



Interview with Former Miami Beach Mayor Norman Ciment

Kathy Hersh: Okay. My name is Kathy Hersh, I'm interviewing Norman Ciment from the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. The date is April 17th, 2015 and we are in his office on Miami Beach.

So I'd like to start out by talking about – you came as a young child. If you could tell us about your first impressions. If you have any early, early memory – your earliest memories of Miami Beach.

Norman Ciment: Well we came down here by train, it was a long trip and we moved to 127 Meridian Avenue, Miami Beach and we lived directly across the street from the police station, which had no air conditioning, the windows were open and the prisoners that were in there would be howling day and night and it was a musical choir.

And I became a newspaper carrier at 13 years of age. I went to Beach High up on 14th and Drexel and we loved it here from the beginning because it was just a simple, casual society and we had the ocean three blocks away, we had a park two blocks away and it was a fun place to live.

Kathy Hersh: And you had a police station across the street so you were pretty secure probably.

Norman Ciment: Right, right. And the entire beach was empty because there were no hotels or apartment houses on it. The only hotels on it were the McFadden-Deauville up in the 60s and another hotel on Lincoln Road, then you had the Roney on 23rd and that was basically it.

The Fontainebleau was the home of the family that owned Goodyear Tires and Rubber and –

Kathy Hersh: So you remember that?

Norman Ciment: Oh, yeah.

Kathy Hersh: An estate house being there?

Norman Ciment: Oh, sure. That was a place that kids necked. [laughter]

Kathy Hersh: Oh, really?

Norman Ciment: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: And why did they choose that place I wonder?

Norman Ciment: Well because it was, it was hidden off the main track and it was just a big house on the beach and a lot of foliage and a lot of roads going in and out, so it was a good place to go.

Kathy Hersh: Oh that's the first time I've heard about it being a necking place.

We talked earlier about the train trip down. Could you tell us – 'cause that was during the war, correct?

Norman Ciment: No, no it was after the war.

Kathy Hersh: It was after the war.

Norman Ciment: After the war.

Kathy Hersh: Tell us about that, what that was like as a boy coming on that train trip down here?

Norman Ciment: Well what happened was – if you want to know the back – the real background – my dad had three brothers and two of them had been wounded in the war. They looked for a place to move where they could, you know, live comfortably without the cold weather affecting them. They had a factory, which manufactured picture frames up in New York City and they decided on Florida.

They came down by a train. When they came out of the train, it was in August. This is what my parents tell me. And it was like 98 degrees, but with the humidity and what have you, it was like over 100. And two of them decided to stay here. One went back to New York and my dad and our family moved to Los Angeles. We lived there for one year, there was an earthquake and our house, the driveway split in half from the earthquake.

My uncle who lived here would open the small little factory on 5th Street, said that that week that they had arrived originally was a record week over the past 75 years, they never had weather like that and it's really livable. Please come back to Miami Beach.

So we ended up moving from L.A. We took the train from L.A. to Chicago, from Chicago to Miami Beach, my other uncle and my grandparents moved from New York, so we ended up all four families plus my grandparents moving down and living in South Beach. The train ride was long and dreary and – but we made it.

Kathy Hersh: What was that like having that much family in one place?

Norman Ciment: Well they – two families lived in one duplex and the other two lived a few blocks apart from each other, so we really were not all together but they all, they all rented space where Thrifty’s was on 5th.

We had the place there in the alleyway. It was a factory place and they manufactured there originally. From there they moved up to where Sunset Harbor is. We had a factory on the water where they built that new condominium complex and that was where their factory was for, you know, 30 some odd years.

Kathy Hersh: So you said you were a newspaper carrier, what was that like?

Norman Ciment: I loved it. I delivered South Beach and since my dad had a factory down there I knew most of the people and I made my \$4.50 a week and it was a tremendous amount of money for a 14-year-old kid back then. And they had a contest every year where you would – whoever brought in the most new customers would win a place to go.

And one of those years I ran and came in seventh and went to Havana, Cuba and went to Butman’s Island [phonetic], which became Nassau eventually, but it was a seven-day trip. It was really nice.

Kathy Hersh: What kinds of things did you do? What did you see that must have been quite impressive to a young man?

