

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GERI ROZANSKI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

DECEMBER 1, 2014

TRANSCRIPT BY

KENNETH WASILJEWS

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Geri Rozanski on December 1, 2014, in New York City with Shaun Illingworth for the ACLU Oral History Project of the Rutgers Oral History Archives. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Geri Rozanski: My pleasure.

SI: To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

GR: Sure. I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1953.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your early years. Did you grow up in Brooklyn?

GR: I was born and raised in Brooklyn, yes. My parents are first-generation American. Both of them are descended from Russian Jews who emigrated here in the late nineteenth century. They lived in Brooklyn and I remained in Brooklyn until I went to high school in New Jersey. But I would say all through my preschool years, early childhood, was essentially spent in Brooklyn, New York.

SI: Do any memories stand out about what the community was like?

GR: Oh, lots of memories, yes. It was a dense community, densely populated. We lived in a two-family home. Everyone knew everyone. Neighbors knew neighbors. My teachers actually taught my father. It was a community where you could be thirty blocks from your home and you still knew everyone on the street. It was very hard to be anonymous in the neighborhood in which I grew up. It was a wonderful childhood, actually, yes.

SI: Was it kind of a melting pot area?

GR: I would not call it a melting pot. I would say it was almost exclusively white. There were African-Americans in my school and in my neighborhood, but not within the immediate area in which I lived. The community was almost exclusively Jewish and Roman Catholic. The only Protestants I knew were African-Americans. There were no white Protestants at all, anywhere, that I knew. It was mostly Italian-American, some Irish Catholic. The teachers were almost exclusively Irish Catholics, some Jewish. My friends were Italian-American and Jewish. All of us were essentially either first-generation or second-generation of European immigrants.

SI: You moved during high school to New Jersey.

GR: Oh, yes. That was pretty awful. There were terrible riots. Actually, there were race riots in my high school. It was in the '60s, in the late '60s. At this same time, my parents, I think, were looking to buy a home. So, a combination of my first year of high school, sophomore year, being interrupted because of the riots, because of the, I think, inability for my parents to buy a home in New York City that was affordable and for a number of other reasons, they relocated to rural New Jersey. It wasn't even suburban at the time--it was quite rural. My father got a job. He had been a classroom teacher and assistant principal in New York, but he had gotten a job in New Jersey. They thought this would be great. They'll have a nice house and we'll have this

bucolic life in New Jersey. So, I went to Marlboro High School. I was in the first graduating class of Marlboro. It's now a considerable suburban community, but, at the time, it was quite rural. So, I did two years there in high school. My sister went to high school there for three years. She's younger than I am. Shortly after my sister graduated, my parents moved back to New York. I don't think they ever really felt at home in New Jersey.

SI: Tell me about the atmosphere in the high school before you left. Were there actual fights in the high school?

GR: Oh, yes. There was actual fighting in the high school. It was a large, urban high school. I was somewhat removed from it. I was a new sophomore. So, where I lived in Brooklyn, you had a junior high school for seventh, eighth and ninth [grades], so I didn't go to high school until my sophomore year, when I was fifteen. Apparently, there was quite a bit of battling over who was going to control the sale of drugs in the high school among juniors and seniors. I frankly was really pretty oblivious to it. I must've been either naïve or just oblivious. Most of my friends didn't really know the folks who were involved. We just knew our schools were shut down pretty regularly because of the battles and the riots in the school.

SI: It sounds like it was drug-based, but you were aware of a larger problem.

GR: Oh, yes, the context in which it was playing out. I came from a family, an extended family, that was politically aware, politically active, progressive in their politics and always aware of the context in which various issues played out.

SI: When you say "politically active," had your family been involved in either observing or participating in the Civil Rights Movement or, more locally, in the issue of school board control?

GR: Yes, to all of that. My family on both sides--so, both my father's family and my mother's family--were Socialists. They were very active politically and not exclusively to control of just the school system. My parents were very active in Democratic politics. They were perhaps more conservative than their family, which was Communist, and then, Socialist. So, by the time I was aware of what was going on, my parents were just kind of average Democrats. I think there were several issues that concerned them greatly. One was race relations and being active in the Civil Rights Movement. My dad was one of the first folks to work in and support and staff the Brownsville Boys Club, which at the time, was an important locus for community activity. My dad was a phys. ed. teacher, but during evenings and weekends, he worked at the Brownsville Boys Club and that was something he chose to do. That was important to him. My mom was always a volunteer around election times. They always staffed polling places. I've never not voted. I think this all comes from a sense from my parents, and from their parents, that all of us have a role to play or a responsibility in ensuring a democracy continues. So, voting is important, working during elections is important, all of that. So, that was all kind of part of the family DNA, so-to-speak, on both sides. As different as my mother's family and my father's family are from each other, and they were quite different, it was the one thing they very much had in common, was a shared sense of progressive, far left politics.

SI: Monmouth County must have been a very different environment. That is a Republican area. [laughter]

GR: It was brutal. Actually, at the time, it was--is that what it is now? I haven't been back since I graduated, like thirty, forty years.

SI: Yes, the last few generations.

GR: Oh, that's interesting. When we moved to Monmouth County, it was interesting. The folks who lived there--it was a combination of folks who lived there. There were folks who had egg farms, apple orchards. They, for the most part, were well-to-do, but their assets really were in the farms. Their homes weren't all that bigger than ours. If you think of how folks can now differentiate between those who have and those who don't, it was much less clear in 1970 than it is now. So, those differences weren't very obvious, but what was interesting to me were those who had come from New York and those who didn't. That's where the real clash was. It was less about Republican and Democrat. At the time, frankly, I thought most people were Democrats, but it had to do with whether you had been from Jersey, in part, and going back generations of farming and making your business in agriculture, and those who had just come from the city, like my family, and bought homes that had been on land that had been sold off and subdivided. That was the real, I think, differentiation between and among the various kids in school. It was racially mixed. The politics I remember--I don't remember a lot of Republicans, quite frankly--where I do remember the tension was on whether you were third-generation Monmouth County, having lived in Monmouth County, or whether you had just come from "the city." For those of us who just came from "the city," we clearly felt out of place. It was interesting. There was a real hierarchy there and it belonged to people who kind of went back generations, doing egg farming. [laughter]

SI: Just one last question about Monmouth County. I know that a lot of egg and chicken farmers across New Jersey were Jewish refugees who were settled there. Were you aware of any in the area? Were they part of the Jewish community in the area?

GR: Oh, yes, absolutely, they were. Absolutely, they were. I think, when we first got there, I actually anticipated that I would be one of a handful of Jews and, while there weren't a lot of Jewish students in my class, almost none in the faculty teaching, none in administration, but among the students, I'd thought whatever Jewish students would be there would've been those who were like me, who had come from New York and had finally had a house to live in, not an apartment. I was surprised at the number of Jewish students who were the children of the egg and chicken farmers. You're absolutely right.

