needed to navigate their internalized homophobia and all the other things that they've had to come through. So, if somebody is actually in the act of coming out, then I think it can both be normalized and not be apathetic. Right. “Thank you for trusting me. I'm so glad you're sharing. You're open enough and feel safe enough to share this important part of yourself with me. It, of course, makes no difference to how I feel about you, save for the fact that I feel closer to you now. But it doesn't jeopardize any warm feelings that I had towards you.” You know what I mean? You can both be normalized and be supportive and loving.

MI: Yes, I totally agree. I definitely understand what you're saying.

ST: I have to say, in my early years, when kids would come out to me, I would say, “Mazel Tov,” because that was a big moment. Now, if I come across somebody, and they say, “Oh, my wife did –” I don't say “Mazel Tov” to them. I just also say, "Oh, my wife did –” you know, whatever. It's just kind of much more natural.

MI: That's something that I've definitely experienced myself. I remember that, while I was still living in Chicago, I met with a rabbi who is married to another woman, and she just casually said, “My wife,” and I just sort of accepted that.

ST: Exactly. Exactly. It wasn't apathetic, it was just normalized.

MI: Exactly. Yes. So, going back to your role at JCDS, who would you say helped encourage you to make this move for your career? To go from being Associate Head of School at Gann, a place where you are comfortable, to being the Head of School at a

place where you weren't as familiar.

ST: Cheryl Finkel, who was then working with a program called DSLTI, Day School Leadership Training Institute, definitely talked to me. But I think my friends at Gann encouraged me to do it, and my wife, Jen, encouraged me to do it, and I really was more internally motivated. I believe that I had something to contribute. So, I wanted to put my educational philosophy into practice.

MI: Makes sense. So, it felt like you, while you were at Gann, developed that philosophy? Then, when you got to JCDS, you are sort of able to execute in a way that you had not been previously?

ST: Yes. I mean, it's very different educating five through thirteen-year-olds than it is fourteen- to eighteen-year-olds. So, thinking about what did pluralism mean for younger kids, there wasn't a lot of work happening systematically on the elementary school level, or the middle school, the K through 8 level … So, I think it was a very different enterprise. I had to learn a lot of things about what it meant to run a school, but I also spent a lot of time thinking about, “Okay, what does it mean to raise children who could participate in conversations where differences were encouraged and not avoided?”

MI: We're coming up on the end of the questions that I had prepared. The last thing that I wanted to ask about JCDS was what were some of your biggest accomplishments and challenges while working as a Head of School?

ST: Some of the biggest challenges, I think, were when a couple of – two different points in my career there. The first being just three months in, a beloved faculty member died. I think it was very challenging to lead a community and hold their grief. Similarly, when Trump was elected, was a very challenging leadership moment. When the massacre, the tragedy of Pittsburgh in the Etz Chaim [Tree of Life] Synagogue happened, and how to handle that, and race relations, all of that was interconnected at JCDS, that was

challenging. I think we didn't do enough around Israel education. So, I think that those were some of the challenges. Some of the things that I'm most proud about, I would say, we developed a concept of a pluralism of engagement, and habits upon mind, and that character education was as important as quote/unquote “academics,” and that we really lived into what it meant to teach a whole human being and a whole child, and what we wanted for that child, and that child's life, and providing a foundation for them not just for high school, but really for living for their lived experience. What statement we made about LGBTQ inclusion, just by living every day, and I think, along with bringing in really the idea of a growth mindset, so the habits of mind and heart of being a pluralistic human being and having a growth mindset, and what that meant for the organization at every level. Those things. And then I would say, moving JCDS from being a reactive institution to being a proactive institution, becoming a strategic organization – what did that mean? What did that look like? I had fantastic teammates to do that with. I was so blessed to hire some of them and to have, from before, just some of the most incredible, dedicated educators who understood what we were educating toward, and who helped me bring that vision to life.

MI: One of the things that I noticed you brought up was a lot of things where you couldn't ignore what was happening in the real world. Did you notice that happening a lot more during your time at JCDS as compared to your time at Gann, just because of how the world changed?

ST: I think so. I think so. I mean, I think when we were doing the LGBTQ stuff at Gann, we really were doing it before the world had kind of gotten there. At JCDS, I think part of its intentional pluralism, and where I, and where we all took that, I think was based on my experiences at Gann, looking at the world, and also really wanting kids not just to be transmitters of Judaism, but also to be transformers. What that meant, to give children the experiences that will enable them to be changemakers in the world, was very important to me. I think, quite frankly, it was born of where we began, thinking about

apartheid South Africa and seeing that the world was complicated and had some things that really needed to change, even as we celebrated the good. So JCDS was a mix of tremendous joy and a desire to help kids understand that they have an obligation to improve our world, and that, yes, they should learn math. Yes, they should learn to read. Yes, they should learn science and Tanach. But they also needed ways of being, habits of heart and mind, that would equip them to navigate difficult conversations, both personal ones and communal ones, and that they had a serious – we taught them about communal responsibility, so that they would understand that it was their obligation to do their part, to improve our world. That's what we were doing. We taught it mindfully, repeatedly, and explicitly. It wasn't that we wanted them to learn those lessons by osmosis; we actually explicitly taught them. So, it was an amazing place to have the honor of leading.

MI: Yes, it sounds like you were able to make it more into something that you had a vision for.

ST: I hope so.

MI: Then I know that you are no longer in the position; you are now at Hebrew College. Was there something that led to that transition, or was it just a position that opened up that you couldn't say no to?

ST: I was looking for my next challenge. Nine years seemed like a good amount of time. Close to ten years was a good amount of time to be involved with the organization. It's a demanding job, and I also wanted to do something that could have an impact in the Boston Jewish community, but wider than just a swath of day schools. So Hebrew College allows for that.

MI: That's great. I really like the mindset that you encourage, of not wanting to be – even if you are enjoying what you do – not wanting to be in the same place for too long. Do

you encourage that in general, or do you feel like it was just happenstance for you?

ST: Oh, no. Theo Epstein, who was the general manager of the Boston Red Sox –

MI: Theo Epstein, did you say? I was thinking about him the whole time when you were talking about that, because I'm from Chicago originally. I more know him from the Cubs and when he left last year.

ST: That's right. That's his vision. That you can contribute, and I saw that there were places either that I wanted to grow, and that it's good for an organization to have different leadership to bring out different aspects of their reality, for each organization to grow in different ways, which I think is healthy for them.

MI: Yes, definitely. I just think it was really funny. We were both thinking about that idea. It took us a while to bring it up. So, those are all the questions that I have for you today. I really appreciate you telling me your story, both about how you grew up and came to Jewish education as a career, how you became active as an activist for queer Jews, your time at Gann Academy, and how you grew there, and what it was like being the Head of School and being as representational as you are.

ST: Thank you. It was an honor and a pleasure.

MI: All right. Thank you so much, Susie. Have a good rest of your day, and Shabbat shalom.

ST: Shabbat shalom. Thank you, Mitchell. Bye-bye.