Norman Ciment: Well Cuba, Havana was a wide open place and it was a – they’re a very happy, go-lucky people and everything was musical and what have you and my dad gave me a sample kit and I went and solicited the photographer who was located on the Prado and took my first order from Havana, Cuba for Ciment Brother picture frames.

And in 1959 that man escaped from the Castro regime, came across on a raft, landed in Islamorada and contacted my father. We had never met because I was a sales rep soliciting. I had gone back to Cuba several times after that as I grew up.

And I went to University of Miami here, I went to Miami law school, graduated from both places, but worked in my dad’s business while I was going to school.

And he came and he asked my dad to help him. He had no money, had nothing, but he wanted to open up the same type of a business that he had in Cuba. And he opened it up and they have several stores now in the Cuban section of Miami where his heirs, his children and grandchildren are running those businesses.

Kathy Hersh: And that was based solely on a contact that you made with him, that one time?

Norman Ciment: That one time, right. Well he continued to be a customer –

Kathy Hersh: Okay, okay.

Norman Ciment: right. He continued.

Kathy Hersh: And you were 14-years-old at the time?

Norman Ciment: Fourteen.

Kathy Hersh: Do you think young people at that age were more adult-like in those days and –

Norman Ciment: Well the kids that lived in South Beach were because most of them came from poor families and practically every one of my friends worked. They were either beach boys or newspaper carriers. They worked for the Miami Herald, the Daily News, the Sun Reporter and every hotel had beach boys working. I was a beach boy also when I left the newspaper I think I was 16 and I became a beach boy. I worked through high school there and most of my friends did the same thing.

Kathy Hersh: So it was necessity really.

Norman Ciment: It was necessity if you wanted to have extra spending money and as it turned out, my campaign manager the first time I ever ran was Robert Goodman, Bobby Goodman who represents our Art Basel today and he was a South Beach boy. All my friends were South Beach Boys. They became doctors, attorneys and what have you. Stanley Rosenblatt.

Carl Hersh: What's a beach boy?

Kathy Hersh: Okay. Describe to us the duties of a beach boy because some people might not know.

Norman Ciment: Well there's two types of beach boys. I worked for the Surfside Plaza, we had no pool, they had a beach and what we had to do is we had to first – we would, at the end of the day we would have a large piece of wood loaded with pipes and with two pieces of cord attached to it and we would have to walk that plank up and down the beach to smooth it out and make it presentable for the next day. Then you would come there and people would come to go swimming.

So you'd install a lounge, a mat and put an umbrella for them. Bring them towels when they went swimming in the ocean. Some people would say rub my back with the oil so I don't get sunburned. You were a beach boy.

Kathy Hersh: Okay. So you went to Miami Beach High.

Norman Ciment: Graduated Beach High in 1953, University of Miami in '57 and law school in '61.

Kathy Hersh: People talk about Miami Beach High with stars in their eyes practically, almost everybody that we've spoken to. What made that place so special?

Norman Ciment: It was special because everybody knew everybody else. Miami Beach was a very small city back then and there were two elements. If you lived Lincoln Road South you were a South Beach boy. You were basically poor and working.

If you lived north of Lincoln Road you were living in a private home and your parents were much more affluent. So the kids that lived in South Beach bonded together because we played together, we worked together, we socialized together. It was a small community.

The kids that lived north, did the same among themselves. When we came into the school and we started playing ball where the north and the south mixed and the girls from the north started dating the guys in the south, it mixed also and we became one community Beach High.

Kathy Hersh: There were not tensions between the economic groups?

Norman Ciment: No. No.

Kathy Hersh: There wasn't the kind of "I wear nicer clothes" or –

Norman Ciment: Well you saw it but you didn't – it didn't really materialize into any kind of a problem.

Kathy Hersh: Like it does today.

Norman Ciment: Well today's it's all over. Those that have and those that have not, it's more pronounced.

Kathy Hersh: So tell us a bit about – you practice law on the beach or generally?

Norman Ciment: I practiced on the beach, I had three partners. My firm was Grover, Ciment, Weinstein and Stauber and all of them lived on Miami Beach. They all live on Miami Beach today. And everyone has retired. As of last year Grover and Weinstein continued on. Sherwin Stauber was a municipal judge, he retired, I retired three years ago and Grover and Weinstein retired this year practically. They had a major, they had a major case against the tobacco people and they won that case last week in the Supreme Court of the state of Florida and with that win they're basically retiring.