SI: At that point, approaching the end of high school, where did you see your life going? Were you looking at colleges? Did you have a career in mind?

GR: Oh, yes. We were going to college and I just wanted to get out of Jersey. Actually, Rutgers--I thought I'd kill myself if I ended up in Rutgers because I really wanted out of New Jersey. I just never felt comfortable there. I mean, Rutgers seemed nice. I have friends who went there, but I really wanted out and I couldn't wait to get to college. I was very lucky to have

some wonderful teachers my senior year, who knew I was both impatient to move on and not really feeling at home in school. I loved school. I was always the kid who really loved school, but I never felt completely comfortable in Marlboro High School. I think my sister did, much more so than I did. So, going away to college was incredibly exciting for me and I ended up going to Syracuse University. I had a scholarship and I went as a--I changed my major a lot, so it's hard for me to remember what I initially went as. I was a journalism student. I was accepted into the Newhouse School of Communications. So, I went as a journalism student, which lasted about a year, and then, I kept changing my major. Yes, I remember being very, very excited and I remember thinking, "I'm going to go away to school and not look back." That's kind of how I approached it.

SI: This was obviously a very politically active time on college campuses all over. When did you graduate from Marlboro?

GR: I graduated from Marlboro in 1970.

SI: You would have been right in there.

GR: Yes, it was great. It was fabulous. I was part of the group of students for McGovern-Shriver. I was responsible for Onondaga County. I worked on the campaign for Mayor Lee Alexander, Mayor of Syracuse. I think he was indicted later. I could be wrong about that, but I think he got into a wee bit of trouble. He was a Democrat for the City of Syracuse. I remembered I was active in politics beyond the campus. So, it mattered to me that I was spending three--I was out of school in three-and-a-half years--that while I was living there, not just on campus, but I was part of the City of Syracuse and the county. At that point, I was a teacher. I had switched my major again and I was in education and American history. American history was always the other major that I had. When I did my student teaching, I was fortunate enough to work in some very, very interesting school settings throughout the county and outside of the county, that allowed me to see yet another way in which people live. So, I did my student teaching, but I was always politically active. I was always working on a campaign and I loved that. For me, the political activity was part-and-parcel of my studies in American history. So, it was all kind of connected and all very much connected back to my family and my childhood.

SI: Tell me a little bit about those years teaching in Upstate New York.

GR: That was just my student teaching I was there. Yes, I was in Central Square Elementary School, which was the coldest I had ever been in my entire life. I student-taught there for almost a year. I think it's almost a year. We did an eight-month student-teaching program. All I remember, my greatest memory, was that it took me a really long time to get everyone's snowsuits, boots, gloves and hats [on and off]. It was so cold, by the time I got the kids undressed, they were already late for first period, and then, getting them dressed again. I remember thinking, "No one prepared me for this." I understood about teaching and education and learning, but I was totally unprepared for what it would take to get, like, twenty-five six-year-olds in and out of snowsuits and winter gear. I was totally unprepared for that. So, that's my great memory of that. The schools were very different than the schools I had gone to in Brooklyn. The schools I went to in Brooklyn, as I had said, the teachers were older. I remember

the teachers as old, having taught my father. These schools had all been built in the '20s. By the time I was going to school in the '50s, they were older. They didn't have air-conditioning, the heating didn't work so well and they were very traditional. The schools I worked in, actually, in Upstate New York were fairly new. They felt modern, they felt well-resourced. Even if the communities were not wealthy communities, the schools were well-resourced. The teachers were younger. It was quite different. It was really quite different. I remember being impressed by that.

SI: After your student-teaching, where did you find a job?

GR: I came back down to New York City. My parents were living back in New York. They were living in Queens, New York, right by St. John's University. I got a job--this was now during the '70s, '74--Ford told New York to "drop dead," I remember that headline, President Ford. [Editor's Note: The *New York Daily News* ran, "Ford to City: Drop Dead," as their headline on October 30, 1975, in response to President Gerald Ford's denial the day before, in an address before the National Press Club, of a federal bailout for the New York City municipal government, which was near bankruptcy.] So, there were very few teaching jobs. There was very little money in the city. I didn't want to move to suburbia. I couldn't imagine living on Long Island, where I currently live. [laughter] I couldn't imagine working there or teaching there. So, I got a job as a paraprofessional for New York City schools, which was fairly traditional at the time. That was your way in to [the system]. I was licensed. I did get my New York City teacher's license. I was licensed for special education and got a job--where was it? It was in, oh, gosh--in Brooklyn and I can't remember where in Brooklyn--for six months, because I graduated in December. I got out six months early. So, I started teaching as a para in January in Brooklyn, in a school that felt like a prison. It wasn't, but that's what it felt like, especially when I thought of my experience in Upstate New York, which was almost bucolic compared to where I was. It was in Bushwick. It was in Bushwick, Brooklyn. I remember, at the time, the principal didn't want me there, because he didn't think it would be safe for a young, white female to be teaching. I had a classroom of emotionally-disturbed junior high school males. I felt safe. I didn't feel unsafe at all and actually worked there for the second half of that school year, and then, got transferred to a special program at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, Babies Hospital. It was a special program, a multidisciplinary program, for neurologically-impaired preschoolers. So, I was part of a team and I enjoyed that very much. I was part of a team of neurologists, teachers, social workers, who worked with families who were dealing with children with significant neurological trauma, preparing them for school. It was exciting. I did that for a year, and then, relocated. While I was doing that, I was getting my master's at St. John's University in rehabilitation counseling and I was working part-time at St. John's to offset the cost for my grad school. Then, I got offered a job at St. John's full-time in which they would pay for the rest of my grad work and I said yes to that. So, I left teaching and I became an assistant dean of students at St. John's University for a year, finished my master's, and then, relocated to Washington, DC, and got a job teaching in a very interesting classroom in Prince George's County, Maryland. I did that for two years.

SI: That is a very diverse educational career.

GR: Yes, yes. [laughter]

SI: Doing special education must have been very difficult. There are more resources devoted to it now, but I know special education teachers who seem constantly overwhelmed to me.

GR: That's a fair statement.

SI: Even then, what was it like?

