

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOLIE BRISLIN

An Oral History Conducted by Barbara Tabach

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

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

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PREFACE

Since the moment Jolie Brislin moved to Las Vegas at the youthful age of ten, she has immersed herself in the Jewish community. There was the bat mitzvah to prepare for, but that was only the beginning for the exuberant Jolie. She thrives as a passionate community advocate and leader.

A graduate of University of Nevada Reno, she found her way back to Las Vegas. At the time of this interview, she is the Anti-Defamation League's Nevada Regional Director. From 2008 to 2016, she was the first Director of Development for ADL in Nevada. Previously she had been the Young Leadership Director for the Jewish Federation.

As Jolie explains, she has never questioned her Jewish identity. Her roots are deep and being Jewish is her foundation. She finds participating in the Jewish community to be an integral part of her professional and spiritual being, whether with the mission of ADL or as a congregant at her synagogue. She recalls the steps that have brought her to this place in life, how she met her husband John, her mentors, and the ADL activities that she spearheads.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Jolie Brislin
April 21, 2017
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Barbara Tabach

Preface.....iv

Discusses that being Jewish was important on both side of her childhood; paternal ancestry is Sephardic, maternal is Ashkenazi from Poland and Russia. Mentions father Larry Alhadeff from San Francisco and mother Maxine Molinsky was born in Tucson and raised in Las Vegas; her maternal grandfather painted and grandmother worked at Caesars Palace. Explains that she was born (1979) in California and she and her mother moved to Las Vegas on Halloween 1991; immediate involvement with Congregation Ner Tamid.....1 – 4

Shares some of her Jewish memories from northern California; Ner Tamid located on Emerson Street; attended Green Valley High School from 1994-1998 where she was nicknamed ‘Jew Jolie.’ Recalls making her Jewish friends. Talks about becoming a bat mitzvah; what Ner Tamid synagogue was like at the time; party at Rivera Hotel. Aspirations after graduating from high school; Jewish summer camp; University of Nevada, Reno and Hillel..... 5 – 10

Mentions Jon Porter; Birthright trip to Israel; job offer in Washington DC.; meeting her husband John Brislin; raising their children Jewish. Involvement with Jewish Federation; Meyer Bodoff; job opportunity at ADL; Phyllis Friedman, regional director.....11 – 18

Recalls year ADL honored Jan Jones; Bill Clinton being guest speaker; Jewish Young Leadership in the early 2000s. Chabad, Rabbi Mendy Harlig, Reform Judaism; other mentors including Mike cherry, Shelley Berkley, Susan Fine, Cari Marshall, Art Marshall and Ellis Landau, Burton Cohen, Greenspun family.....19 – 24

Becoming director of ADL, following Phyllis Freidman; her accomplishments so far; Rabbi Sanford Akselrad, Cantor Jessica Hutchings, Interfaith Council. Talks about ADL sponsoring law enforcement trips to Israel, Capt. Chris Darcy, Fusion Center; No Place for Hate campaign, mentions Ayelit Blit, Lauren Eisenberg; fighting anti-Semitism, working within Clark County School District, Muslim community; mentions ADL leadership such as Jonathan Greenblatt (CEO), Abe Foxman.....25 – 30

Discusses impact of Donald Trump becoming President, his rhetoric, ADL being non-partisan, being the go-to responders against hate and bullying locally; ADL’s broader presence with Office of Technology in Society, Center of Extremism, taking FBI to Holocaust Museum, Israel for counter-terrorism training, working with Metro police. Other initiatives: WALK for Hate, Nation of Immigrants Seder, Words to Action.....31 – 35



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This is Barbara Tabach with the Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage project. I'm sitting in the office of the ADL with Jolie Brislin. This is April 21st, 2017.

I thank you so much for inviting me in here to do this.

This is wonderful. I'm so excited.

Jolie, spell your name for us, please.

J-O-L-I-E. B-R-I-S-L-I-N.

Great. You pass the first test.

Wonderful.

As I mentioned, I like to start with a person's background, a family heritage. What can you tell me about your Jewish ancestry?

I'm still putting a lot of pieces together. Now that we have the DNA kits I think it's going to be a little bit different as we move forward and my kids investigate a little bit more.

Being Jewish was always so important to both sides of my grandparents. Both my parents [Maxine Molinsky & Larry Alhadeff] were raised in Jewish homes, more socially, culturally than maybe religiously, but nonetheless completely identified as Jewish and their grandparents as well. I'm a Sephardic Jew. My grandparents on my father's side came from Spain and then my mother's side came from Poland and Russia. Quite the mix, but I do identify myself as Sephardic.

And why is that?

I think it's just because I grew up with so many more Sephardic traditions—whether it was the food that we ate or how we celebrated Passover and the holidays—that's what resonated. Now I get to eat rice for Passover.

That's a major (dietary) difference.

Right.

I didn't realize all the nuisances that there are until this project—between Sephardic and Ashkenazi. It's very interesting.

Yes. And you get to have peanut butter as well.

When did your grandparents come to the United States? Do you know anything about either side's story there?

I know on my father's side, he's a fourth generation San Franciscan. I was very fortunate that neither one of my grandparents were in the Holocaust. That's not part of our immediate story.

My mother's grandparents, they immigrated to Ellis Island and came here.

Did they settle in San Francisco as well then?

My mom was born in Tucson. I don't remember where my grandparents came from. So we're going to have to fill that spot in when we do the re-write.

It's kind of interesting to find how everybody gets to Las Vegas.

Yes. I'm going to be like, "Okay, so, Mom, I need this information before this goes to print."

My mom was born in Tucson, Arizona. She has three older brothers. Her mom was in her late forties when she had her, but she wanted a girl. Can you imagine?

No.

Eventually my grandparents moved to Las Vegas on my mother's side.

What brought them to Las Vegas?

My grandpa was a painter and he painted for some of the greats on the Strip. He was a worker man. So he was able to come here and really do that. He was also a fighter. Vegas really had quite the calling for him from Tucson to here. My grandmother worked in Caesars Palace, the original, as a cocktail waitress and cigarettes and cigars. My mom grew up here most of her life.

But she was born in Tucson. So what age was she when she arrived here, do you know?

I think she was like six maybe when she arrived here.

So if I get a new phase of this project, she would be definitely a person I should interview.

Yes, she definitely has a lot of information on where we are versus where we came from. My grandparents, one of the stories that they love to tell us—my mom loves to tell us is growing up they lived in Las Vegas. There was only a very small area at that point. But right above them Ike and Tina Turner lived and...Lee Greenwood—he lived there as well. She has some very interesting stories of those times.