Kathy Hersh: What made you decide to run for mayor? Well, first of all, you were involved in the commission for many years. What made you decide to get involved in politics?

Norman Ciment: Well Miami Beach was a vibrant community and it was being run by a lot older members of the community and some of the young people that were coming up wanted change, they wanted to look at things from a different perspective. And, to be honest with you, Bob Goodman is the one that really got me more or so involved in politics than myself.

Kathy Hersh: He became your manager.

Norman Ciment: He became my manager. He's a public relations advertising professional and he suggested the idea to me and we filed – never believing that we could win, to be honest. We ran against Bernie Frank who was an incumbent for 14 years and we figured that I wouldn't – I was practicing at that time four or five years it would be a good way to meet a lot of new people, hopefully, you know, expand your practice and get involved with the community.

So never believing that we could win, we ran for that purpose. Getting exposure, understanding what it was all about.

Kathy Hersh: And this was for Commissioner.

Norman Ciment: This was for the City Commission, but this first happened in '67. What happened was, we were going to do it the first time in '65 and Joe Malek was a local attorney who was very politically involved and he didn't want me to run. He thought that I would get into his base of power, which was South Beach people and he offered me to be his campaign manager.

So he says, you'll get all the exposure you want and you don't have to worry about, you know, losing.

Kathy Hersh: [laughter]

Norman Ciment: So I said fine. So we got involved with him, I was his campaign manager, he won and '67 came, I ran, he helped me, Goodman helped and we won that time. But that was an interesting race because on the last day of qualification the vice president of Washington Federal who was partners with Senator Claude Pepper from the U.S. Congress, they filed to run for the commission.

And what happened was, they have enormous amounts of money, they had tremendous way with the entire, with the entire power structure of Miami Beach from the Hotel Association, the bankers, they owned all the banks on the beach and it became a very, very heated race.

The cub reporter at that time for the Miami Beach Sun was Larry King and the way Larry King, which I'm sure you know, the way he would write it was Bernie Frank is a three-to-one favorite and Milton Gaynor is five-to-one and there's a kid running who's three hundred-to-one. And that's the way it went.

Until about two weeks before the election it was two-to-one, three-to-one and a hundred-to-one. And a week before the election it was two-to-one, three-to-one and ten-to-one. And then Larry King makes his famous projection. He says, "I wouldn't be surprised if the kid beats them all."

And what happened was I came in first, Gaynor came in second and Frank came in third. The incumbent came in third, so we had made an agreement between myself and Mr. Frank that if I should lose and he wins, I would endorse him and vice-versa. He endorsed Gaynor but his father who was a very, very unusual, honorable man, a major leader of various organizations in South Beach, he came to me and he said to me, "Norman Ciment I can't deliver my son's endorsement to you but I will keep my word that we will endorse you, my whole organization will endorse you. We will work for you." And he was very instrumental in helping me win the election.

Kathy Hersh: And his name again?

Norman Ciment: His name was Frank. I don't remember his first name.

Kathy Hersh: Oh, okay.

Norman Ciment: He was Bernie Frank's dad.

Kathy Hersh: Amazing story.

Norman Ciment: Yup.

Kathy Hersh: So you were the kid and what was it about the kid that made people vote for you?

Norman Ciment: Well I don't know. I promised change and I implemented change and I think it was a breath of fresh air that was different than what they had had before. And I think that they sort of didn't like the idea that Senator Claude Pepper was campaigning for Mr. Gaynor and that all the power structure was endorsing Mr. Gaynor.

They felt that I was more from their background and from their section of the city and they came out and voted.

Kathy Hersh: They voted for the underdog.

Norman Ciment: They voted for the underdog.

Kathy Hersh: And so what kind of changes did you promote?

Norman Ciment: Well they wanted rent control, they wanted, they wanted doctors on ambulances, we created air rights, the theory of air rights. We restricted zoning so that they couldn't overwhelm the city. They wanted a lot of different changes. They wanted improvement in the parks. We tried very desperately – Jay Dermer and myself, we went to Washington, we met with the Corps of Engineers. They offered us in 1968 30 million to improve the beaches because the beaches were eroding away and the power structure of Miami Beach voted against it. They got five commissioners to vote against it. We never got it.