GR: I think I was too young to know better. In retrospect, I would be exhausted Friday evenings and not know why and, in retrospect, I think I was excited to be doing this work. I felt grateful to have a job. I felt privileged to be doing the work, especially at Babies Hospital. It was a unique experience and got to work with so many interesting people and was exposed to the lives of people. It was interesting. Prior to that experience, and I've only started thinking about this recently, I thought in terms of big scale. So, when I thought of challenges that people were dealing with, I thought of structural issues and institutional issues and politics writ large. My experience at Babies Hospital really showed me just how hard it was for some families just getting up in the morning, getting out of bed, getting their kid dressed, to school and figuring out how they were going to make it through the day. Some of them were very, very wealthy, privileged families and some were incredibly poor, and they all had the same struggle. That was a very important lesson for me, that not everything was determined by your socioeconomic status. I had made assumptions about privileged families somehow having things easier and I worked with those families and those parents and their kids and they had the same struggle. They really did. So, that was interesting for me. It challenged some of my thinking about what it means to have and not have. I learned early on the importance of having really good health and how that can make a huge difference in your life. I don't think I would've thought about that in my twenties if I didn't have that teaching experience. I was very lucky to have had that experience. The program didn't sustain, which is unfortunate. It lost its funding, which is incredibly unfortunate, because I think it not only helped those families, it prepared those children, so that they could enter school, special education programs, and be prepared for it. We worked with them when they were three to five and I think it was an important program, but they lost their funding, yes.

SI: Tell me about Washington, DC, and your job there.

GR: I always wanted to be in Washington, so, I was really excited to relocate down there. At the time, my then boyfriend--he's now my husband--was going to law school in Washington. We were friends. One of the things, when we were first friends, before we started dating, we talked about how we'd really love to live in Washington. I moved to Washington, DC. I didn't have a job. It was 1974 ... I lose all track of time, maybe it was '75 or '76 when I moved down there. No, it was '76 and I moved to Washington. I didn't have a job. I found a really, really cheap apartment in Alexandria. My boyfriend at the time got an apartment with a friend, because they were going to law school together. I was very excited, because this was the first time I was living on my own and paying my own bills. I had enough money to get me through it for three months and I was pretty confident that, by September, I would find a job. I moved in the summer. By Labor Day Weekend, I didn't have a job. I was getting a little nervous. I went back up to New York to see my family for Labor Day Weekend. I got home Sunday evening and the

phone rang and it was a guy by the name of Ed Clement. He was the principal of an elementary school in Prince George's County, called Apple Grove Elementary School, and he said, "I need a teacher tomorrow morning and I figured anyone who worked in New York City could handle Apple Grove." He didn't even know me and he hired me, over the phone. My paperwork had been submitted several months earlier. I showed up Monday morning for my teaching job at Apple Grove Elementary School, which was a very interesting school. It was almost exclusively African-American kids, faculty, administration, and a mix of white military families, where someone had retired from the military, but wanted to stay in the same community, and so, their kids were going to this school. It was also an area for families to purchase their first home, moving out of the District of Columbia. So, it was an opportunity for a lot of African-American families to buy a home, to have some land and a backyard. For all the same reasons my parents moved to New Jersey, these folks moved to Prince George's County. It was a fairly new school and I had a 3/4 combination class. Essentially, the kids who--the teachers got to pick their students, apparently--and those who were not wanted by the teachers in certain third grade classes and fourth grade [classes], they made a combination class. It was one combination, 3/4, that was mine, and a 5/6, that was someone else's. I had those kids and they were great and I still have their picture, up there.

SI: Great.

GR: Yes. It was a great class.

SI: How long were you at Apple Grove?

GR: I taught there for two years. I was going to be offered tenure. I had been thinking for some time I wasn't sure I wanted to keep teaching. While I was at Apple Grove, my principal asked me to do some community relations work. He thought I was particularly effective with the different families, with both the white military families and the African-American families. There were some problems, nothing too huge, but there were some challenges, community relations challenges, that the school was struggling with at the time. I loved doing it and I found I loved it almost as much as teaching, if not more. While I loved teaching, when I looked around, I didn't, at the time, see any teachers who were in their forties who were still loving it, let alone older. Another teacher who I liked a great deal, she advised me to get out. [laughter] She said, "Once you get your tenure, you'll never leave. It's too hard to leave." So, I turned down tenure and I was unemployed again, but I kind of knew what I liked doing and what I didn't like doing and I didn't need a lot to live off of. So, I had an interesting career for a couple of years, and then, ultimately went to work for the American Jewish Committee in their Washington office. I had an antique store before that, I worked at an art gallery--I did a few kind of interesting things.

SI: Before we get into the American Jewish Committee, what form did this community relations work take?

GR: It didn't take the form that more, I want to call it professionalized community relations work usually looks like. It was much more informal. It had to do with the funding for the school. So, there was a breakdown by race on the degree to which more funding should go to the

school. There were constant battles that played out in the school that had very little to do with education and a lot to do with the socioeconomic and cultural norms of the community that the school was located in. So, there would be community meetings and I would go to the community meetings. I was respected by the different players. My students liked me, respected me. I was very involved, very engaged with parents. I understood that many of the parents of the children I taught were working multiple jobs in order to keep this home that they had and I was extremely flexible in meeting with them. So, if they wanted to do a call at ten o'clock at night, I would do that. If they wanted to meet on a Sunday, I would do that. I would do whatever would work for them, so that we could partner on their child's education, which to me just seemed that's what you do, but, apparently, it was quite unique in the school. I think it was appreciated and valued by the parents and the administration. I was so young--I can't believe it--I think, in retrospect, now, they sent this twenty-five-year-old off to these different meetings to kind of negotiate understandings. None of it was very formal, but it was to make sure that whatever legitimate disagreements may be occurring in the community did not play out in such a way as to interfere with any of the kids' education. That was primarily what it looked like. That's what I did and I liked doing it. I liked doing it. I enjoyed doing it.

SI: Can you give me a brief example, without naming anybody, obviously, of what a problem would be and what a solution would be?

GR: So, there was a teacher, a classroom teacher, who--actually, he was not an employee--he was an employee of the district, not of the school. He was like a guidance counselor. The school could not afford to have a permanent guidance counselor. So, it would not be unusual--it was a smallish school--to have an employee of the county who would go to different schools. Allegations were made against this teacher for--it wasn't sexual molestation, I want to be really clear--but it was inappropriate touching. I think it was inappropriate touching. It was interesting in how that played [out]. He was immediately not permitted back into our school, but what should be done and how to approach the challenge broke down very much along racial lines. He was African-American, but it was interesting, the African-American parents and family didn't want him and they thought that he should be fired. They wanted his immediate ouster. They didn't think he had any rights. He lost whatever rights he had as soon as the child asserted what had happened. The white families, who were exclusively military, thought, "There's due process. He should at least have a hearing. He should be allowed to say what happened." He was considered by everybody prior to this incident to be a remarkable teacher, and so, it got ugly. It got really ugly, really fast. I had no role to play in deciding what happens to him. That belonged to the county, actually, but I did meet with all the different families of the children and we talked about what the process would be. We talked about the security of the children. At the same time, we can protect his legal interests and still keep children safe. That seemed to be getting lost in a lot of the discussion, that, somehow, in order for him to have his legal rights, the children were put in harm's way. That was not the case, but that kind of spread like wildfire. A lot of people believed that. So, it was just taking the time to talk to different groups of people and helping them understand that we would keep the children safe and there would still be some process to determine whether or not he should be allowed to continue to teach or not. He was ultimately--while the charges were not proven conclusively, he did lose his contract to teach in the district. So, that was the most extreme version. The others were not that bad.

