

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN GREENSPUN**

An Oral History Conducted by Barbara Tabach

---

Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project  
Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

©Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2014

Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries

Director: Claytee D. White

Project Manager: Barbara Tabach

Transcriber: Kristin Hicks

Interviewers: Barbara Tabach, Claytee D. White

Editors and Project Assistants: Maggie Lopes, Maggie Bukowski, Shannon Nutt

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grant. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project*.

Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

## PREFACE



Photo credit: Culture Dog Films website. Robin Greenspun at work directing.

Robin Greenspun has lived in Las Vegas since she was a toddler. In 1952, her parents Maury and Muriel Stevens left Philadelphia in the rearview mirror and soon established roots in Las Vegas. Her parents would each establish themselves in the community as creative talents. Maury as an advertising executive and also as a television production company owner. He would produce Muriel's local live cooking show. She would also write a longtime cooking column for the Las Vegas Sun.

Robin's aspirations shifted from a childhood dream to be a ballerina to art and then accepted her father's job offer that over the years has bloomed into a highly respected career in film and documentary.

Robin is married to Danny Greenspun and considered a cultural leader in Las Vegas. She has spearheaded film festivals, is on the board of the Black Mountain Institute, and a generous philanthropic spirit.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Robin Greenspun  
February 9, 2017  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Barbara Tabach

Preface.....iv

Speaks about what she knows of her paternal family ancestry from Eastern Europe; Susson surname; Philadelphia. Maternal side was based in Virginia; Gadirov. Born in Philadelphia (1952); family moved West in 1954; Las Vegas becomes home.....1 – 5

Resided on McWilliams Street; moved to Scotch 80s and attended Howard Wasden Elementary School. As a youngster, she met Danny, her future husband, at Temple Beth Sholom. Talks about attending Hebrew school.....6 – 9

Father, Maury Stevens, who worked in advertising and public relations; attributes her father with being an early leader to bring cultural events to Las Vegas. Mother, Muriel Stevens, was known for her cooking; Maury showcased her in a live TV cooking show; mentions Nat Hart Cooking School. Memories of her mother’s dishes and Passover Seders at friends’ homes. Mentions Steve and Eydie Gorme, Shecky Greene, Totie Fields.....10 – 18

Post-high school years, enrolled at University of Nevada, Reno; then San Diego State. Goes to work for her father, first at his ad agency, then for his television production enterprise, Trans American Video. Paul Anka first directorial job. Jerry Lewis Telethon experience.....19 – 22

Marries Danny in 1980; traditional Jewish wedding. Two children. Retail owner attempts. More recently owns film production company, Culture Dog Films.....23 – 28



# Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project

## UNLV University Libraries

### Use Agreement


Name of Narrator: ROBIN GREENSPUN

Name of Interviewer: BARBARA TABACH

We, the above named, give to the Oral History Research Center of UNLV, the recorded interview(s) initiated on 02-09-2017 along with typed transcripts as an unrestricted gift, to be used for such scholarly and educational purposes as shall be determined, and transfer to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude the right of the interviewer, as a representative of UNLV, to use the recordings and related materials for scholarly pursuits.

I understand that my interview will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, distributed, placed on the Internet or broadcast in any medium that the Oral History Research Center and UNLV Libraries deem appropriate including future forms of electronic and digital media.

There will be no compensation for any interviews.

 2/9/17  
Signature of Narrator Date

 2/9/17  
Signature of Interviewer Date

Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries  
4505 S. Maryland Parkway, Box 457010, Las Vegas, NV 89154-7010  
702.895.2222

**Today is February ninth, 2017. This is Barbara Tabach and I'm sitting with Robin Greenspun in the Reading Room at Special Collections at UNLV Libraries. We're going to talk about Southern Nevada Jewish history and heritage.**

I don't know where I fit in.

**Oh, yes, you do. You married into a *Vegas-y* family that's for sure.**

That's true.

**But we're going to start because you have your own distinctive background and family ties to the community. What do you know about your family heritage? How far back can you go in roots? Get me from wherever that is to the United States. Do you know anything about that travel?**

I don't have a lot of information. My husband has more. I should have been more prepared and brought what he has from Ancestry-dot-com. I know that on my father's side we're from Russia although I have a cousin who explores things and now it turns out maybe we're also from Poland. There's like twelve other things that he's finding out. My mother's family...I'm not quite sure. The background I have on them is actually from Virginia. So I'm not sure. I know that there's lots of information somewhere; I don't have it. I do have, as I say, through Ancestry and through an uncle of my mother's who did a genealogical chart, which, again, I could have brought, which I didn't do.

**We can always do an appendix to supplement this.**

Yes, I will. I'll look up all that stuff for you for both sides of the family because we do have a lot and I just don't have it in my head.

**So it's basically Eastern European.**

But Eastern European, most recent on my father's side. My Grandfather Simon, when he came

over, his name coming through Ellis Island became Susson, S-U-S-S-O-N; however, as everybody knows, names changed. Hard to know what the actual name was. We believe it was Schushon, but became Susson. I can't remember how many relatives he had. But Simon was my grandfather on my father's side and Mary was his wife. Again, somewhere I have all the genealogy on Ancestry. That's my husband's department.