Oh, I bet. And she stayed here.

So she stayed here until college and then she went to Santa Rosa for college. When she went there she loved the Bay Area. She was involved in different organizations in college and she met my father. Then she stayed in the Bay Area for the next fifteen years or so.

Where were you born?

I was born in Redwood City in California.

So you were a California girl to begin with.

Yes, northern California. I lived there until I was twelve.

Do you have memories of moving to Las Vegas?

Oh, absolutely. We moved here November 1, 1991, the day after you got to spend Halloween with your friends. Then the next day we loaded into the Volvo station wagon and my mom and my brother and I, we drove to Las Vegas.

My parents got a divorce in 1985. So we were there for about six years after my parents separated and went through the divorce. My mom's brother lived here in Las Vegas and he worked in the casino and did conventions and was a chef. Then my mom's mother lived here as well. So this was kind of a natural place to come back. The cost of living was always so

reasonable here and she knew the Jewish community, which was important. So we made this big move to Las Vegas.

That's an impressionable age.

Yes.

Were you happy or upset? Do you remember what you felt like?

I don't think I was very happy. I loved my friends. I'm really lucky because these are the people that are still in my life today; my best friends are two of my friends from kindergarten. But I understood.

But it's hard when your parents are getting divorced and you're having to choose between where you want to live and who you want to live with. No child should have to decide those kind of...be put in those situations. But I know it was what was best for my mom and I knew it was so hard to live in California.

So when we got here, right away we got so involved. We got here on a Wednesday and probably that Friday we were at Ner Tamid to go to synagogue on a Friday night. We really just jumped right into this community and the community really just welcomed us with open arms. We live in such a warm and welcoming city. So it made it a little bit easier.

Do you have any recollection of what the Jewish community was like in San Francisco versus Las Vegas?

I lived in a suburb outside in the Bay Area called Foster City. It's about thirty minutes from San Francisco. It always felt everything was very Jewish. I went to the JCC [Jewish Community Center]. We had a building. My first bee bite was at the JCC swimming pool when I was a child. I grew up going to preschool at the JCC. So we had these buildings and we had these synagogues that were really old because everything in California is built on so much foundation of what

came before and it's an old city. We were so active and we went to Beth El in Burlingame. We were so close with the rabbis. We were close with the cantor.

My mom does a lot of singing here locally when it comes to the synagogue at Ner Tamid. She would do different variety shows at the synagogue and she would help out on Friday services there.

Synagogue has always been a part of my entire life. In California, I think it was so strong as well because not only did we have any family in Redwood City, which is where we lived, but my father's family lived in San Francisco and they belonged to a temple that was just a masterpiece. It was so old and it was gorgeous. You walked in and it was almost like a cathedral. You just knew that there was so much history in that building.

I think at that time coming from California to here was such a strong Jewish presence. Even though our community was so old and welcoming, it was still really small. So I kind of felt like we went from everything being Jewish to now you're kind of in your own little silo.

With Congregation Ner Tamid, you're in Henderson, you're in Green Valley specifically, and everything is new at that time.

Right. But there was no Green Valley really. There was Green Valley, but it was—

It was just beginning, right?

It was just beginning and Ner Tamid was on Emerson.

Oh, sure. Right. I've jumped forward there. Yes.

The 215 didn't even exist. We did live in Green Valley growing up. But in order to get to temple, we literally had to take Eastern to Desert Inn and then make a left on Emerson. So it was quite the schlep. When people say, "I don't want to go from Summerlin to Green Valley or Green Valley to Summerlin," I think—*we did this twice a week with no freeway.*

The population was a little lighter though.

Yes, it really was.

So what high school did you go to?

I went to Green Valley High School. I graduated from high school in 1998 and it had just opened. I think the first class started in '94. So it was still relatively new when I went there.

Were there any challenges for you, in your memories, of being a Jewish student in a school here?

So growing up here it was interesting because...We're such a tight-knit community and we've been so fortunate that even our community that we're named after was such a strong and prominent and inspirational family of Jewish values, but still there was not a lot of Jewish kids. Many of the Jewish kids in this community went to Gorman High School growing up. When I was in high school, there were a handful of us that were there, but they ended up calling me 'Jew Jolie.'

Sitting here today as the director of the ADL, it's funny because if someone were to say that today I would have a different response to that. But in high school it was like, *yes, Jew Jolie, I'm JJ*, because I was so proud. But there weren't a lot of Jews and I was being identified as that not with a negative connotation at all, but because there were so few of us.

You're not the only person I've heard being nicknamed Jew. Today that would be inappropriate, right?

Completely inappropriate. It's funny that today I have the privilege to be the regional director of ADL [Anti-Defamation League] when there was a time when that was my badge. So it's like how far you've come.

It's interesting.

Yes. But we had a group of people and still some of my greatest friends today—we all went to Green Valley High School together and we went to Ner Tamid together and we all grew up. When you look at the population of Jewish students, it still was not great. We just found each other.

How does that happen I wonder?

Yes, I think it's temple. We all were in youth group together. Then we all went to summer camp together. So you find each other. Our parents ended up knowing each other. Everyone was so all over the place and there weren't so many ways to bring people together. We had TBS [Temple Beth Shalom], and we had Ner Tamid, and we had a Chabad, but I think that was it for a long time.

Our parents really had to make a conscious effort to make sure that we had Jewish friends and that we were active. Even if you were kicking and screaming, you're going to Sunday school and you're going to have your bat mitzvah and you're going to be involved in youth group and that's just what it is. I'm so thankful because I feel like everything I am today is because of those experiences.

So talk about your bat mitzvah. Everybody, especially non-Jewish people, love hearing what the bat mitzvah experience is like especially in Vegas. They think it's going to be different in some way or another.

My goodness, I had such a Vegas bat mitzvah. So we came here in '91, so I was either eleven or twelve. So I was getting really close to that bat mitzvah age. We joined Ner Tamid right away. Rabbi [Sanford] Akselrad has been my rabbi. He was there to do my bat mitzvah, but my confirmation, my wedding, my baby naming, and my worst of times and my best of times. I feel so blessed to call him my rabbi. He's really a dear friend and a mentor to me as well.

So we were on Emerson. Ner Tamid went through two different changes; they had this old building and then they did a renovation to it. This renovation made it look like a hotel inside. Did you see any pictures of the second phase?

I've seen pictures, but I don't know if I realized that inside it looked like a hotel.