SI: Moving forward to when you joined the American Jewish Committee, what year was that?

GR: That was 1981, September 1981.

SI: You worked there over twenty years before coming to the ACLU.

GR: Oh, yes, in a variety of different positions, in both Washington, DC, and then, New York, the national office in New York.

SI: Tell me about the first part of your career in Washington.

GR: It was an absolute fluke how I got the job. I essentially knew very few people in Washington, because I had been living in Virginia and teaching in Maryland, and so, I really didn't know very many people in the District. I'd had an antique store and worked in an art gallery, but that was also all in Alexandria, Virginia, but I met this person--it doesn't matter how--I met this person who said she heard about an opening for a position at the American Jewish Committee, Washington Office. She said, "You'd be perfect for that," and I said, at the time, I thought the organization would be a little too conservative for me. I knew of it, but I didn't think it would be a good fit. She said, "No, I don't think you know it that well. You shouldn't make judgments. Just go meet [with them]." She was socially friends with the executive director at the time, she and her husband were. So, I went and I met him and interviewed. He was a very new, very young executive director for the Washington Office, which was the chapter office. It wasn't the legislative work, which was handled by a separate staff. This was for the chapter office to work with the members and the donors and do all the programming. I met with him. I didn't get the job. He offered it to someone else, and then, I found I was very disappointed, because I'd decided I really wanted this job. Then, something fell--to this day, I still don't know what happened--but something fell through with the person and he called me the next day and said, "If you still want it, the job is yours." I said, "Yes, I still want it, even though I'm not your first choice. I still want it." I started working there. We were in Washington from 1981 and we moved back to New York in 1985. I knew we would eventually be coming back to New York. At this point, my husband and I married. I might have left sooner, but I felt greatly valued in the organization and it had been suggested to me that if I hung in there, they would find something for me in the national office. I have to say, I was given a good amount of freedom while I was in Washington to not only do the work, obviously, I was hired to do, but, also, to do some work with the legislative office, because I loved the political work. It was, at the time, I thought, a real dream job. I was grossly underpaid and very happy. I did that for four years.

SI: What kind of issues would you tackle?

GR: Oh, our issues. Well, the organization was somewhat different, frankly, than it is now. At the time, we worked on four general program areas--international relations, which is very important to Jewish organizations, and not just because of Israel, but because of Jewish communities that live all over the world and all that kind of stuff. Because we were in Washington, in the presence of embassies, our international program, I think, was really quite extraordinary. We also did domestic issues, which, at the time, immigration was key. That was for me, one of the most critical issues. The issue of immigration was, and continues to be, one of

the most important issues for me, personally. So, we worked on that. We worked on--energy, was an important issue in the Jewish community at the time, and energy policy, and a variety of policy issues. Then, there was intergroup and interfaith issues. So, AJC is known for its work with the black community, its black-Jewish relations work, as well as its work with other religious groups. Then, there was Jewish communal affairs, having to do with internal Jewish issues, such as, I don't know, intermarriage and a variety of other things about the state of the Jewish community. We had a good program on that, but I would say, because we were in Washington, the emphasis was mostly on black-Jewish relations, interfaith work, socioeconomic policy, immigration policy and foreign affairs. That's what I focused on. It was great fun.

SI: What is most vivid in your mind of what you worked on when you think about that period?

GR: Oh, my goodness. It's like a jumble. Several things are. So, it was the first time I worked someplace where I realized I was part of a really big organization and understood, fairly quickly, that doing a good job is important, but understanding how to navigate this incredible bureaucracy is also important. So, I remember that very distinctly and I remember the great frustration for almost all my colleagues was figuring out how to work with the crazy national office, because when you weren't in the national office, it was somehow a feeling of greater superiority than being someone who works in the national office; figuring out how to take the work that was happening in other places and have it be meaningful for Washington, DC, and also, how to approach issues in Washington that kind of stripped away what made Washington a unique city, because, at the end of the day, we were still dealing with members and donors and local leaders in a way that, if you were in Atlanta or Houston or Chicago or Boston, LA, it would be very similar. So, it was not so much how to play up the uniqueness of Washington, which I thought was very easy to do, but, actually, take a step back and strip some of that away and approach the work that said, "We just happen to be in Washington." So, what I remember mostly, it was how to think about things, how to approach things, so that our work could be highly competitive with the other chapter offices and also show that while we're unique in Washington, we're not that exceptional, because sometimes that actually hurt us, it didn't help us with the national office in particular. So, that's what I mostly remember, and sitting in on a lot of the meetings. I was allowed to sit in on whatever meeting I could. There was a meeting I remember, it was called the first Tuesday meeting, and it was all the Washington reps from every Jewish organization. At the time, I think one of the best was the one who worked for AJC. His name is Bookie, Hyman Bookbinder. He's now deceased, but he was, like, "the dean" of the Washington reps for almost all organizations, brilliant, brilliant guy. He'd been an aide to Hubert Humphrey. [Editor's Notes: Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr. (1911-1978) was a pillar in the postwar Democratic party establishment, serving as U.S. Senator for Minnesota for two different periods--from 1949 until 1964, and from 1971 until 1976. He was Vice President under Lyndon Johnson from 1964 until 1968, and unsuccessfully ran for the presidency in 1968, losing to Richard Nixon.] He'd been in Washington his whole career. I was allowed to sit in on those meetings. I didn't participate, but I found it really interesting to hear different strategies about how to present your issues, how to be an advocate, how to be an effective advocate in a highly competitive marketplace, both on the Hill as well as with the Executive Branch and the other departments in Washington. I loved that. So, I remember that more than I remember particular issues that we worked on or meetings, board meetings, and all the other kind of stuff you do if you're part of an organization.

SI: It is interesting that you said competing with the other chapters. Was that, for example, if you raised more money than the other chapters, you would get more recognition or more resources from national? What was the competition based on?