**Somebody has to be the history keeper of the family. So where did they land, what part of the United States?**

They were in Philadelphia, my father's side. My mother was Virginia. She has fond memories of aunts and everybody else in Myrtle Beach, Virginia. That's where she would go to visit her relatives. My Grandfather Jack, her father, the only thing we can trace back on him is that as a youth, a very young man, I think before his teens, actually was in a youth home, a home for wayward boys in Philadelphia. That's as far back as we can trace him. So I'm not quite sure the rest because he and my grandmother were divorced fairly early. My mom was pretty young when they divorced. She was old enough to remember him. They did not stay in touch for many years although I now have some things from him because when he died he left everything to her, which was in a shoebox, which all it was was his driver's license and a few other things, not much.

**Interesting way to discover those connections, isn't it?**

Yes, yes. My brother knew him. He did come to visit, I guess, when my brother was younger. My brother is seven years older. We were living in Philadelphia at the time. He says Jack was a very nice man. My mother always called him a monster. So hard to know. I never met him. I don't know. Anyway, so Jack was her father. I just don't know the information. Everything was pretty sketchy about him.



I do know that my mother's side of the family...I'm trying to think. I can't remember off the top of my head what my grandmother's maiden name. I have it written down somewhere. But my mother's maiden name, Gadirov, so it was Jack Gadirov, which again we think was changed. It started out as something else and ended up as Gadirov.

**Did she grow up religiously Jewish?**

My mother? No, no. My father did, which, again, is interesting because my father was from this family that did come over basically as a unit from Eastern Europe and lived in a Philadelphia ghetto of Jews and was part of this major network of cousins and relatives. In fact, they had what was called the Cousins' Club, which I think was a pretty standard thing in those days on the East Coast. There are pictures of these hundreds and hundreds of people that would come to these Cousin Club meetings. I have a cousin who is very much into our heritage and he travels the world looking for relatives and has found them all over the world, which is pretty funny, people that never knew that they were related to us and maybe they aren't really, but we think they are. So that's his thing.

**You look for the family resemblance.**

Yes. So that was his thing. So on my mother's side, they were very American very quickly. I believe her mother and her mother's sisters—I think there were five sisters—were all born in the United States. So they had been here for a while. I don't remember how far we can trace them back to where they came from on her side. My mother's side is much more muddled than my father's side; that's pretty clear as far as where everybody came from.

**Now, do you have much memory of Philadelphia?**

Not really. I was very young when my father decided that he was done with the East Coast. He actually was a sales manager for a company that was selling wonderful new products made out

of acrylic. Those were the days that now there was furniture, acrylic chairs and accessories and all of that. The showroom burnt to the ground and he took that as a sign it was time to just move on. So he got a job with a film company actually, with a movie company in sales, which was his thing. That was in Denver. So they packed us up—my brother, as I say, is seven years older than I am; I was a baby—and set out on the road to Denver. Got to Denver. My father decided that it was going to be too smoggy for him and he didn't want to be there. So he was able to get transferred to their Los Angeles office. So moved us to L.A. I have no recollection of Denver or L.A. I don't think we were in either one for long.

I know that my mother was in Philadelphia with my brother and me shortly after we moved; I was probably two at this point. My mother was with us in Philadelphia visiting family. She got a telegram from my father saying, "We don't live in L.A. anymore; we're moving to Las Vegas."

**He just told her.**

He just told her, yes. He said, "You're not coming back to L.A.; you're coming to Las Vegas." He went into public relations firm that had an opening and it sounded wonderful to him. He was in public relations, marketing and sales, and that was his thing. So she got off the plane in Las Vegas in the middle of the summer with two children.

**And that was in 1954.**

That was at some point in 1954 in the summer. So it was probably right before I turned three because I know it was in the summer. She got off the plane swearing that she would make his life miserable till the day he died for moving her to this godforsaken place. Then, of course, it took her a few years, but then she would never live anywhere else because Las Vegas was very good to her. So that's how we got here.

**So Las Vegas was home to you.**

Las Vegas was home to me, yes. I grew up here. It's really the only home I know. Yes, I visited Philadelphia many times with my parents. As it turns out—I didn't realize until my brother informed me—we actually—well, I remember the stories about my brother when I was probably still around two. I don't even know the time sequence and it's funny when I talk to him about it. He's fuzzy on it, too. My brother and I did spend I think it was about six months in Philadelphia. We're not sure exactly why. I have an uncle that says, "Oh, yes, that's the time when your parents were separated," which is what they told Bruce. I never knew that until my brother told me.

**It happens, doesn't it?**

So I guess at some point my parents were not getting along very well and they sent us to live with my grandparents in Philadelphia. I have a recollection through photos and I have a recollection through stories that one of my uncles—they all lived in Philadelphia—has told over the years about picking me up at nursery school and that I saw him and my reaction when I saw him. It never occurred to me that that happened in Philadelphia, not in Las Vegas until... Well, of course, it makes so much more sense. He wasn't here. He didn't move out here until much later. So obviously he was picking me up there. So there you go. So that's all I know about living in Philadelphia. Again, I have visited many, many times, not anymore because I don't have close relatives that are living there anymore. But I did for many, many years.

**What was the first neighborhood that you can remember growing up in?**

I remember growing up on East McWilliams Street. I remember my phone number, Dudley 23063. That was right at the base of Bonanza, which is no longer there, Bonanza Road and it must be Eastern now. So it was in that basic area. I don't even know what area we'd call that. Northeast Las Vegas? Southeast? Who knows?