But ten years later it cost \$80 million and the beaches had disappeared. They realized that we were right ten years ago. They voted to let the beaches be restored and now they're doing that every X amount of years.

Kathy Hersh: That was a major accomplishment.

Norman Ciment: Right.

Kathy Hersh: What were some of the challenges you were facing? You mentioned the power groups being bankers and hotels.

Norman Ciment: Well they – for every dollar that we spent, they spent \$25 dollars. They advertised every which way in which we couldn't match in any way.

Kathy Hersh: To resist the changes you were trying to –

Norman Ciment: They resisted many things and they wanted many different things than we wanted. They were the power structure. They wanted – and that became more pronounced several years later because in 1972 or 3, they created what was known as a moratorium. You couldn't – that was the death knell for Miami Beach at that time.

They did not allow construction from 6th Street south, they didn't allow renovations in that area, they wanted to condemn 240 acres of Miami Beach and they wanted to make canals and they wanted to make sections. This will be for low-rise, middle-rise, hi-rise, shopping centers, townhouses. On paper it looked great. I supported it in the beginning because Steve Muss who owned the Fontainebleau Hotel at the time said we're going to get all the money from an insurance company that's going to bond it and we're going to sell it out to different developers and then we're going to change the Miami Beach area.

And one year, three years, five years nothing happened. Kept getting worse and worse and then when Castro made the deal

with Jimmy Carter who didn't understand what he was doing at the time, they emptied out the prisons, the insane asylums, all these crazy people came – you know, it was over 100,000 of them that came from Havana and they migrated and started living and we had more crime in Miami Beach then ever during that moratorium period because they were living down there in the dilapidated, deteriorated neighborhoods and it just became worse and worse.

And Murray Meyerson who became mayor, promised to lift the moratorium. He never did and then I ran against him in 1981 to lift the moratorium. And that was the catalyst really that changed Miami Beach around. We were – you couldn't rent Lincoln Road for \$10 a foot. Seventy-five percent of it was empty. And I went all over the country. I went all over the world speaking to different people everywhere and we couldn't do it. It just didn't – they had no interest in coming here. We were the murder capitol of America instead of the fun and sun capitol of America. It was really bad.

And getting ourselves but when I became mayor the first thing I did was I opened up a jail that had been closed for 23 years. I put policemen on horses, patrolling Miami Beach, I put them on motor scooters, I gave them different kinds of uniforms and they had batons and what have you on every corner so that the people should feel secure, not to be, you know, burglarized and robbed and raped.

We had hundreds of cases of criminal acts going on here and it began slowly, slowly. When I created the Art Deco District, because Barbara Capitman was one of my supporters and that whole group and she really did a phenomenal job in helping get many of these local hotels and apartment houses categorize as historic sites.

And then what happened was the European companies and many, many other companies that were creating advertising for various newspapers and magazines started sending models over here because we have natural light, we had beautiful sets with this Art Deco District properties and they began to use these properties without having to pay for them. And they were better than the ones you paid for. And they started bringing in many, many, many people. And those people attracted other people. And before you knew it, Art Deco took off.

Kathy Hersh:

What was your relationship with Barbara Capitman like and what did you think of her at the time?

Norman Ciment:

She was a pioneer of Art Deco. She was a hard working, very, very bright lady and we had a very meaningful understanding of what she wanted and what I wanted. And both our views merged.

Kathy Hersh: There were challengers, however.

Norman Ciment: Yes, yeah.

Kathy Hersh: Explain what that dynamic was like.

Norman Ciment: Well they didn't want the moratorium lifted.

Kathy Hersh: Who's they?

Norman Ciment: The power structure. The people who owned the hotels, the apartment owners, they wanted, they wanted to redevelop South Beach. And what actually happened was, when I got elected Steve Muss came and handed me the gavel and he says, 'All right you won. Take it over, do whatever you want.' I said, "You know what? You've had it for eight years. You never got the money to do it. How much longer do you think you would need in order to implement your idea?" He says, "I'm on the verge of doing it now. In the next 60 days I can get it done." I said, "I'll tell you what." And he had taken the gavel and he threw it on the floor. You know, "Here's your gavel."