GR: Well, there were several pieces. One did have to do with resources. Most organizations, at the time and even now, your ability to attract big leaders, generate important program, means you'll get more resources. I thought the Washington office was under-resourced when I got there. The resources were put into the legislative office, not the chapter office, which I thought was a huge mistake. They, at the national office, approached the Washington office of AJC as if it were a group of--that there was no great wealth there. There were so many myths about it, all of which were crazy; no great wealth, totally not true. People just were interested in--or they were government people; not entirely true, or that they would somehow not respect the authority of folks in New York. Well, that was true. So, that part was kind of true, but I thought we could do really excellent work in very--it seemed to me that if black-Jewish relations are going to be one of the most important issues you're going to work on as a national organization--people were looking in Atlanta, which is fine, and New York City and other places, but to not be looking in Washington, DC, seemed to me to be utterly crazy and that's what I meant by it. It was looking at the city as if people didn't live there. It was looking at the city as a place for the federal government, not a place of poor people, black people, brown people, Jews, not all of whom are wealthy, some of whom are. It wasn't really looking at the city as a place where people live and breathe and die. It was looking at it as a place for the federal government and I think a lot of organizations do that with their Washington office. They don't fully appreciate the vibrancy of the city as a city. So, that was something that interested me. I didn't realize it right away, but it didn't take me that long to figure out if we could find a way to make that work, it could make us a more important chapter to the national organization. So, that's what we did.

SI: Then, in 1985, you went up to New York.

GR: '85, yes. Summer of '85.

SI: Were you working on the same issues on the national level?

GR: No, because I first went into--they offered me a job in the membership department and I wasn't really very happy with it. So, it was mostly members write to you, mostly with complaints, and you write back to them, saying, "Oh, we're so sorry," and blah-blah-blah. So, I did that for about six or seven months, and then, the department was called community services department. It oversaw the chapters and, unlike ACLU, the chapters were part of the national office. They were not separate entities. They were employed by the national office and supervised by the head of the community services department. His name was Gene DuBow. He was the one who, kind of with a wink and a nod, said, "Hang in there in Washington and we'll bring you to New York." I was in membership for a while, and then, he put me into the program department. Essentially, it was my job to take the national program priorities of the organization and help interpret them for implementation on the ground. At the time, we had twenty-seven chapter offices to do that. That's what I did and did that for a number of years, and then, became director of program, and then, assistant director of the department, and then, I headed the entire

department. That's what I was doing when Anthony [Romero] called me to come here. [Editor's Notes: Anthony D. Romero became the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, the sixth in the organization's history, one week before the September 11, 2001 attacks.]

SI: Tell me about the major changes you tried to bring about.

GR: At the American Jewish Committee?

SI: Yes, before we get into ACLU.

GR: Sure. I always thought it was absolutely ridiculous for organizations to kind of feed on themselves, and it wasn't just AJC. It's lots of organizations where you have a national office, and then, a hub or a network. There is a sense among the people not in the national office that everyone in the national office is a complete and utter imbecile and doesn't understand the realities of their life. In the national office, it's, "Oh, those idiots out there. They don't understand we're dealing with all the big stuff. They don't have to deal with the funding or this or that." It just seemed to me an incredible waste of resources and energy. I never understood it. I never understood it. I was good friends with folks who did my job in lots of other organizations. I had colleagues in Urban League and NAA[CP], as well as Planned Parenthood and every other Jewish organization. We were almost all women. We would get together for lunch and we all kind of observed the same thing, but really, I was lucky enough to move into a position where I could have some impact on whether or not it would continue. So, it wasn't anything huge. It was a lot of little things, from how we talk about each other to creating opportunities to build multidisciplinary teams of people to make decisions about stuff, to bring more national staff into the thinking when I was thinking about chapter things in AJC, and vice versa. Not everything needed to be adversarial. Not everything needed to be "we" and "them." One of the biggest challenges we had was competing over donors, of all things. The chapters, for the most part, would identify local leaders. They would do the work with them. They would cultivate them, and then, when the person moved to the national office, essentially, the message was, "Back off. They're ours now." From the perspective of the donor, that was very confusing, because, "This was the person who first brought me into this organization. I like you, Shaun. You brought me in here. I respect you. Why would you suddenly have no contact with me?" So, I would work with folks in development and other parts of the organization to say, "You know, we can have multiple relationships with these people." It may be that if you're going to solicit a very large gift, [then] that should come from the national executive director. That makes sense, but it shouldn't mean that the executive director from the chapter should have no interaction, consultation, conversation. That's just silly. So, it was a lot of negotiation, discussion, conversation. There was a sense that whatever happened in the national office needed to be absolutely replicated in the chapters, and, again, I said, "This doesn't make a lot of sense." There's a certain part--we need to take a step back, think of it as like an organism, and there are things, frankly, the chapters can do better than the national office, so, the national office should just stop, waste of resources. There are things the national office could do better, and so the chapters need to take a step back. Then, there are things where we all need to do it, but maybe do it a little bit differently. So, it was approaching what had traditionally been points of tension in a new way. It didn't decrease the tension entirely and I actually think a little bit of tension between the national and the chapters, a little bit, is always good, but certainly, the depth

of the tension--it had been pretty bad for quite some time--and I think that disappeared. I also think the nature of organized Jewish life started to change very radically. We were an organization that had really been founded on domestic issues, human rights issues. We had an institute for human rights and human relations before any other organization in the United States. As the world changed, and in so many ways, I think, became smaller, I think a lot of Jewish organizations, they knew they needed to reinterpret their mission. They weren't quite sure what that meant. I think, despite the best attempts of AJC's leaders, I think it faltered, and so, just to be clear, my time with them wasn't all rosy. I think I made valuable contributions, but I also butted heads. I thought we didn't need to be the advocate for Israel that the organization was pressing us to be, or the one or two leaders were pressing us to be. I thought Israel did quite well on its own. I don't think they really cared if we were arguing for them in LA or San Francisco, and I thought we were abandoning the domestic agenda, which concerned me greatly and I thought many Jewish organizations were doing that. I thought it was a big mistake. So, that was an area in which I had very little impact, quite frankly, yes.

SI: I just have one more question before we move on to the ACLU. Black-Jewish relations was a big part of your work in Washington. You were in New York when, giving amateur perspective, it seems that Crown Heights was the nadir of black-Jewish relations. How did your office respond to that? [Editor's Notes: Crown Heights is a neighborhood in Brooklyn in which a three-day race riot took place in August 1991 between the community's Black and Orthodox Jewish communities. The riots began after two Guyanese children were struck by a car that was part of a motorcade for the Chabad-Lubavitch leader Rabbi Menachem Schneerson. One of the children, Gavin Cato, died as a result of his injuries. African-American and Caribbean-American residents attacked members of the Orthodox Jewish community in recrimination attacks in the riots that ensued, resulting in the murder of an Australian Jew, Yankel Rosenbaum.]