So at one point the social hall, where the stage was—that was our synagogue. They would bring a rolling Torah onto the stage. Then it would be a synagogue. Then they would take it away and then it would be an Oneg. Then we finally were able to do a capital campaign and build on to that second part that was facing east.

I had my bat mitzvah here. It was wonderful. We had a lot of community members. But the party is what was so funny to me. Everybody has these big parties here. My mom was not going to let me be any different than anybody else, and so I had my bat mitzvah party on the top of the Riv [Riviera Hotel]. It was so Vegas. Looking down on the Las Vegas Strip. But we had such a great showing from the community. I think, looking back on my bat mitzvah, I can see that the relationships that we have today in the community, they were just so instantaneous. I can think back of the people that we just met that were at my bat mitzvah sitting in the sanctuary there that day.

Did you invite classmates that you had just met?

Yes, I invited classmates. My mom made me do a little (*Ali Ali*) on the flute. I was like—*I'm the only kid that has to play a musical instrument.*

I was already here for a year or so, a year and a half, so I was making those connections. I had school friends that we invited. It was a great time because all my family came to Las Vegas from California. So everybody was here.

So your party is at the Riviera. Did everybody dress in evening clothes?

Oh, it was very fancy. But the Riviera, at that point, was already starting to go a little downhill. My mom worked at the Riviera and she was able to work her magic to make sure that I had the same party as everybody else and it was really special.

I don't think I'm going to do it for my kids.

Really?

Yes. I go back and forth on big parties now because they continue to get really out of control. They're insane. It takes away from what we're really working for and starting to focus more on napkins and tablecloths.

Like you're making a wedding, yes.

Yes. I'll give you a wedding. I'd rather take you to Israel and give you a bat mitzvah.

Yes, I understand that.

After graduation from Green Valley, what did you do next? What were your aspirations at that time?

Of course, I wanted to take on the world. I was trying to figure out what did that mean. So I was really involved with student council and every summer I was really involved in Jewish summer camp. I think that Jewish summer camp really gave me a strong sense of who I am and how you can make a difference, *tikkun olam*, kind of learning about putting all these things that you read about or heard about in synagogue into real world. So I went to a camp called Camp Swig and that was one was in Saratoga for many years. Then I started going to a camp called Camp Charles Pearlstein. Many of the kids in Las Vegas went to Pearlstein; that was the Reform camp here and it's in Prescott, Arizona.

I was working there every summer and doing those things and trying to figure out what did I want to do. I decided to go to UNR [University of Nevada, Reno]. I had a couple of

different choices, but UNR seemed like the best fit. I got to go with my best friend. She decided to go. Her name is Amy Specter. I said, "All right, well, if you're going to go, I'll go because I'll follow you anywhere."

So we went to UNR. It was so much fun. But when we got there, there was really no Jewish culture at all. So I started working at—growing up I'd work at Ner Tamid on Sunday mornings. I don't know if you've interviewed Melissa Glovinsky, Melissa Lemoine?

Yes I have.

That was one of my best friends growing up and I got to be her aide. So that was fun every Sunday morning.

What did you do as her aide?

I think I fetched her paper. Whatever she needed. It made me come to temple every Sunday. Even when I was done with my bat mitzvah, it was like this is just what you did. You have to stay involved.

So when I was in Reno and there was really nothing Jewish, of course I decided I'm going to help create something Jewish. So this guy named Elliot and myself, we worked to create a Hillel at UNR. I got involved in student government at UNR and I ended up being the editor of their school Year in Review. I really wanted to try to incorporate the Jewish world a little bit into this secular big world that more people were going to. But still, there were not a lot of Jewish kids at UNR.

So we started Hillel there and I think it was like four kids. I couldn't even get all of our friends to come. Today Hillel is huge there.

Oh, really?

Oh, yes, they have a really strong Hillel. They have a Jewish fraternity and a Jewish sorority. I

don't know how much I got to play in that, but it makes me feel very good to see where we started twenty-something years ago and where we are today. I think it's gone up and it's gone down. I was just a name on a piece of paper, but I'm really proud of where northern Nevada has taken their Jewish community and UNR especially.

So I was going to get into politics. I thought, *oh, this is going to be great*. My best friend's dad was Jon Porter and he was running for congress at the time. I'm like, *this is what I want to do*. I just thought that he was...Jon Porter is one of the *mensch-iest* men that you'll ever meet. He's so kind. I wanted to be just like him.

He's from Iowa originally; that's where I'm originally from, and that's what I remember vividly about him.

Yes. He's a good man. And he thinks, well—It's not about (political) party; it's about policy. I have a lot of respect for him. His daughter was my best friend in high school and we lived together in college. I studied political science with a minor in business. So I ended up doing all that.

Then the real world came and I had to graduate -- and now what? I did get offered a job in D.C., but D.C. doesn't pay anything. Nobody tells you that when you're filling out your forms, like, I'm going to do political science. So you graduate college and where are you going to go?

So I was going to go to D.C. and I went on a Birthright trip and I came back and I was a senior in college at the time. This was in January, I graduated in May. This was the January before I graduated. I went to a Sprint store because my phone didn't work. I was in the JFK Airport coming back from Birthright. This is before text message or anything like that. So I turned on my phone and it didn't work. The next day, jet lagged and all over the place, I go to Sprint and I was a little irate. I was not the nicest person. It was not my best moment. Kind of

just all over the place. But I wanted a phone that would work. I wanted to know who would call.

Finally I just kept asking for a manager and asking for a manager and asking for a manager. Then finally this guy came out to help me. I thought, *I'm going to try something different. I'm going to flirt with him and maybe he'll help me get this phone.* So I flirted with him and then I ended up getting an SUV and a mortgage and two children because that man turned out to be my husband [John Brislin]. So with that being said, we met in January.

And this is January of what year?

This is January of 2002. It's like, *I want to come back to—D.C.* wasn't finalized. This was just what I was thinking of doing, but then I met this guy and I'm like, *this guy is pretty special, so I'm going to come back.* The thing about Vegas is once you've been here, you know the community is wonderful and it's about who you know and you know you can come to Vegas and everyone watches out for one another. So it's like, all right, I'm going to come to Vegas. It worked out well because we just celebrated our eleventh anniversary and we've been together now for fourteen or fifteen years.

So I'm going to come back to Birthright. I don't want to forget to talk more about that.

But let's continue with meeting John. Was he Jewish?

He's not Jewish.

So when you grow up with such a Jewish foundation like that, how is it in today's world?