Kathy Hersh: Oh he didn't do it in a –

Norman Ciment: No, no, not at me. He –

Kathy Hersh: - a peaceful –

Norman Ciment: - no, he threw the gavel on the floor. He says, "Here's your gavel. Take your committee and go." I went and picked up the gavel, I handed it to him and I said to him, "Mr. Muss, you need 60 days to raise all this money to do this entire project?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm going to give you 90 days, not 60, 90. You go get it done and I'll help you get it done. If you don't get it done, hand me the gavel, don't throw it. Hand it to me."

We worked on it for 90 days, couldn't get it done. I appointed the chairman of the board of Jefferson Bank to take over the redevelopment agency and the rest is history. We lifted the moratorium. For the first 11 months the vote was six-to-one against, then five-to-two, then four-to-three against. Eleven months later seven-to-nothing.

Kathy Hersh: Was that decline directly related to Muss's inability to get the funding together? That people were sort of thinking that he would do it and then when it became obvious that nothing was happening?

Norman Ciment: Yeah, I think that had a major part of it, yeah. Yes.

Kathy Hersh: What about the factor of – we interviewed Ernie Martin who worked for the county development and he was in charge of county redevelopment at the time who – apparently his – he was a major factor in getting federal funds allocated that enabled then, other people, smaller people, to come in and do redevelopment.

Norman Ciment: I'm not familiar with what he did but –

Kathy Hersh: He worked with Barbara Capitman pretty closely.

Norman Ciment: Okay, but what really happened here was federal funds did not do what private enterprise did. Every one of these – Tony who came in from – Tony Goldman who came in from New York and he bought my clients a little hotel on 7th Street and the day we closed, he asked his attorney, “Do I really own this hotel?”

Kathy Hersh: And that was the Park Central?

Norman Ciment: It was Park Central. “Do I really own this hotel?” And his attorney said, “Yeah, we closed and you got a deed.” And my client, Manfred Gerber said, “Norman, is the money really good?” They were both ecstatic. Him in selling and him in buying because they both – this man was suffering all these years, he was running 80 percent empty and this man had a vision to change Miami Beach. And both of them were happy on that day, you know? And the rest is history. Tony Goldman built a phenomenal thing in South Beach.

Kathy Hersh: So that was a real turning point then?

Norman Ciment: Yup. Yes.

Kathy Hersh: What other turning points have you been aware? I mean that was a major one but obviously there have been challenges. What would you say were the most challenging things while you served mayor two terms?

Norman Ciment: One term.

Kathy Hersh: One term. During your term, what years what it was?

Norman Ciment: Eighty-one to '83.

Kathy Hersh: Eighty-one to '83.

Norman Ciment: In '67 I was elected the first time, in '71 I was appointed by the governor as a state judge in the Industrial Claims Court. I sat there till '74 and then in '81 I ran for mayor.

Kathy Hersh: Tell the story about going to the Hungarian Club. I'd really like to get that on the record. Can you give us that background again please for the –

Norman Ciment: My parents were Hungarian and they spoke Hungarian in the house. They didn't allow my brother or I to learn to speak Hungarian because that was their way of communicating about things that they didn't want us to understand. But my mother loved to sing and she had a beautiful voice and she taught us to sing songs both in Yiddish and in Hungarian and we learned those songs and I like to sing, so.

Fast forward, 1981 my dentist is Dr. Richard Schwartz, his wife Patsy is my campaign manager and one day he says to me, "Norman, I'm going to take off from my office and I'm going to take you to the Hungarian Club where there's about 150 women that play Mahjong and canasta and what have you and we're going to pick up some votes for you there.

So we go to the club and he takes me in to meet the president and he tells her that for once we have a real, authentic Hungarian candidate running for mayor of Miami Beach and she must have been losing or something at that time, she was unhappy with the intrusion and she yells at him, "Stop with these phony-bologna Hungarian candidates. He's no more Hungarian than the man in the moon. So please leave."

And he says, "But please understand, he really is Hungarian." So she turns to me and she throws a question at me. In Hungarian she says, "Now answer me, Mr. Hungarian," and actually I couldn't speak Hungarian. I didn't understand what she said. So I said to her, "I am not going to answer that question, but I'm going to do something much better for you because you're a very special lady and I'm going to sing a Hungarian song to you." And I sang the song my mother taught me. And she became a voter supporting me.