GR: I think we did great work on Crown Heights. I tried to use that to make the case that we should not abandon, that we were one of the few organizations who had links to, because of our interfaith work and our work in churches, and at the time, and still, to a great extent, churches are where much of the social justice movement for African-Americans lives. So, it wasn't just our work with African-American and black communities, it was our relationship to these churches that we had had for decades. So, I think that served us well. I think we were able to do really, really good work in Crown Heights and just lower the volume a bit. We were an organization where the New York chapter at the time, and the executive director at the time, Diane Steinman, did great work. She was someone who could sit down with Mayor Dinkins, sit down with leaders of the Orthodox community. [Editor's Notes: David N. Dinkins was mayor of New York City from 1990 until 1993, and served during the Crown Heights riots.] We could sit down with anybody and have a conversation. We had credibility, we had integrity, we were trusted. I think Crown Heights could have been a lesson in this is what we do really, really well, we should do more of it. Some people saw it as, "We should just be out of this game entirely, because we're never going to make a difference here." I think ultimately that's what most Jewish organizations have decided to do, the traditional Jewish organizations, because there are some newer Jewish organizations that have sprouted up, but for the organized Jewish community, I think fighting anti-Semitism, which is still real, or defending Israel--and, for some organizations, the two are the same; I'm not sure they're always the same--that's really become their sole mission. Everything else has become, maybe secondary and I think that's unfortunate.

SI: How did you make the transition from AJC.

GR: To here.

SI: Yes.

GR: First of all, it was the easiest transition. Everyone said, "It's going to be so hard. You were at AJC for twenty-one years," and it was probably the easiest work transition I've ever had. I got a phone call from Anthony. It's kind of crazy. So, I had been thinking, "Am I going to finish my career at the American Jewish Committee?" I was forty-nine. I had been there since I was twenty-eight and I thought, "If I don't get out now, I'm never getting out," because everyone said a woman who's fifty and over is never going to find another job. "Nobody will hire you," and I remembered that. I wasn't sure where I wanted to go. I knew my strength had less to do with working in a Jewish organization and more to do with I understand how to make a really large organization function well. I kind of know how to do that, and then, 9/11 had happened. The world kind of became a strange place. So, internally, this is what I'm thinking, right, 9/11 happened. A few months later, my dad died, separate from 9/11, and my father and I were always extremely close. He was the one I always talked to about career stuff. Then, I got a phone call from Anthony and they're all related in my head. I'm not sure why, but they've always been related in my head and it just seemed like the right time to leave. I never had much of a career plan, obviously, [laughter] but it just seemed to make sense. It felt right. It felt right. It was very hard leaving there. I'm still very good friends with the--I'd worked there from the time I was in my late twenties until I was forty-nine years old. I kind of grew up in the organization. It was incredibly good to me and incredibly generous. So, leaving was hard. I'm sure there were a lot of people who still don't understand why I left, but anyone who knows me really well understood why and it made a lot of sense. Anthony had this really young vision. He was thirty-seven, thirty-eight. He was younger than me. We talked about the affiliates. The department hadn't been formed. He had a transition paper that he wrote for the board, laying out the role of affiliates. He even created a mockup of what the department could look like. He showed it to me. I said, "Well, it makes no sense whatsoever. I wouldn't do it this way." So, he kind of suckered me into, "So, how would you do it?" I start drawing things for him and we start chatting. We just liked each other. We liked each other immensely. That was in May, and then there were lots of phone calls, discussions, conversations, and I came here November 1 of 2002, with no great plan, by the way. [laughter] That should be said.

SI: The department basically started with you coming here.

GR: The department actually--I don't care. Well, I'll go on the record with this. So, when Anthony and I were talking, one of the things he shared with me was the fact that, in creating this department, it was not something--he was very committed to it and there were a couple of executive directors, affiliate EDs, who wanted it and maybe had given him the idea, I don't know--but that, universally, there was great ambivalence, or even opposition, to the creation of the department. This was an organization that had been going along its merry way for a very long time and here's this young guy coming in with a lot of ideas. I think that while people are open, this as an organization, I can tell you, is fairly conservative in its organizational sense of

self. It loves its traditions. It loves how it's always done things. It's proud of its success and kind of, like "Why mess with anything, right?" which you can understand. Anthony came in with lots of ideas and I think a lot of people found that troubling. So, one of the things he and I were talking about, I said to him, "I don't know I'm your person. I'd be this person you're bringing in. Half of them don't even want this here. You should find someone who everyone loves, who doesn't scare anybody, who won't be the face of change, and that's what you should do. That's what I would do if I were you, and stay in touch and I'll help in whatever way I can." He said, "Great," and he did stay in touch. At the time, he was working, he wanted to create the first membership conference for the ACLU. The American Jewish Committee is known for, we do an annual meeting, and I was one of the people who ran it, with the associate director. He had a lot of questions about how we did it at AJC, so, I was sending him my budget. So, we stayed in touch just so I could help him with some things having to do with the conference and other things. Then, he called me, during the summer, and said, "Listen. Just come work here. I've found this person and she's an ED and she's lovely. She's going to come here, but she's never worked in a national office. Why don't you come and do this with her?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know. I've been a number two before--took me too long to become a number one. I don't think I want to be a number two. I'll help her from here, but I don't think this will work, and besides, I'm too busy. I'm going on the road." He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I have to go to San Diego, where I'm hiring a new director there." He said, "This woman is in San Diego. Her name is Linda Hills. You have to go talk to her. This is meant to be." I said, "Okay." So, I go to San Diego, I do my AJC work. I meet Linda Hills for breakfast. She drives me to the airport. She says, "You've got to come do this with me, because all I did was run the San Diego office of ACLU. We're four people. That's it." I said, "Let me think about it." By the time I landed, I decided I'm not going to do it, but what this did help me think is, "It is time for me to move on from AJC." So, I thought that was the role of all of this. It was to help me get to the point where I need to put myself out there and think differently about the last fifteen, sixteen years of my career, twenty years of my career. Then, Anthony started calling relentlessly. He can be relentless. I don't know if other people who you've interviewed have talked about him, but he can be--when he really, really wants something, he's relentless. He started calling me all the time. My assistant at AJC thought I was having an affair with a guy named "Anthony." She didn't understand who this Anthony was who was calling me all the time. Then, Linda called me, and then, I don't know. I changed my mind and I'm still not sure why. It started to feel right and I thought I could help Linda. So, I said yes, and she moved to New York. She and I did everything as a team. So, the staff--I wrote the job descriptions. She was the person who sat in on senior staff meetings. I didn't have to do any of that. I kind of liked that. It was kind of a relief not to have to do all this stuff you have to do when you're a member of the senior team. I felt she and Anthony were very respectful to me, very respectful to all my experience. There was no one who was brought into the department or hired who was not my hire. The understanding we had was for her to be here for two to three years. It also allowed me to see if I would like this. They never filled my job at AJC. It was an acting director. They were incredibly generous and said, "If it doesn't work out and you hate it, you can come back." So, it was the best of all worlds, and then, Linda actually ended up leaving sooner, for a lot of reasons. We had a rough winter here in New York and she's a San Diego person. Her family was in California. She didn't really have friends or family here. It was hard for her, I think. So, she left sooner. I then became head of the department, a year-and-a-half later. That's how it happened.