You're one of the younger [Southern Nevada Jewish Heritage Project] narrators right now.

It's so funny because anybody that I told that I was—I mean, I would date non-Jewish people. But when we finally got really serious, no one would believe that I would end up being with someone who wasn't Jewish. I'll never forget, on our second date we were driving and I said, "You need to pull over the car." I'm in college. I don't even live here. He lives in Vegas. I live in

Reno. I'm like, "I need to tell you something. If this ends up going anywhere, you need to know that my children need to be raised Jewish. That's it."

I'll never forget we pulled off on the side. It was by Mount Charleston or something. He was like, "You know what? That could work because I don't believe in Jesus or the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, so I think that this is something I can..." I'm like, "All right, let's keep driving." Because at that point if he was going to tell me that Jesus was his savior that would be great for him and I would be happy that he had that religion in his life, but I don't think that there would be anyplace for us to go.

Looking back, I was this twenty-two-year-old girl. I don't even know why I was thinking about marriage or kids. So that was a little odd, but that was really important to me. I guess I must have known that he was going to be the one. But it was really important to me – that my children grow up in a Jewish home and that was it.

Did John convert?

He did not convert. I don't know if maybe one day he will. His mom is not Jewish and she's still alive. Out of respect for her I don't think he will convert. But we have these conversations. He's so involved with the synagogue. Our children are so involved in the synagogue. He would definitely call Rabbi Akselrad his buddy. They're friends. He's involved even to the point where we went to Rabbi Mendy Harlig's house for Shabbat dinner two weeks ago. When you're a non-Jew and you're immersed in all of this and this is your world, when he walks away from that—and he says it to me throughout the years—but that he does agree; when he reads their prayer books and he sits in services what he hears he truly believes. So even if he doesn't convert but this is what's in his heart; it makes me very happy.

That's supportive of your raising your kids in the Jewish faith.

Yes. It's a lot of Jewish, though, I have to tell you – between what I do for my day in and day out of being able to be a part of ADL to the relationship that we have with the synagogue to the relationship; that we financially give to JFSA and JCC and Chabad. I sit on the board at Ner Tamid. All of our friends are Jewish. It's a very Jewish world. So he's found a way to continue to have his beliefs, but be able to be a part... This is his world. It's not even he's a part of it. This is just his world and he's in it. He's in it with me with open arms.

I understand.

He's a great partner to have on this nutty ride.

That's great. I can relate to all of that.

I want to go back to Birthright. Talk about what that is and going on that trip.

So Birthright back then and I think Birthright now might be so different—so when I went on Birthright, it was in 2002. Birthright was just out for a few years.

Or 2001. You went on Birthright before you met John?

Yes, and I met him in January 2002. So, yes, in December of 2001. I don't remember what year Birthright started, but when it first started [in 1994] it was so elite. In order to get on a trip, it was interviews and essays. No one was coming to you and saying, "Would you be interested in going to Israel this summer? Please, please. We have a space open on our bus." This was really an intense process and not everybody got to go. Nobody would ever come and say, "Will you please do this?"

It was so hard and it was so elite. If you were chosen to do that, it was quite the honor...I think Birthright is one of the greatest experiences and one of the best organizations to really instill some kind of love for Judaism and love for Israel and a connection especially with all that's happening in the world. I think it's only going to continue to happen when it comes to

Israel. Birthright might be the most important organization that we have in our country to really create pro-Israel Zionist Jews.

It was a wonderful experience. I didn't know anybody. We went in December. I'll never forget we were there for New Year's Eve and there was an attack that happened. We were in college. But we ended up spending the New Year's Eve in a bomb shelter because there was an attack and we just didn't even get it. Looking back on it, how did we not get the fact that we were in a bomb shelter for New Year's Eve?

How many of you were there in the group?

There was probably about thirty.

Where were you all from?

All over the country. There wasn't a bus from Jewish Federation or a bus from Reno. You applied for it and then they would just pick people from all over and just stick you on this bus. It was a little bit different, but it's a beautiful organization.

So being in a bomb shelter: describe that from your recollection. Were the bombs going off?

I just remember J.Lo.

J.Lo?

Yes, Jennifer Lopez. Like they were piping her through. It was such a teenage mentality. If you have all the experiences that you had when you were in college and high school today, it's so different. But at the time I was just like, *whoa, we're in a bomb shelter. This is cool.* I think it was also very eye-opening that this is just a normal day.

Just a normal day in Israel.

Just a normal day in Israel. Nobody was scared and nobody was freaked out. This was just like

what you did. But I've never felt safer—

But how about your parents? Did your parents freak out?

I don't think they knew we were in the bomb shelter until afterwards. I've been to Israel—I've been very blessed because I've been a few times. My love for Israel is so special. I think it's the most magnificent place on earth and I cannot wait to share it with my children. When you're in Israel you just know that you're somewhere with so much history and with so much belonging. You don't have to even say who—and I think that might be one of the things coming from a town like Las Vegas.

I don't know, if you're in New York—it still has that significance and that feeling to it. But coming from such a small city like Las Vegas where you might be the only Jew to knowing that there's so many Jews and that this is just a way of life, it just feels very, very special. You don't feel so isolated and so alone. So I think that might be one of the reasons that I love Israel.

But, yes, spending time in a bomb shelter is just another New Year's Eve – either the Strip or a bomb shelter. I still talk to people today, but I do believe if we sit here and we look at all the different experiences that I had, I swear every single experience brought me to where I am.

So how did you get here?

I graduated college and met my husband. He was with Sprint and then he was a financial adviser with Merrill Lynch. I did insurance with Country Insurance. It was great, a securities rep. It was a good life for a kid out of college with a degree, no bills and no kids.

But I was really not fulfilled at all. I remember one day going and talking to them and saying—I was really involved in Federation at the time. I sat on their Young Leadership board. Meyer Bodoff at the time was the CEO of Federation—I sat down and I just: "I don't know what

I want to do with my life. This is my chance. What am I going to do?"

He's like, "I have a proposal for you." I'm like, "Oh, great, what are we going to do?" I thought they were going to put me in charge of a program or a board or something. He goes, "Come and work for me." I'm like, "What?" He's like, "There's going to be a huge pay cut, but come and work for me." I was like, "What?" He's like, "You should be a Jewish professional. That's what you should be doing."

So I went home that night and I said, "Honey, you're never going to guess what the conversation was that I had today. But I'm going to have to take this huge pay cut," and this and that. He said, "This is the time. If you're ever going to do something and you want to be fulfilled, now is the time that you do it." I was, "Are you sure?"