**I don't even know where McWilliams is for sure.**

McWilliams is...Bonanza used to be a giant hill that would—in fact, they had soapbox derby races down Bonanza hill. Oh, yes, yes. It was a very famous hill. So it was at the base of that. I think it must have been close to Eastern and Bonanza. We were a little off of that. It's downtown almost. It would be east of the downtown area. But if you're on 95, to the right in the Charleston/Bonanza/that area, it's in that general vicinity.

**What was it like to grow up in that neighborhood?**

It was great. It was great. Everybody knew everybody else. They were little crackerjack boxes. My mother didn't drive when she got here, and she used to ride her bicycle everywhere until she finally learned to drive. So I don't know how we got around to be perfectly honest. I mean, my dad took us places, obviously. I was probably in elementary school before she started driving.

**That was that era I remember my mother not driving until I was probably twelve years old.**

Yes. We had public transportation, which there wasn't much of. But I think we just got rides everywhere. We walked to school. Nobody would think of driving to school.

**And what school would you have been going to?**

I was trying to remember what the name of the school was. I knew it for years. I don't even think it's there anymore. It was on Eastern and Charleston, I think—no. I'll have to look it up.

**You can add that. That's fine. Not a big deal.**

I had the name of it. It's always on the tip of my tongue and it never even occurred to me to look it up. I could have easily looked it up to tell you what the name of it was. It was an elementary school that I went to for a few years. I'm trying to think, what was it? Well, I'll figure it out.

**That's all right. Not to get hung up on that.**

No. I'll find the fame and I'll just shoot you an email and tell you what the name of it is and you can insert that. Insert here.

So we lived there for...I don't know how many years...long enough that probably at least...I was in kindergarten, first grade...probably second grade at that school. Then we moved to the Rancho/Charleston area, actually to the Scotch 80s, and that's the house that I remember the best. I went to what is now Howard Wasden Elementary; at that point was West Charleston Elementary School. So that's where I went. From there I went to Las Vegas Day School, the first year it ever opened, because at that time they were starting to bus kids to sixth grade centers and my parents were not going to hear about that. They didn't like that idea. Las Vegas Day School had just opened. So I started there in sixth grade. I was one of the first sixth graders. I was there for junior high basically; I was there for sixth, seventh and eighth. \*What was the Day School like? How many students were there? I haven't talked to anyone who's actually attended that. Well, it was in the middle of the desert. There was nothing there. It was just this school. I mean, they had buses to get us there and it was like an all-day trek. It was crazy because we were coming from all over the city. But it was interesting. What could I say? Mr. Daseler was the headmaster. It was a privately owned school; it still is. In fact, Neil Daseler, who now runs it, was my husband's classmate. He was just a fourth grader because I'm two years older than my husband. So my husband (Danny Greenspun) actually as it turned out was there at the same time I was. We both went to Las Vegas Day School together.

**Is that where you met?**

No. We actually knew each other before that. Our families knew each other through Temple Beth Sholom. There were very few Jewish families. One of the first things that my dad did, of course, was to find the temple, the synagogue, and join the synagogue. Through that and through

Sisterhood and all the Jewish organizations, my parents met all of the Greenspuns. I knew Danny from the time he was a little boy. We actually went to the same camp together, Camp Akela. But again, he was two years younger than I. I was still pretty young when I went to camp. But I knew his cousin Karen Greenspun, actually was one of my good friends. My mother was very close with Danny's aunt Belle Greenspun and we knew them better, spent more time with them than Hank and Barbara, but I have pictures of my parents from the early days with Hank and Barbara at events and stuff. Everybody was friends. So I knew him.

**It was a small community.**

It was a very small community. It really was.

**Do you have Hebrew school memories?**

Oh, vivid Hebrew school memories.

**Tell me about those.**

I refused to go. I think I went to Sunday school for, oh, I don't know, probably not even a year and I hated it. I was one of those—my mother wasn't in the least bit interested. My father was very religious. I did go to synagogue with him, but my mother never went. My mother's philosophy was *I believe in God; I believe in being Jewish; I can worship in my home as well as I can anywhere else*. So she did not come from a home where she had a father who would take her or a mother who was in the least bit interested. Although she definitely grew up being Jewish, it was not the kind of background that my dad had, which he came from a very, very religious family.

**So he was more spiritual and she was more secular in their foundation, I guess.**

Yes, yes, exactly. So when I announced to my mother at probably age—who knows what age—ten, nine, seven, whenever it was that I had to make some sort of a decision about whether I was

going to have a bat mitzvah, I said, "I have no interest whatsoever." I was into ballet. "I would rather just go to ballet classes." Okay, done, no problem.

My brother did have a bar mitzvah; it was very important to him. I missed his bar mitzvah because I had the measles. I remember it vividly. I remember the robe with the pink rosebuds on it that my mother bought for me as a present because I had to stay home. I didn't get to go to my brother's bar mitzvah.

**Did he have a big party and everything? What did they do back then?**

So back then the bar mitzvah was at Temple Beth Sholom and then they would do a luncheon afterwards. I don't think there were parties at night. I think it was all done with luncheons and things as far as I know. I know my brother's was. I don't think there was anything at night.