Kathy Hersh: Do you remember that song?

Norman Ciment: Yeah, it was "Szól a kakas már, majd megvirrad már, Zöld erdőben, sík mezőben sétál egy madár." Hungarian.

Kathy Hersh: So that won over the Hungarian Club?

Norman Ciment: That won over the Hungarian Club.

Kathy Hersh: [laughter]

Carl Hersh: [inaudible][34:36] the beach and the sidewalks and the change on Ocean?

Kathy Hersh: Okay. One of the biggest things that's happened that a lot of people think really changed the beach for better or worse was the sidewalk, widening of the sidewalks and the beach. Did that happen during your watch?

Norman Ciment: I don't think so. But you asked me one other thing. You asked me what other major event occurred in Miami Beach that turned it around. Do you know what an eruv is?

Kathy Hersh: A what?

Norman Ciment: You ever hear of it? An eruv, e-r-u-v? Let me explain it to you.

In the Jewish world the Orthodox Jew is not allowed to carry on the Sabbath. They don't carry keys, they can't wheel a stroller, they can't carry an umbrella, so that prevents them from going very far because they can't carry anything with them. So in the old countries where they lived in these little shtetls or little villages, there is a Rabbinical law that if you put a string or a cord around the city where you live, it encapsulates the community where that string covers and if you live in that type of a community, you're allowed to carry.

I was in office three weeks and there was a very big Rabbinical scholar on Miami Beach, his name was Tibor, Rabbi Tibor Stern. He ran the congregation that was located on 15th and Washington Avenue and he was the head Rabbinical officer for Hebrew National Nationwide in America and he lived on Flamingo Drive where I lived at the same time and I knew him very well. And he came to visit me. And – in office. I was in office three weeks. And he said to me, "Ciment you were not elected simply because you're a good looking guy, you're elected because you're going to bring and build an eruv in Miami Beach. I says, "How am I going to do that?" I said, "That costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. You need cherry picking trucks and you need people to go up and string over all these waterways all over the city." He says, "Yes, but you're going to change Miami Beach if you do that because you're going to attract thousands and tens of thousands of people who will vacation here, who will live here because you'll have that eruv." I said, "Well if you raise the money for it I'll be happy to do it," you know?

About six months later representatives of the union came in and they started talking to me about they need pensions and they need raises. Every time there's a new, a new set of officers that were on Miami Beach the city employees are always coming and asking for more and more and more. It's normal.

And they had supported the incumbent not me, but they were telling me how they supported me, you know? It's an interesting part. And I said to them, "What do you guys do for the city that you don't get paid for? Everything you do you're getting paid for and you're getting more than enough right now. Show me something that you do where you're doing it as a community service." "Well do you want us to do?" I says, 'I'll tell you what I want you to do. I want you to help the

community build an eruv. Let the city contribute the cherry picking trucks, you supervise them and let them put their string around the city. It'll help bring in a whole new element.'

The long and short of it was, they did it, they helped it, they built an eruv in Miami Beach and at that point you then had ten kosher hotels that were operating and they were bringing in this element from all over the world because we made the front pages of every one of the major newspapers saying that Miami Beach of all places, the fun and sun capital of America, now had an eruv.

So you had the Saxony, and the Caribbean, the Boulevard, the Crowne, the Days Inn, the Sterling - every one of these hotels were attracting. And then the community started growing because those people that wanted to live in a community that had an eruv were attracted to it. They found it very comfortable to come live here.

And in August of this year, Rabbi Phineas Weberman is going to be honored at a special dinner sponsored by the Eruv Committee because he is responsible for supervising every week to make sure that no part of the string in circling the city of Miami Beach has been torn or damaged which would make it invalid. So they have a committee every week that checks it to report on radio and on the Internet that the eruv is functioning, that people can carry on the Sabbath. So they let him know I think Friday so they can carry Friday night and Saturday.

Kathy Hersh: So there's an announcement?

Norman Ciment: They announce it on radio and on the Internet. They have an Internet program. And there are thousands and thousands of people that adhere to this and one of the honorees is Albee [Albert] Galbut, he's a local attorney, I'm one of the honorees because I was the creator of this eruv and Rabbi Weberman who runs and supervises the inspections for the eruv is the honoree.