What year was this?

So this was in 2005, I guess, 2006 maybe. I can get you exact dates. So I went to Federation. It was completely different. The town was just different. You had the internal struggles and the fighting and this one doesn't talk to this one. I think we've come a long way as a community...When I went, Meyer was the CEO there for about a year and then there was some more transition and Meyer left.

I kind of had to figure out what was next. I saw a job opening for ADL. I don't remember ADL being such a big name in Las Vegas (while) growing up. So I wasn't really familiar with the organization. I called around and I got some more information on what is ADL, what do they do, what's their history in Las Vegas. Then they were hiring their first director of development for the Las Vegas office. I reached out to the development director in Arizona, like, "Tell me what you think of this organization." When she started talking about how it's a Jewish organization that fights hatred and bigotry for all, I said, "Where do I sign?"

I said that, but ADL did not say that. I decided at that moment this is where I wanted to work; this is what I wanted to do. So I applied for a position and this must have been in 2008, I think, 2007, 2008. Phyllis Friedman was just hired on to be the regional director here. Phyllis used to live in Vegas, then she moved to L.A. and came back here. So I didn't know Phyllis. I put in my application and it went through the process. The ADL process is crazy. I think it took me four or five months to get this position. All the time I'm working for Federation, I'm applying for a job in another Jewish organization. So it was a real internal struggle sometimes.

I'll never forget the day that I came in to meet with the board, and I really didn't know who was on the board. I walked in and it was like all the Federation people. I was like, *well, if this does not work, you never saw me*. So I did my interview. I know there was a couple of amazing people that they were also interviewing. The fact that I was chosen is even more rich because I respected so many people in the pool; that these people believe that I could do this; that I was ready to take this step.

So I went from being the Young Leadership Director at the Federation to being ADL's first Director of Development for ADL Nevada. I got to work under Phyllis. This is a woman who has dedicated her life to Jewish philanthropy and Jewish service. I got to learn a lot. We tried some amazing things in this office together. We really created what the ADL is today.

What are some of those things that you did with Phyllis?

So we always do our annual dinner. That's the one thing that ADL always did here. Then we upped that. We did that on steroids. Every year we were better and better. One of the highlights of working together was the year that we honored Jan Jones. We were sitting on the table with Jan, Susan Fine and Phyllis Friedman. Jan's like, "Well, what else can I do to help make this success?" Of course, I did my research. I'm like, "We would really love to have Bill Clinton

come." She's like, "Bill? Yeah, no problem, I can get you Bill." And Phyllis and I are literally kicking each other underneath the table. I think I still have a bruise. Not only did she get Bill, but she knew we had no budget either. What a fun dinner that was to be able to honor Jan who in herself is such a magnificent woman and then to have Bill Clinton. I'm like, *I'm just starting my career; how am I going to top this?* I'll never forget Susan—we were just all so happy, kicking each other. I probably had a smile for two days. He was such a statesman at the time.

Did he charge you a fee?

Nothing. Nothing. We insisted on paying for the hotel. Even Caesars, I think they finally just charged us a thousand dollars because I wouldn't stop saying, "What can we do? What can we do? We can't thank you enough." Bill Clinton donated his services to ADL that night in honor of Jan and the work that we do.

When we came to the event, I couldn't get him away from all the bartenders and all the workers. I'm like, "Mr. President, we really need to go. We have all these major donors that would love to have an opportunity to meet you." Just every person that he met, it didn't matter who they were, that person was special to him.

He's a great schmoozer, isn't he?

That should be the book he writes, *Schmoozing 101*. It was incredible. It was such a highlight.

We got to do that together and so that was really special. That was a special night.

We should get pictures of that.

Oh, we have lots of pictures.

Okay, we'll talk about that before we're done here.

You've mentioned some other things that I'd like to expand on. Let's go back to the Young Leadership involvement at the Federation. I hear that and I see pictures that people

say, "Oh, these are Young Leadership." What does that mean?

So let's take it back to the time of—we know who our leaders are today, right? But at that time the young leaders were Hugh Bassewitz, Leonard Stone, Eric Polis, Lisa Screw. These are real leaders of our community today, but they were the young and up and coming leaders. Each of these people have already been the chairs of Federation at this point.

So it kind of like puts in how long ago this was. But it was really giving an opportunity for people who were just getting out of college or starting their career who might not be able to give at the philanthropy level of a Women's Division, but wanting them to stay involved in the Jewish community to realize that everybody does make a contribution and that the stronger we are as a community and the more people we have involved in it the stronger our Jewish community is going to be as a whole. So the Young Leadership division was really about inspiring and empowering and bringing people together of like-minded interests to do Jewish.

In your position you were managing this group?

Yes.

Would you be inviting them to be part of the Young Leadership? What was your role?

I was the director of the Young Leadership Department. I was putting together strategies and leadership development. I was putting together ideas of fundraising and how to start to teach philanthropy because that in itself is a whole to-do of how do we give; why do we give. When you're giving money and you're not getting anything, you have that feeling. How do we teach people that that's the feeling that's worth so much more than that new shirt or that cup of coffee?

So this group was all about starting to learn that. We teamed up and we did a mentors program. The mentors program actually started right before I joined and my mentor was Mike Cherry who sits on my ADL board now—I have so many wonderful mentors in this town. So he

was my mentor at Federation. But this was something that we continued. It was Shelley Berkley. It was Fran Fine. It was Danny Greenspun. It was these people that really are so influential in our community, and they were taking time to spend with these young leaders right out of college. It wasn't about giving the money to Federation at the time, but it was about keeping them involved and showing them why our community needed them and that they were really the next generation. If you look, it worked pretty well. I think Leonard, Hugh, Eric, they all have taken such active roles in our Jewish community.

And you probably were learning along with them—

Right.

—in your tasks as director. That's cool.

Yes. It was a great experience. It was great.

You've mentioned Chabad a couple of times. Explain its role in your life.

So it's interesting. Chabad had never had a role in my life until recently. It's relatively new. Rabbi Harlig, Mendy Harlig, studies with one of our board members whose office is right across the hallway. It's actually our board chair at the time, Josh Reisman. So Josh connected me to Rabbi Harlig. When I sat with him, it was only supposed to be a meet and greet, and three hours later—I felt so spiritual. I felt so educated. He gave me something that I really don't feel like I've had before. Maybe it was like the education. I'm a Reform Jew through and through and I'm very proud of that. But seeing the whole circle of Judaism and learning about the whole circle and being able to see how different areas that I'm working in whether it's gun control or it's immigration reform or it's Israel, another perspective of it.