I've never asked Danny. I don't know what he did. I didn't go to his. The only pictures—I don't think they did anything different. I think everything was always at the synagogue because thinking back the only pictures I have of Danny from his bar mitzvah are at the synagogue and that was it.

Because my parents knew Hank and Barbara, my brother's bar mitzvah was in the social page. So I do have a copy of that. So that's how I learned about his bar mitzvah, from the photos and the big thing in the newspaper.

**Now, your parents' careers, talk about those a little bit.**

Well, my father had several advertising agencies. When he first came here, he ended up forming an agency with a commercial artist, fine artist, a guy named Rex Trimboth, and it was the Stevens Trimboth Agency. I don't know who their first clients were. I don't know how many clients they had.

I know very early on my dad ended up at the El Rancho doing public relations and

marketing for the El Rancho, and, in fact, was one of the first people on site when the El Rancho burned to the ground, the original. Yes, I've got pictures from that of him standing there. Yes, so he was one of the first ones there.

He continued at the hotels in PR and marketing, in many of the hotels. There is a question of whether he was the first entertainment director, but then immediately switched to director of publicity, or he may have just started as director of publicity, I'm not positive, at Caesars Palace when it first opened, but he wasn't there very long.

He just was one of those people that when...His philosophy was *if you get up in the morning and you're not happy about where you're going to work, change*, which was lovely for him, but a little unsteady for us because he did change jobs a lot. He was actually better off working for himself, which is what he finally ended up doing.

But he worked at the Frontier, the old Frontier. He worked at the Thunderbird hotel. He and Monte Proser, who was one of the founders of one of the clubs in New York [Copacabana], which I can't remember anymore, and was a show producer in New York, he and my father brought the first Broadway shows to Las Vegas. So the Thunderbird had two shows at one time, "Anything Goes" and "High Button Shoes." They did "Flower Drum Song," "South Pacific," I think. I can't remember what other ones. When he worked at Caesars, he brought in the Bolshoi Ballet, "Fiddler on the Roof" with Theodore Bikel. They did all kinds of special events and special performances and that was him bringing all of that into the hotels.

**So when you fast forward and you think about the Smith Center opening up here...**

My dad was actually one of the first to bring culture to the hotels, big regional and national and international shows, yes.

**That's great. And you were interested in ballet yourself?**



I was. I played the piano and I spent a lot of time at...I can't remember the name of the school. But my ballet mistress was Christina Carson and we shared a studio with...Oh, gosh, I can't remember the name of the woman whose studio it was. So it was just like day and night because one was tap and jazz, and then there was Miss Christina who was strictly classic ballet. Our performances were always in the same show. So it was the Starlights of nineteen whatever featuring...And then we had several very classic ballet numbers within this tap and jazz ensemble.

**So was this like your recital?**

Yes, the recitals.

**Where would those be?**

Those were at—everything was at Las Vegas High School. That was the only auditorium. The studios were downtown. Everything we did was basically in the downtown area because there wasn't anything anywhere else when we were growing up. Downtown was where the movie theaters were. Las Vegas High School auditorium was really where everybody did anything that had to do with recitals and all of that sort of stuff because it was the only theater, the only space that you could do it.

**Yes. And your mom, did she always have a career or when did she decide to go out on her own?**

My mother did modeling when she was younger before she met my dad. They were married when she was very young. She was eighteen when they got married. She did not work when they first got here. She had been cooking since the time she was a child because her father had left or was just gone and her mother was working all the time or out on dates or whatever. My grandmother was a pretty interesting woman. My mom basically raised her three younger

brothers from the time she was eight and that's when she started cooking. She had to get a stool to get up to the stove to cook, but that's when she started cooking. So she was a fabulous cook from the time my dad met her.

My dad was, again, always involved with something and was always in advertising. At some point—and I can't remember the year and I should know it—I think it was probably in the late sixties, he had an advertising agency, but he also was involved with a radio station. He decided to try and put my mom on the air with a cooking show.

**Was she interested in this?**

She was sort of interested. But actually the first thing that happened is she became an on-air woman newscaster, reporter with a man by the name of Alan Jarlson. I think it was KLAV. I have the photo. I think I may have given you photos.

**You may have. I haven't gone through all those materials yet.**

Yes, KLAV. So it started out—I take it back—it started out that she was a reporter, but like the first woman reporter in Las Vegas. Alan called her and said, "Hey, I've got this great thing for you. You are going to be the first woman on site for the atomic test." These were aboveground tests in those days. She knew enough to say, "Not my thing," and she didn't go, which was really smart. So that was when she decided, *eh, maybe reporting is not quite what I want to do*. That's when my dad came up with the concept of switching her to a radio talk show that dealt with everything from food to health issues to whatever. That's basically where she started that. I think I was in high school when she did that. I was the beginning of high school when she started.

**It seems like a lot of pockets of the United States that was a time when women would get those talk shows.**

Right.

**That was what women could do well.**

Right, right. From there she had a little cooking store, which was in the Boulevard Mall for a while, and then started doing her television show. That was at Channel 5. So it was a local show and it was live.

**Oh, wow. Really? I didn't realize it was live.**

Oh, yes, it was a live cooking show. Then eventually that turned into syndication. My dad at that point had gotten into the television production facilities company, Trans-American Video that he actually ran until he died. Merv Griffin, I think Merv bought the company after my dad was already doing Las Vegas—so he had Trans-American Video of Nevada, but it was actually out of Burbank, and they had these big remote trucks that traveled and did on-site productions, and that was all pretty new at that time. So any national television that came out of Las Vegas was usually done by Trans-American Video and by my dad. So that was everything from the major fights, Dick Clark used to do specials here. I remember in high school working on a Dick Clark special when I was in high school.