SI: I have heard a little bit about the relationship between national and the affiliates from other interviews. I know, for example, what other people have called the “race to the donor’s door,” with national versus affiliates going after the same donors, had been settled. Would you say it was really settled by the time you got here?

GR: I think no. It was certainly better than it was anywhere else, I'll tell you that much, from any other national affiliate operation that I know of, and I'm pretty familiar with organizations generally and their structure. I thought ACLU had figured a lot of it out, but it was hardly perfect. It got better. I think one of the things I sought to do when I came here, I think Anthony was looking for a way to lower the volume of the fighting, the bickering. I think he observed what I observed--what a waste of energy and resources--but I don't think the solution was to keep the affiliates happy and if you keep them happy, it'll keep them quiet. I looked upon it as wanting to build a nationwide organization. I said to him, "I have a real vision and the vision of this department isn't to support affiliates. It's to support the creation of a nationwide organization. That means we strengthen affiliates, so that we can leverage all the parts of the organization." I thought that's what I did at AJC and that's what I thought I was coming here to do and that's what we've been doing. Again, just by doing some really routine things, from being in a meeting and when people talk about affiliates and talk about "them," just to say, "They're not 'them'. They're 'us,' and that's not okay. We can't talk about them that way," and the same thing for--just changing the language of how we talk about one another, changing the pattern of how decisions get made. Not everything has to be made that quickly and there's no reason we can't consult more people and we can't share information. We can provide best practices to them. They can choose not to take advantage of it, but we shouldn't say, "Oh, it doesn't pay to even share it with them, because they won't listen." This is what people used to say. That's crazy. People want to do excellent work and, if you share what excellence looks like, ninety-nine out of a hundred times, they'll pursue it. They want to do that. Doing staff conferences, nationwide staff conferences, where you put all the bodies in the room--this is an organization that never did that. Helping affiliates achieve their goals, saying to them, "Tell me what your goals are and how can I help get you there," not, "Here's what you have to do," just little things like that. That's what we do in this department. That's what we do. It's about meeting affiliates where they're at, helping them get to where they want to go and, when we do that, we create a stronger organization nationwide. I think we've been pretty successful, actually. I feel really good about what we've achieved in a fairly short period of time. For staff who come to the organization now, they don't know what it was like, but, every now and then, I'll get a note or an email or a call or something from someone who's been around forever, pre-me, and they'll just, "Thank you so much. What your department's done is amazing." So, that's important and meaningful.

SI: Tell me about getting to that point. In the first five years, what were the major thrusts you made?

GR: So, the first thing that helped--having nothing to do with me, absolutely nothing to do with me--had to do with the money that started to flow into the organization as a result of several things--Anthony's leadership and George Bush. So, our membership doubled. It generated revenue for us. So, having money sure as hell helps. What I'm grateful for, though, is the fact that, when I asked that more of the resources go back out into the states, there was some

pushback, but nothing I couldn't argue. Again, so, the ability to invest more in the states certainly helped, because once you gave resources to the states, the argument of, "Well, they're not very good," that used to be the argument, "They're not very good," and it was kind of this vicious circle. "They're not very good, because they don't have the resources." Well, we wouldn't give them resources, because they're not very good. So, we would just go around and around--it used to drive me crazy. One of the first things we did was put a staff attorney in--there were twenty-seven ACLU offices, twenty-seven or twenty-eight, I can't remember, that had no staff attorney, which shocked me when I got here. I assumed, "It's the ACLU. Everyone has at least one lawyer," and I found out the majority of state offices rely upon cooperating attorneys, which is great, but they're not employees of the organization and what they say yes and no to can be dependent upon so many things, but not necessarily the vision of the ACLU. So, we had money and certainly more staff attorneys were being hired in the national office, but I made the pitch that, "Twenty-five more lawyers in the national office is one thing. We'll get some return on investment, but twenty-five more lawyers in the states? Just think what that could do for us." We didn't have a staff attorney in Texas. That was crazy. Anthony said, "You're right," and so, we did it and we did it over the course of two years. We did, I think, twelve and twelve, because we had to then help executive directors hire a staff attorney. We had to help them with their executive boards, many of whom believed that a non-lawyer ED could not supervise a staff attorney. So, it was not just helping them hire someone, but creating a climate for success in whatever was going on in the state, so, working with boards, helping affiliates deal with the challenges of professionalizing. Many of our affiliate offices were run by volunteers, which is great. We love having volunteers, but, when you hire professionals to do the work day to day, there can be some real tension between the person who's come on to do the work and the volunteers who had done it all along. The ED could be caught in the middle, and so, helping them navigate that, work through that and do it in such a way that the volunteers don't feel disrespected, feel valued, but still give space to the staff to do the job they've been hired to do and do it well. So, we do that. We started doing an orientation for all new affiliate staff every year. We started doing a national staff conference every year. We do a financial training seminar. We do development training. We assume that folks have a baseline of technical expertise when they're hired. So, we assume, if you come to us as a staff attorney, you know how to be a staff attorney. We don't assume you know how to do it for the ACLU. So, helping affiliates navigate the ACLU is what we do here in this department.

SI: Was the initiative to get a lawyer in each affiliate part of or separate from the Strategic Affiliate Initiative?

GR: That came later. So, SAI, Strategic Affiliate Initiative, came about in '05. It was part of our last campaign, Leading Freedom Forward, but it was really only possible because we had done all this other investment. You can't be strategic, I don't think, until you've been fair. So, our hiring not just a staff attorney in many places, but development people, getting them new equipment, technology--we had affiliate offices where there was one computer and it would be shared with the two or three persons. That was just crazy. So, providing grants to affiliates for everything from technology to web development services to what-have-you, whatever the affiliates thought they needed, by doing all that kind of investment, by growing a subsidy of support for the smallest and most vulnerable affiliates--the subsidy went from, it was \$55,000 when I got here, it's now a quarter of a million dollars--by doing all of that, you can then take a

step back and say, "Okay, now we can be strategic." We're now supporting Alabama and Louisiana in a way they've never been supported. So if we want to really go deep in Mississippi and really grow that, we can do it, because I don't have to feel bad that their phones don't work in New Orleans. That was the approach. SAI was launched in 2005. There are eleven affiliates that are in the program. It is in the process of winding down. Most of the monies have been distributed. It sought to do capacity building in states that we view as critical to our work, no matter what the issue is.