So Rabbi Harlig has now become my go-to person. I say *I study with him* because every time we're together he teaches me something, the Torah or the laws of why he thinks something

or why I should think something. We don't agree on everything, but we have the most wonderful conversations. If he walks in this door right now, I know it's two hours that we will sit here and talk until finally one of us is like, "Oh my goodness, my children, I need to go get my kids at school." It's just one of those relationships that I really value and it's relatively new. It's just a few years old. I guess I didn't realize until this conversation how much of a mark he has on me and how much I appreciate the relationship I have with him.

Again that's something else I do hear from different people...like you, blend Chabad with whatever other Judaism—

Right. Especially Reform.

Yes, especially Reform. So is that ever a challenge?

I'm Reform 100 percent, but I love the Chabad—the learning that's involved with that. He shares. I agree; I disagree; I continue to have my feelings, but I feel more educated. So I want to go to his home for Shabbat. He had us over to his home for Shabbat and it was like the first time that my children have ever seen a real religious Shabbat dinner, no cell phones.

I was going to ask, how does it differ?

My kids, though I would love to say we turn off on Shabbat, some days it just does not happen. But even down to certain toys of why you don't play with a certain toy because that's looked at as work. I think that it really just adds so many dimensions to myself, but especially to my children. As they're going out into the world they're strong Jews that are educated on, yes, I don't use a phone on Shabbat or if I do I'm not supposed to and this is why. So just making sure that they're really well-balanced. I think Rabbi Harlig makes me more balanced and able to look at different situations to make sure that my kids are educated. As long as they have a Jewish life, they can choose within that realm. But it was really special to have my whole family over to his home for

Shabbat.

I'll bet.

Especially my non-Jewish husband, right?

Well, he's getting a very balanced perspective about it all for sure.

Yes, after fifteen years...

Yes, I get it.

He brought it up about a week or two after we were there. We were sitting there one night just having a conversation and he said, "I'm still thinking about dinner and I really enjoyed it. I was really challenged and I'm thinking about things in different ways." I just thought, *wow, that's, A, so open-minded, but...* That's the power that Mendy has is that he's able to sit down with someone who he knows might not agree with everything he's saying, but he doesn't judge. So when I have a question at that level that I need to work through. He and Rabbi Akselrad are like the two people that I go to to fulfill that Jewish quest.

I got you. That's great. Then you started to mention mentors. You have had a lot. You mentioned Mike Cherry. We'll start with him and maybe list some of your mentors and the impact that they've had on you.

I am so lucky. Shelley Berkley, Ellis Landau, Susan Fine, Cari Marshall, Art Marshall, my goodness. I've had the privilege of sitting around a table with Art Marshall and Burton Cohen and listening to their shtick and just realizing what they made our community into. These two men, they knew that what they were doing needed to be done, but how they changed—

When you're saying *needed*, what was it that.?

They knew that we needed to have more of a foundation. We needed to have more organizations. We needed a stronger Jewish life. I think that the Marshalls, the Greenspuns, these families,

they're the ones that really laid the foundation so that we could all do the work that we're doing today. And there's many more, but those two families in particular to me are so special.

My relationships I truly value. Susan [Fine] is one of my greatest sounding boards. Cari Marshall makes me look at everything in such a different way. Shelley has taught me how to speak about an issue even if I agree with it or don't in a way that's respectful to others, and she's always willing to put her neck out for me anywhere I need it with any problems. Even if it's going to the highest person in D.C., I know when I call Shelley Berkley, she always has my back.

Mike Cherry, just the other day, wrote me this beautiful E-mail that he's thankful for the ADL, but he's more thankful for me. I saw that E-mail and I printed it out because of all the wonderful things that I get to do in a day, to have someone who I respect so much who doesn't always agree with me, but he respects me as much as I respect him. That E-mail...I'm going to cry because it really just meant so much to me.

Ellis Landau, he is the quiet voice in a room. He sees everything and he speaks out when it's needed, but he thinks so strategically about how our community can work together. I had the privilege of having him as a board chair for nine years. Nobody should ever have a board chair for nine years, but because of that I have this beautiful relationship and I value it so much.

That's really awesome. That's a great cast of characters. This jumps off this project, people that I have interviewed and people that I still haven't interviewed. That just demonstrates the importance of the history here.

When I think of Burton Cohen and Art Marshall, I cannot think of those two—I look over here because they would always sit...Burton would always call Art *Mr. Marshall*. "Well, I'll do it, but, Mr. Marshall, will you do it?" But whenever I think of those two, the biggest smile comes on my

face. I just have so much respect for Art. He's raised the most beautiful children and given so much to our community.

One time we were sitting in a meeting and I was like, "I really need to get something from Harry Reid." This is probably seven years ago, six years ago maybe. He goes, "You need Harry? Hold on." He pulls out his cell phone and he starts going like this. He's like, "What do you need?" I'm like, "Uh..." He's like, "No, Harry's on the floor right now. He needs to know what we need." I was like, *he picked up the phone on the floor?* But that was Art. Art could get to anybody at any time.

One time he left his cell phone here and it wasn't locked. I'm like, "Art, this phone is the most powerful phone in Las Vegas. We need to lock it. What if you lose this?"

That's amazing. So from the floor of the senate he's answering this phone.

From the floor of the senate for Art Marshall he picks up the phone.

Well, Art is such an endearing person. The whole family is, you're absolutely right. So you took over—you worked here for how long and then what happened?

So I worked here for seven years and then I just had my two-year anniversary as the regional director. Phyllis Friedman hired me and what a wonderful experience that was. Then she retired two and a half years ago now, I guess, a little less. When she retired I was put in as interim. They did a national search. Then I was very honored to be chosen to be able to continue the work that we were doing here and only really enhance it. We've been on overdrive for the last two years here and I'm really proud of our office. There's amazing work that comes from four people in a small office.

That's all that work here?

For an entire state of Nevada, yes.

Wow. So what are the major accomplishments thus far? I looked about our organization on the website and there's just so much that's there.

So much. One of the things that I'm most passionate about is interfaith work. So with the ADL, it drew me because it's a Jewish organization and that's really important to me, but it captured my heart because it's an organization that fights for everybody because ADL knows that you can't fight hate against one group without combating hate against all. Isn't that the Jewish way? Isn't that the way that we're taught that we don't just think for ourselves, but we think how does this affect others? To me it ties everything that's important in my life, my secular and my Jewish worlds together into one, but leading me with principles of *tikkun olam* and mitzvah and our Jewish community and what's best for it.