**When you worked on it, what did you do?**

Oh, I was a production assistant.

**You weren't out there dancing.**

Oh, no, no, no. I was always behind the scenes. My mother had tried to get me in front of a camera when she was doing her show at Channel 5 and then also when the show was going to go into syndication and I have horrible—not just stage fright, but, more importantly, about being in front of a camera, I don't do well. That's why I'm always behind the camera, behind the scenes. I don't remember why I was telling you that.

**Well, we were talking about your mom's career. So she became a celebrity chef.**

Well, she became a celebrity not only because of her cooking, but she became a cooking celebrity. She didn't have a restaurant, but she was the food expert and she was the food critic. She was it basically for Las Vegas at that point and that just continued. She became a writer, a columnist. She wrote for airline magazines and she led food tours with people. She did some with the university; the university always sets up these trips and they have experts that go with you, and my mom had many that she did through the university. She also did a lot with Nat Hart, who was the food and beverage manager at Caesars and the brainchild behind the Bacchanal and all of the first real gourmet rooms. He had a cooking school, the Nat Hart Cooking School at Caesars, and she basically was his partner in that, which is why you have in your files recipes and transcripts from their books and stuff.

**Yes. And we have Nat Hart's collection. The son keeps adding to it a little bit at a time, which is great.**

Good. Then you've got my mom's version here.

**Did she like doing it?**

Oh, I think she loved doing it and lived for it. My mother was all about learning new things, doing new things, but food related; that was her thing. She absolutely loved it. It was hard to get her to retire. She did not want to retire. She actually refused to retire. She was actually told, "We're retiring you," and she said, "No, you're not."

**What age was she?**

She was in her eighties. I think she was just turning eighty. It probably happened when she was in her late seventies and she basically refused. Then finally I think when she turned eighty...I mean, it was like she wouldn't move out of her office. It was crazy. We also now believe that she may have started to have the first symptoms of Alzheimer's about then and I think the whole idea

of any kind of change...But she was furious when she was told that it was time to retire.

**That is interesting.**

Yes. She did not tell it well and she would not move out of her office. I truly believe a lot of it had to do with the fact that she was starting to have symptoms that any kind of change was scaring her. She never shared any of that with us. To the day she died my mother never admitted that she had anything wrong with her.

**That's interesting. My father was similar. My father just passed away of complications due to Alzheimer's last fall. Leaving his career—he was a tailor—and his shop was really difficult. So that is an interesting observation. Thank you for sharing that. It gives me personal pause.**

Well, there are people I think that accept that there is something wrong with them, try to seek help for that, share that with their families; my mother was not one to do that. She was very proud and she was a perfectionist. I would say a textbook narcissist in many ways, which is not a bad thing.

**No, it's not.**

That's how you get perfectionists. So it was very hard for her to deal with that kind of a change and the fact that she wasn't in control. It was horrible for her.

**Well, everybody has wonderful memories about her. That was clear with her recent passing. So at home for dinner what was your favorite meal that she would prepare? Did you have a favorite?**

She made a fabulous brisket. Thanksgivings were always incredible. Every holiday was incredible. She did a lot of work with Sisterhood when she first came, which is how she met a lot of people at Temple Beth Shalom. She taught them all how to make hamantashen. It's funny

because there are people that are my age, some are a little younger actually, who say to me, "Oh, I remember your mother coming to my house with Sisterhood and my mother cooking with her and she taught me how to make hamantashen." Who knew? I didn't know. As far as I was concerned, she was my mom.

Everything was amazing, but the problem was she was always experimenting, too. My brother and I would just say, "Can you just make meatloaf?" I did not have meatloaf until I went to college and I made it myself, but I had to call her for the recipe and then she gave me something...I said, "Forget it." I just went to the box of Lipton's soup mix and there was a meatloaf recipe on it.

So it was crazy. We would beg her to let us go get tacos somewhere or get hamburgers somewhere. "Well, I can make you hamburgers." "No, we just want a plain hamburger." Our favorite, favorite place to go if they were going to out to dinner or something, we would ask if we could get food from Macayo Vegas, which in those days was one of the two or three places that was on Charleston, and they made what they called a Mexican pizza and it was the most amazing thing ever. I can still taste it. That was my favorite food. So forget what my mother made. That was my favorite food.

But her deserts were probably my favorite things that she made. She has a very famous apple crumb cake that she would make for Thanksgiving. I don't even know what she called it. We just called it her apple streusel cake basically. That I would eat an entire plate of. She also made lemon poppy seed cookies. Those were two of my favorites.