SI: Can we pause for a second?

[Tape Paused]

SI: Tell me about your approach to building the department and your staff.

GR: It's big and it keeps changing. I always thought the department should reflect affiliate need, and kind of be ahead of the game in many ways. When I said before that Anthony showed me his org chart for affiliate support and I said, "Oh, that doesn't make any sense," and it didn't, because it was a miniature national office. So, in his view, which I understood; a lot of people shared this view, I would have someone who would help affiliates that would be a legal department person, a development department person. Basically, I would create a mini department here that looked like the national org chart and what these staff would be doing would basically be a go-between, which seemed ridiculous to me. If someone wants to talk with Steve Shapiro, the legal director, that's who they should talk to. They shouldn't have to come through--we shouldn't be a pass-through. That doesn't make any sense. So, the first hire Linda and I made was Debra Sanchez, who still works here, and it was communications and marketing, because it seemed to me the affiliates just stunk at it. I mean, their visibility was almost nonexistent, for the most part. They all had different logos. They all had different names. It was a mess. Here you were, a part of one of the most important organizations in America, and I could live in your state and not even know that there's an office here--seemed crazy to me. So, the communications and marketing is where we started, and I think that was the right thing to do. Our initial composition were folks who focused on organizational development, financial management and communications and marketing, and that's still the backbone of the department. We have many more people doing that work now. So, now, we have someone who's doing online marketing, in addition to traditional marketing and communications, and we have Jake, who does finance and organizational management and Tomi Jean and her staff work on building the development departments of all the affiliates. That makes sense. I would say, every year or so, I go through an exercise, both informally, as well as--I mean, I have these questions that I look at every single day. It forces me to think about what do affiliates need now, what are they going to need in ten years, because it's too easy to keep doing what you've always done, because organizations are both reactive and proactive and the landscape in which we work changes. To keep the same structure always seems to me to not make very much sense, so that while the rest of the national office has mostly stayed the same, with some jiggering, I think our department has been kind of the R & D for the ACLU. We experiment with things here. We try things out. We can always find some affiliates who will let us beta-test stuff with them and it's been great fun and I think it has made the rest of the national organization more comfortable with experimentation, because this, "What if we fail, and then ruin the amazing ACLU," that becomes

less of an issue if we say, "Let's just beta-test and we'll see how it works and, if it doesn't work, we won't do it." So, it's made people more comfortable with trying new things. All the advocacy work now lives in the department. The campaigns live in the department. So, that's new. That happened in 2010 as a result of the restructure, that I'm sure people have talked to you about.

SI: For the record, what you referred to is a list of six questions on the wall. You keep that up all the time.

GR: Yes.

SI: Could you read them for the records?

GR: Sure. "What do affiliates need now? What will they need in five to ten years? How can ASA serve those needs?" That's this department. "What other parts of the organization might serve those needs? What skills and talents are missing from ASA to serve those needs?" and "Does ASA's structure continue to work?"

SI: Tell me about some of the initiatives that you launched with the affiliates on that maybe have not worked out. We will start there, and then, get into things that have worked out.

GR: Sure. So, I thought it would be great if we could have--well, I wasn't the only one who thought--many of us thought, if we're going to be serious about doing political work, and there's still some people who think we shouldn't be doing it, but I think that boat has sailed, that we needed to have a relational database. We needed to have some way in which to say, "Who knows Shaun and who doesn't?" and if Geri knows Shaun, that may not be good enough. We have people working on different issues and we need to share these relationships. I remember saying to a colleague, eight years ago, I said, "The next big fight isn't going to be over money. It's going to be over relationships, who knows who and who gets to who," and not just donors. It could be political leaders. It could be grasstops, but letting go of that three by five card with the name and the private cell number on it? That's going to be tough. That's going to be the next battle. I thought if we could test it with a couple of affiliates and show how well it works, we could prepare the rest of the organization for creating this relational database. So, I picked two really good affiliates, EDs who I love and adore, and I wouldn't say it was an abysmal failure, but it was a pretty good failure. It showed me, on a very small scale, the problems we're going to have throughout the organization, because fairly reasonable people refused to give up their information, even within affiliates. So, in one affiliate, we had the development director refuse to release information to the organizer, who she believed would somehow make stupid judgments and destroy everything they were doing with the donor. The organizers refused to share information they had with grasstops and hand them over to the development staff, because they believed, once the development staff got their hands on them, all they'd do is ask them for money and they wouldn't have the political leverage they had. I was surprised at the absolute refusal on the part of such a small number of people, among whom I consider them be more enlightened than some of the others. So, yes, that was a pretty bad, pretty bad failure. That was a couple years ago. So, I let it go. I said, "Okay, we're not ready yet. We just haven't made the case. People are not understanding what's at stake here and, if they don't understand what's at

stake about why this is important, then right now it's just kind of an intellectual argument and, as long as it's an intellectual argument, they're never going to do it." We're now revisiting the issue and we're pulling together a working group of affiliate and national staff and it's moving along. It's very slow. We do things very slowly here, and we'll see what happens. I remain somewhat cynical of its near-term success, but I think, in time, we'll get there. It's going to take a while.

SI: If you had had success there and you wanted to go forward with it, would you be able to just implement it or would you have to get it approved by the board? No?

GR: I have a lot of freedom. It's great. I have a lot of freedom, a lot of autonomy. I have incredible support from Anthony. He doesn't micromanage me--I love that. I don't mind being left alone. We think similarly and I think my knowing when he may want to know something has been spot on. So, I don't bog him down in a lot of stuff, but the things I bring to his attention are things he's grateful that I've brought them to his attention. He knows I'm one of the few people who's always looking at the whole organization, not just a part. Most of the people who work here, for good reason, are looking at a part of the organization, and I'm always looking at the whole thing. It gives me an opportunity to see patterns and trends even outside of affiliate support, and so I share that with other colleagues, not Anthony, but I'll go to other colleagues and say, "I'm seeing this pattern here. What do you think that means? And are you seeing that too?" I think colleagues appreciate that.

SI: I think we are at the end of our session, but I appreciate all of your time today.

GR: You're very welcome.

SI: I look forward to coming back.

GR: Okay. Great.

SI: Thank you.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 11/4/2015

Reviewed by Geri Rozanski 11/12/2015