The interfaith work that we do is amazing. We bring together different groups to have real dialogue and real conversation. Just this year we did our first ever interfaith Seder where we had a hundred people from every religion and organization come together for a night before Passover to a Nation of Immigrants Seder. Rabbi Akselrad and Cantor [Jessica] Hutchings performed it. ADL sponsored it. We wrote the Seder for it. The Seder was really about celebrating our diversity and looking at each other that our differences are much smaller than our similarities.

We do a lot. We sit on the Interfaith Council. We provide dialogue. We do education. We do so many things throughout the year when it comes to interfaith and bringing people together.

At the end of the night I had one of the most rewarding moments of my career. At the end there was a Sikh, a Muslim, a Christian, a Mormon and a Jew making lunch plans. I thought, *by golly, we did something amazing tonight*. This is it. This is where it starts. It doesn't just stay from the Seder for a hundred people. This is how it goes into the community. This is how we

create real change. That probably might be one of the highlights of my career and I've had a lot of highlights, but just seeing that organic change happen in front of me was so powerful.

Then the other work we do with law enforcement; we take law enforcement to Israel. We just took Captain Chris Darcy, who runs the counter terrorism center and the Fusion Center in Metro, to Israel. He just got back last week. Last year I was actually able to go on that mission as well. We take high-level law enforcement from across the country to Israel to work with the Israeli police on how to combat terrorism and what do you do, God forbid, an incident happens, because there's so many differences if, God forbid, an incident happens in the United States and it takes three weeks to try to get back to normal versus Israel where it takes three hours. So being able to spend that time with law enforcement, being able to be on that trip to see really firsthand the work that ADL is doing on the ground in Israel with our law enforcement agents was incredible. We went to a prison and we had a meeting with the heads of Hamas and Fatah. Nothing was between us; as close as I am to you right now. It was so disturbing. It motivated me to come back to the States and fight against extremism and terrorism and create this conversation that, once again, it's about our similarities and not our differences because when hate wins that's what it looks like.

So the ADL, whether we're doing the work with law enforcement, the interfaith community—I have someone in our office named Amanda Solomon. Her whole job is just to go and do education work and teach about anti-bias, anti-bullying and empower students not to be bystanders. Because as Jews we know what it means when someone is a bystander. How do we empower our students to be allies? How do we empower adults to speak out when they see injustice, when they hear comments being made that are anti-Israel? When these things are happening we need to continue to do something. So our education department goes and they do

this. They teach our students. They teach our adults. They teach our community and administrators and principals on how to empower themselves.

**Do you let the community know that this service is available for them, this opportunity?
Are you knocking on doors of the public schools as well as the private schools? How does
that all come together?**

So we knock on a lot of doors. But we work within the public schools. We're in about fifty to seventy schools a year where we do our No Place for Hate program. Then we do programs for the community as well. We are going to be doing a Jewish University, which I'm sure you've spoken with Ayelit [Blit] and Lauren [Eisenberg]. We're going to be doing one on how to combat anti-Semitism in terms of anti-Israel rhetoric because we find that so often people don't know what to say so they say nothing at all. So we want to empower them with words and action and education so that when comments are made they have answers for them.

The time that we're living in is pretty crazy especially for me. I'm thirty-eight years old and I have never seen anti-Semitism in my life at the level that it is. I've never seen the news talk so often about incidents that are happening or hate in general. So the ADL has this really special responsibility right now to make sure that we are educating—it all comes down to education—that we're educating our community and students on anti-Semitism as well and what does that mean and what should a student say and how should a parent handle it and how should a school handle it? We're not all prepared. We have not had to deal with these situations like we had in the past.

We just did a panel discussion on anti-Semitism in our schools and we had Las Vegas Metro, we had CCSD school police, we had Equity and Diversity with CCSD, ADL, and Rabbi Akselrad came to that one and spoke about what our roles are as Jewish parents to help our

students. It was this wonderful panel discussion and I think people walked away with some more tools and at least knowing that ADL is here so if they do have a situation or an incident they call us and we can go in and we talk to the schools. We call the administrators. Most of the time it's actually ignorance, but that's better because then it's an education moment. The responsibility that we hold right now with the civility of our country is one that ADL does not take lightly.

How do you work with the rest of the regions in the country?

So we're one organization. We have our national office in New York. I had the privilege—talk about a name—working for Abe Foxman. One of the highlights of my career is always going to be an Abe Foxman hug. I consider him a friend. I get to talk to him once in a while. He retired after fifty years with ADL.

But now we have—his name is Jonathan Greenblatt. Jonathan Greenblatt is the CEO and president of ADL and incredible, what a vision. So he actually started Ethos Water and he sold it to Starbucks. He took that and he figured out how he can work within philanthropy. The whole idea of Ethos Water is you give, they give; they make a change together. He just has so many fresh ideas, technology savvy, really looking at things just from a different point of view. Abe was a hidden child and Jonathan's grandparents were Holocaust survivors. It's a different vision, but it's all the same. What a privilege to work for that man as well. He's brilliant. He's brilliant.

So we have twenty-eight offices around the country and we all do similar work. We have our pillars. I keep saying it, but it really does all come back to education. So whether we're educating the students, whether we're working with law enforcement to educate them, whether we're working with the interfaith communities to educate one another, it all comes down to education and dialogue and advocacy.

We're building a really strong relationship with the Muslim community in Las Vegas and

it's really wonderful. After we had the JCC threats here locally, they opened up their mosque for breakfast and conversation and about ten leaders in the Jewish community went to the mosque. They talked a little bit, but it was more about them telling us that if an active anti-Semitism in this community happens they are going to be the first ones to say, "We denounce this." How strong is that that? God forbid something happens and the Muslim community gets up and says, "This is not okay." If something happens in the Muslim community, the Jewish community right away comes and says, "This hate is not tolerated." Because our voices are so much stronger when we're speaking out for other people. First they came for the Soviets...I mean it all comes back to our history and what we've learned from the Holocaust and from our history and from our ancestors. So it's something I'm really proud of. The Muslim community...Once again, it's just education. We're going to Jerusalem Grill next week for lunch, the imam and myself, because he keeps kosher. It's beautiful.

So the purpose of ADL isn't just to serve the Jewish community. If there's an issue for the Muslims or African Americans or whatever, this is a place that people can call upon?