**Good, good. You mentioned holidays, both secular and religious holidays. What would you do for Passover Seder?**

Oh, Passover Seders. Well, we would go to different people's houses when I was younger. When

my mother and father bought the house that she actually started taping her cooking show from, which was way out on Las Vegas Boulevard, which is now in the middle Silverado Ranch, but that's where it was—

**Oh, it wasn't a studio kitchen then.**

No. Her syndicated show was actually done in the kitchen of their house. My dad built onto this little ranch house that they bought. He built a studio kitchen. He kind of rebuilt the house. So she her studio kitchen was the kitchen and family room of the house. It could be easily cleared out for either cameras or for dinners and parties. We had huge Passover Seders. Shecky Greene was there and Steve and Eydie were there and this one was there and that one was there and Totie Fields was there. It was crazy. So that's what I remember about Passover. My dad wrote his Haggadah. He took from here and there and made his own. I still have relatives and friends who say, "Hey, do you still have your dad's service? We want to use that." So it still gets used, which is pretty amazing.

**Can we have a copy of that?**

Oh, I have it. I can get you a copy.

**I would like to see that.**

Sure.

**I think that would be nice to add to the collection.**

Sure, yes.

**People don't understand Passover. They don't understand a lot of things. But Passover is such a wonderful service and I know I always like inviting friends over to participate and they always come away with...But I don't have that kind of guest list.**

Well, to me it was just crazy to see who would show up at ours. But I remember Shecky Greene

being there a lot and Totie (Fields).

**He still lives here, right?**

I know. He's still here and alive. I know. Crazy. Yes, it was wonderful. It really was.

**Was it a traditional menu with the brisket and the...?**

Oh, yes, but it was with my mother's flare. So it was the most delicious food.

**How far ahead of time would she start preparing for a large crowd of people and still be able to enjoy the dinners?**

Oh, who said she enjoyed it? Who knows if she ever sat down? She just was happy cooking. She couldn't care less. Oh, she started a week before putting things in the freezer because that's what she was all about was teaching other people how to prepare ahead of time.

**Then for yourself when you're raising your children here—so we're going to jump forward.**

**Let's talk about your education. You graduated from Las Vegas High School.**

Yes. I actually started at Clark High School. My dad decided he didn't like Clark High School.

So while my mother and I were away during a brief period of time, during a summer, when I came back, he said, "Oh, by the way, you don't go to Clark High School anymore; you go to Las Vegas High School." He didn't like my friends at Clark. It was in the middle of all the hippies.

We're talking the sixties. Well, it was the sixties then. He didn't like all those long-haired boys that kept coming over and hanging out. He changed schools on me.

**What did you say?**

I was not happy. But, you know, that's how he was. So I graduated from Las Vegas High School, but started at Clark.

**Then what did you do?**



I wanted to go to art school because that was my thing; I was an artist then. I had given up on ballet and wanted to go to art school. I had worked for my dad in his advertising agency from the time I was—just on and off. But also worked in the art department, as it turns out, of the Las Vegas Sun from the time I was in high school. I actually started in the dispatch department and then moved up to the art department. I was there until I went to college and then actually came back and worked there.

I didn't know anything about applying to colleges. I didn't have obviously the greatest college counselors at my school and parents that were—my mother only wanted me to go to one of the Ivy League schools back East. I don't think I'm getting into any of those and I have no interest. I wasn't someone who liked to be away from home and that kind of distance. They were very busy with whatever else they were doing. So I just kind of took it upon myself. I didn't know you should apply to more than one school. I applied to the University of California, Irvine. It had a great art department at that point. They were sending me wonderful letters. "We're so excited that you're interested in the art department." I just assumed I got in. So when I got the rejection letter saying, no, you didn't get in, I was stunned and I didn't know what to do.

So I actually went to UNR for my first year because I wasn't staying at home, just not going to do it. So I went to UNR and then I came back to Las Vegas because I did not like living in snow. Good thing I didn't grow up in Philadelphia although maybe I would have liked it more. Then spent some time here, went back to work at the Sun and decided what I wanted to do, and I ended up at San Diego State, which at the time I went to San Diego State it was San Diego State College. While I was there actually it changed to San Diego State University, and I loved it. That was great.

But I was there for two years and my father called me one day and said, "So I'm going

into this new company, Trans-American Video. We're going to do remote television facilities. That's how we're going to do your mom's show. So I'm going to give up the advertising agency, which is what you're going to school for, unless you...I would never tell you not to go to school, but it seems kind of silly to be going to school in San Diego to learn what you can come home and do." *Okay.*

So I did not graduate from San Diego State. I came home and took over the advertising agency. It was a little agency, but I had worked there and I knew good clients. We didn't have a huge roster of clients, but we had some nice ones.

**So about what year would that have been?**

Well, that would have been in...Let's see. I graduated in '70. So probably '74. Yes, probably around '74, '73, '74.

**Who were some of the clients that you were coming back to work with?**

We had Al Phillips The Cleaner; the Shapiro boys, Mel and Phil; Alpine Village, a restaurant which know longer exists on Paradise. We had Imperial Carpets, Paul Wolfson and...I forget what his partner's name was, which also doesn't exist anymore. So there was a few of them.

**How did you like it?**

I liked it.

**What was your typical day like?**

I mean, I loved it. It was so weird because I had been thrown into this basically, because I had a father who just didn't—it wasn't that he didn't take no for an answer; he said, "You can do this; there's no reason you can't do this; you're going to school for this; just do it." It was like, okay. So I have had moments of self-doubt throughout my life because of that, because it was like I always felt like I was thrown into a situation that I really had no control over and had no idea

what I was doing. So I felt like a fraud half my life, but I seem to have pulled it off.

**Yes.**

I know. But it's just one of those things where you think, *what am I doing?* But I guess whatever I did, I did well enough.

**You're fantastic.**

We had people that we subbed things out to obviously. It wasn't like there were a lot of people working for me or anything.

**So most of your day was spent selling or doing art?**

Mostly going and meeting with clients. I produced some television commercials because by that time doing television commercials had become more of a thing. In those days you just went to a television station to do them more so than doing on location, but it was just starting where you could do commercials on location. So that's what I was doing, producing television commercials and working with the advertising business.

**So is this where you then decided to develop this movie business?**

Well, no, no.

**How does all this come together?**

So through that my dad had gone into television production. I then started working with him on more and more television productions. I at one point was a card carrying member of the Directors Guild of America, and still want to just smack myself for thinking at some point in my life, *eh, I'm not going to do that*. I think it was when I was going to get married or whatever. It's like, *I don't want to spend the money on the dues and whatever*, and let it lapse and have regretted it ever since, but not really. My brother was smart enough and kept his up.

So I was working on productions. I was working in television with him. So besides

running the agency—which, again, we didn't have huge amounts of clients; the work was mostly subbed out; so mostly I was meeting with people—I worked on television productions with my dad. My first job of directing, which my father set up because he said, "I don't have anybody else to do this," was directing Paul Anka for a music video when there was first such a thing. I don't know if you remember, but there used to be...it's almost a jukebox, but it would be a video jukebox. But the first places that they did this were in Europe. So there were a lot of recording artists who were doing these music videos for their song releases, but they were doing them overseas. So Paul Anka wanted to do one for his song that was coming out called "You're Having My Baby." So that was my first directing job. I am surprised that I lived to tell about it, it was so nerve-racking and so hard. I mean, I had been watching people do this forever and I had worked not only as a production assistant, but even as assistant director, sitting next to the director and doing time codes and notes and all of that. But when you have two cameras and your headset and you're telling the cameras what to do and you lose track of one...I remember watching as these two cameras just started to go like this, crossing in front of each other, because nobody knew what I wanted them to do. So that was my first directing job. I thought, *okay, I don't think I'm very good at this.*

**But you enjoyed it.**

I did enjoy it. I did enjoy it and I loved being on the production end of television. I was involved with the fights that they did.

During college actually I worked...My dad is the one who brought the Jerry Lewis Telethon, the national telethon, the muscular dystrophy telethon to Las Vegas. It used to be at that point in time the Sahara convention space. He is the one who talked them into doing the whole show. We used to do portions of it from Las Vegas that went live to the rest of the nation.

But he's the one who actually moved the main show to Las Vegas and then there were segments that played into that from around the country. But the show emanated from Las Vegas. So I worked on that. I was an assistant to the director for that. I worked as his personal assistant on the telethon for two or three years and spent time in L.A. working out of Jerry Lewis' office with the director and with the whole crew.

**That's fascinating. So you're kind of honing your skills from these experiences.**

Yes, I was figuring out basically what to do, how to do it.

**So somewhere in all of this, when did you get married? We'll come back to your career.**

**We'll catch up on the marriage and the family stuff.**

I got married in 1980. Danny and I dated for three years before—actually four years before that, so like '76. I know that because we were caught in the blizzard of—maybe it was '77 because we were caught in the blizzard of '78, which was in Massachusetts. I went back to visit him. He was still in school then. He was at Hampshire College and I went to visit. There was this huge blizzard and there was a call for martial law in Massachusetts. It was crazy. We were fine. But I assume I called my mother and said, "I just want to let you know I'm okay. Danny and I are fine." She said, "That's wonderful. I don't know why you're there, but okay." We had actually been dating for months and months and months and both sides of the family just assumed, well, that's nice the kids are hanging out together, and didn't really put it together. We had been dating for at least six months before I went there—or at least corresponding. We had gone out on a few dates when he was home from college. That was my first big trip to go visit him and meet all his friends and everybody in Amherst at Hampshire College. So that's how we got together.

I actually set him up on dates with Totie Fields's daughter, Debbie, who worked for me, a very lovely girl, younger than me. She only wanted to meet Danny and date Danny and it didn't

go well. It was very hard for me to tell her, basically the next year, that, well...Because she kept asking me about him and asking me about him. "Why doesn't he call me? Why doesn't he call me?" By that time, like six months later we were dating. So that was not easy.

**That's funny. So you guys got married. Where did you get married, here in Las Vegas?**

We did, at the Desert Inn Country Club. My dad only wanted us to get married at Beth Sholom, have the service at Beth Sholom, and somebody had already picked that date and he was very unhappy. He was so unhappy because they did not treat him nicely. I don't remember who the rabbi was then, but he was not a happy camper that he sought out the new reform rabbi who had just moved to town who didn't even have a synagogue yet, Rabbi Mel Hecht. So we got married at the Desert Inn Country Club. So the ceremony and the party was there.

**So you had a Jewish ceremony with the chuppah and everything?**

We did, everything, yes.

**And marrying into the Greenspun family...**

That's another three hours, so sorry.

**I know.**

We may have to do this in two parts.

**Yes, I would love to do that because it's an interesting family. So we can back burner that if you'd be willing to...**

Sure. I don't know how much I can tell you, but I will tell you. It was tough.