Yes. First and foremost, we are to stop the defamation of the Jewish people; that is our number one mission. However, how do you do that? You only do that by combating hate against all. So because of that we really have a dual mission, to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all. So by having that dual mission, it allows us to work in both the secular and the non-secular communities and bring people together. So I go from a JFSA event to speaking at the Sikh National Campaign. I go from having breakfast with an imam to talking to a parent whose child just experienced anti-Semitism. I talk to the school district one morning and the sheriff of Metro that afternoon. It's really all over the place. If you look at all of those things, you can see how this bubble in the middle, it all makes sense and that

the only way to end hate is to have these tentacles in all these different areas.

The impact of the change in presidency [election of President Donald Trump]...We can't ignore what opened up after the inauguration and all of that. Rabbi Akselrad spoke vibrantly during services and I put part of that on the website right from his sermon. What happened in this office?

First of all, ADL is a 501(c)(3). We are not partisan. We really are more about policy over politics. With that being said, I think that the election itself emboldened people to say things and speak out in ways that we know are socially not acceptable, but now they really felt empowered, and there was nobody saying that this is not okay. We see different issues especially right now that we have to work harder. We have to be stronger.

Did you get a lot of call-ins about things happening?

Yes, lots of calls. Our community is interesting. The Las Vegas community is very interesting. So for every call that I get from someone who is upset about immigration, I might get a call from someone who is not happy about something ADL said against the immigration policy. We are such a split community between conservatives and liberals. So I always say a good day is when someone from the left calls me and someone from the right calls me and yells at me because then I don't do the right thing.

You're in the right spot.

Yes. Because the work that we do is about standing up against hate. I don't care who the president is and I don't care who our congressional leaders are or who is in the White House, if hate is taking place and nobody is denouncing it, we are going to scream louder and we are going to put together policies that make sense and are tangible to combat bigotry.

One of the things that's talked about on your website, responding to bullying and

cyberbullying, is that a huge part of. ADL's mission?

Huge, huge. So ADL just opened up an Office of Technology in Society in Silicon Valley and that whole office is just to work with the interfaces of technology companies on combating hate online. When we were younger we would get bullied at school and we would shut the door and we wouldn't have to talk about it with our parents and it would be over. But now when kids are going home—and even adults; this is a major problem in that world as well—but there's no turning off. There's no place for the bullying to end and then it becomes viral and you bring other people into it. So we need to be able to combat online bullying, which is a major initiative to ADL.

But ADL also has a Center of Extremism. So our Center of Extremism...Talk about hate and bigotry and combating all of these issues, the work that we do in extremism really goes hand in hand with that as well. So we are the number-one nongovernmental agency that works with law enforcement in the U.S. In fact, in order to be able to graduate from Quantico and become an FBI agent, you have to go through ADL training.

The ADL training is this anti-bias. We take them to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. because they're already in Virginia and we do a day-long anti-bias training. It's about what is your role as law enforcement? Yes, this is the Holocaust, but it's not so much teaching them about the Holocaust but what was their role? What was law enforcement's role during this time and how were they able to let their own bias take over and stop doing their job?

We take every single FBI agent to the Holocaust Museum and we do this anti-bias training. We work really closely with law enforcement and they really consider us a trusted ally. We do trainings with them. We take them to Israel to do counter terrorism training. We do anti-bias training with them. Locally we bring in different speakers from around the country of

ADL to talk about new trends that are happening.

About five years ago we saw a trend happening with sovereign citizens. So we said, "Listen, we really want to do a training for Metro." Who knew that one day Bundy Ranch was going to happen? We just saw this as a trend that we wanted to try to get in front of and we were able to bring in training.

Every year we bring training on extremism both domestic and international to Las Vegas Metro and Henderson Police Department and we bring it to the security corridors at the hotels and we do a day-long, usually two-day training with them so that they know the trends and they know what we're learning about whether it's ISIS or different groups like that that are really taking hold so that they have the information because, God forbid, something happens they need to know what to look for and then what; how do we work on this? So we do so many different things.

You really do. Then I go back as a business owner in my past, it's like, how do you do this with a staff of four? Do you work with volunteers? How do you get this done?

So we have a board and our board is incredible. The people that work in this office...I think I'm dedicated? No. They are so dedicated. They come in here every day and they work harder than the day before even if the day before was one of the worst days ever.

Out of this office just this past few months we did our first ever Nation of Immigrants interfaith Seder. We're doing a WALK Against Hate, the first one that we've ever done. Philadelphia started it six years ago. We're the second region in the entire country of ADL to do a WALK Against Hate. What's more powerful than all of us standing together to celebrate our diversity? Nothing. That is what it's about. So we have over four hundred community members—Jewish, non-Jewish, schools that we have our No Place for Hate program in—and

they're going to come out and put their feet to the test and walk it out. We're going to celebrate that.

Then we have our Words to Action, which is working with students on anti-Israel rhetoric and combating BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement]. We're doing trainings all over the city on that and doing our No Place for Hate, our anti-bullying, anti-bias in the schools.

Of course, we have our fundraising events as well. We have our Jurisprudence Luncheon, which is the premier law luncheon in Las Vegas. If you take away Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada as a nonprofit organization, this is really the leading lunch that lawyers look forward to each year. So we have that coming up in June.

Then it's like working with parents and students and educating again about High Holidays, December dilemma. Every incident that comes in whether it's a swastika that's being painted on a school or it's a swastika being painted on a stop sign or it's a kid being told "Jew down" or a picture of a student whose face is cut out and put on Hitler's and passed around on their phones, every day we come in here so that we can combat that.

Sounds exhausting.

It's beautiful.

But you sit here with a smile and you do a good job.

I'm so honored that the community entrusts me to have this role, to be this voice.

Well, you are a great spokesperson for this, really.

Thank you.

I've learned so much, Jolie. I guess if we were to think of maybe a closing story or two...Is there anything else that you would like to share with me today?

I think I've spoken a lot.

You articulate it so well, different things. This WALK Against Hate, I hope that's an extremely successful event. I wish I was going to be in town, but I'll be there next year.

Good, good. Las Vegas is—I try to tell people—we have people that come in from all over the country from ADL and their different areas, "Las Vegas is so big. Las Vegas, there's this and that." I tell people all the time we are so small. We are such a small, tight-knit community that at the end of the day there's no community that I'd rather be a part of than ours because we all have each other's backs and we know that when one of us succeeds and when one organization succeeds even if you don't always agree with all the politics or policies that are involved with those organizations, our community thrives. People here see the big picture. I feel really blessed that this is my home and I get to raise my children here.

That's very wonderful. Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]