**They are part of the fiber of this community.**

Yes, and it was tough. It was tough to come into this very close-knit family even though I had known them all my life. I knew actually, as I said, Danny's cousin and that side of the family a little bit better. I was a little overwhelmed to say the least. It was tough. It was tough. I mean,

they're wonderful. All of them are wonderful. My sister-in-law Susan is one of my best friends. It was tough because they're not easy on people. You've got to prove yourself. Eventually I did. But it was tough.

**Well, the name is ubiquitous in history. We'll not go there for right now. But you raised two children here.**

I did.

**Do they both live here now still?**

No, no. Danny went to boarding school. Hank decided that he needed to get him out of here; he was too smart to go to school in Las Vegas, whatever. So Danny came home from school one day when he was in junior high school and I think he said, "Can I build a laser?" And Hank said, "Wouldn't you rather go to boarding school?" And basically two days later he had an overnight bag packed and he was on his way to Massachusetts to boarding school. Barbara was out of town and met them there, ready to kill Hank because Hank did it without asking. But he just felt there were so many things going on in the community at that point that he felt that it was so much better. He'd get a great education. It was in the middle of protests and everything going on.

**People don't understand how frightening it was especially—**

Yes, it was.

**There was fear.**

Yes, there was a lot of fear. So Danny was the product of a boarding school and basically never came back to Las Vegas until...I didn't even talk him into coming back. He came back because of me mostly, which is lovely.

**It is lovely.**

But he had his family and the business was here and whatever. It was inevitable that he would

come back here, I guess. But because of that he had always said to our kids, "I want you to go to boarding school unless something drastic happens, but I can't imagine that anything will." They both started out at the Meadows—Seton Academy and then the Meadows. The Meadows was fabulous. We were on the board of the Meadows. But both kids were very creative and they still are and they don't learn in a straight line and that was an issue. Their early days were fine, but then as they got older it wasn't the happiest thing for them.

When Warren-Walker School opened, which I don't even know if Warren-Walker is still around, which was on our side of town—they also were spending hours and hours every day on a bus going to the other side of town because we lived in Green Valley.

**Yes, that was a long trek.**

It was a very long trek and it was just tiresome. When there was an opportunity to move them to our side of town, they both jumped on it. They actually were not happy where they were. Jamie was going to stay and my son was going to stay. And then when our daughter was just going into third grade—I think she was going into fourth grade and decided to move to the school near the house, he decided—and he was about to go into sixth grade at the Meadows—he decided, *you know what? I'm going to try it, too.* So they went to Warren-Walker for a few years. My daughter actually went to Greenspun Junior High. My son refused. He said, "There is no way I'm going to a school with my grandparents' name on it." So he wanted nothing to do with that. So he was in junior high at Warren-Walker and there were like six kids in his class, which was a very interesting experience for him because they were the oldest class. Mara had more kids in her class. She had a more normal size for private school. So she stayed until junior high. But Jamie decided that he would take the challenge and go to boarding school. So both my kids actually ended up at boarding school for high school, and then neither one of them moved back.



They are now both in California. My daughter went to NYU and then transferred to Bowdoin College in Maine and she stayed in Maine after college for a few years. My first grandson was born there. My son went to Vanderbilt University. So he was there and then he went from there to New York and a little bit in Washington and then to Florida to work for a friend and then he ended up in California, too. So everyone is in California.

**At least they're close.**

They're close. Thank goodness, now they're close.

**Same time zone anyway. Yes, yes. You and Danny, it said in this one thing I pulled off the Internet—**

I can't even imagine.

**—that you owned a store called Culture Dog Bookstore?**

Yes, in Mara James Gallery, named for our children.

**So that was the same business.**

Culture Dog Bookstore and Mara James Gallery, yes. We were, again, ahead of our time.

**Tell me about that.**

As it turns out, Danny didn't really want to own a bookstore; he wanted to have an office where he could walk through a bookstore to get to. We were terrible retailers. We were terrible because we both had the problem of not wanting to sell anything to anybody that we wouldn't own or have in our house ourselves, and you really can't be in retail if you're going to do that. Most people looked at the gallery and the—we had a coffee bar, cafe, which my mother cooked for. I had more than my mother. But it was amazing food, just soups and sandwiches and stuff. But we had a full coffee bar. We specialized in art, architecture and children's books and Fine Press books. Oh, and then it was contemporary craft, which my friend Beth Weinberger did the

jewelry. So there were all these wonderful artists that she had—she had already been doing this just kind of as a little sideline. So she became my partner in the gallery part of it. Danny was supposedly in charge of the bookstore, but he wasn't. Mostly if someone came in and asked for a Danielle Steel book, he would throw them out and say, "We don't sell that trash here; go to Costco." So not good retailers.

**Where was it located?**

It was on Athenian Way, which is where the Green Valley Athletic Club was, which is on Sunset where Town Center in Green Valley. So right there, right on Green Valley Parkway.

**What years was that open?**

It was open in 1989 through, I think, '92.

**Oh, so it was just before I moved here because that would have been the kind of store I would sit in.**

Oh, everybody loved it, but nobody bought anything; that was the problem. They all came and had coffee and browsed in all the books and said, "This is such a nice library," and then they would leave.

**Retail is tough.**

Retail sucks especially when you don't do it well. When you have really good taste and you don't do it well because you won't sell things to people that you don't think they should own. So we were terrible at it. My film company is now called Culture Dog Films in honor of it.

**Oh, okay. So that's where that comes from.**

**[End Session I]**