Kathy Hersh: I have never heard about this. Have you? So can you physically see it?

Norman Ciment: Yes. It runs on the boardwalk. That's one of the places. You'll see a string running up on top of the boardwalk.

Kathy Hersh: And so really it's kind of a boundary.

Norman Ciment: That's all. That's all it is. It's simply in circling a community with a string.

Kathy Hersh: And what are the boundaries? What do they coincide with streetwise that we would know?

Norman Ciment: It encircles the city.

Kathy Hersh: The entire city of Miami Beach?

Norman Ciment: The entire city.

Kathy Hersh: Wow.

Carl Hersh: Shtetl Miami?

Kathy Hersh: This is amazing. In all the people that we've interviewed, I think you're the 66th or 67th person, this has never come up. This is interesting.

Norman Ciment: Well I was the only Orthodox – I was the first Orthodox mayor in Miami Beach, practically in the United States when I was elected in '81.

Kathy Hersh: What has that been like? I mean that's a spiritual dimension actually. That's kind of interesting. Were there challenges around that or?

Norman Ciment: Yeah. Many challenges because a lot of times functions would take place on Friday night, I couldn't attend or on Saturday and – because I don't eat non-kosher, so if I was invited to the La Gorce Country Club they made sure I had a tuna platter instead of roast beef and things like that, so there was – it was very special. It's very nice.

Kathy Hersh: And were people generally aware then of your being Orthodox?

Norman Ciment: Quite a few people, yes, yes.

Kathy Hersh: And that wasn't a political liability? It was an asset would you say?

Norman Ciment: It was both. It was both a liability and an asset but I would say much more of an asset than a liability.

Kathy Hersh: Could you elaborate on that?

Norman Ciment: Well, people respected for the most part and then there are a lot of, believe it or not, Jewish people that didn't respect it. They were, they were uncomfortable with it, you know, because they weren't and you were and you were doing something that they didn't believe in and if you, if you would question maybe 100 Jewish families about – not Orthodox but just normal Jewish families, I guarantee you over 75 percent of them wouldn't know what an eruv was. But they would feel uncomfortable. String and circling a city?

I can't give you the validation for why. It was created, you know a thousand years ago. I don't understand it but I respect it.

I didn't, you know, - many people who are Orthodox didn't abide by the fact that the eruv was not there and they still carried keys, but many of the younger generation today do abide by it because they're much more educated and they're much more knowledgeable and they adhere to the, to the ruling.

Kathy Hersh: What is the Orthodox population on the Miami Beach? Do you have any idea?

Norman Ciment: I don't know today. When I ran I know that the Jewish population was about 50 some odd percent and now I understand the Hispanic population has replaced the Jewish population as being over 50 percent.

Kathy Hersh: Of course there are Hispanic Jews.

Norman Ciment: Quite a few, yes.

Kathy Hersh: There's the Cuban Hebrew congregation.

Norman Ciment: Right, right.

Kathy Hersh: Do you have – did you have any relationship with them at all?

Norman Ciment: Yes, yes I did.

Kathy Hersh: We'd been trying actually to find someone from that congregation to interview, to talk and we have not been successful so far, so remind me afterwards to check with you to get a name if you have one or –

Norman Ciment: Fine.

Kathy Hersh: Any questions, Carl?

Carl Hersh: Yeah. Miami Beach has had somewhat of a reputation of being an open city going back, well, way back. I was wondering, if you had sort of any awareness of sort of the, of the, I call it the underbelly or the darker side of what was Miami before [inaudible][46:46] and maybe even what – how have things changed when we were aware of the change?

Norman Ciment: Well, yes. I knew some of the people that were involved as I was much younger, but there was – there were attorneys, Marion Sibley, Ben Cohen, these were attorneys that represented very small groups of people that sort of, I wouldn't say controlled Miami Beach but had a major hold on many of the things that took place in the city of Miami Beach and as the

community grew and these people passed away, that idea also disappeared and we now have a very vibrant, cosmopolitan community in the entire area.

But back then it was controlled – I wouldn't say controlled but it was, it was handled by a half dozen groups that ran Miami Beach.

I was the kid, we're the first one running that was not attached to anybody.

Kathy Hersh: And that's why the odds that Larry King gave you were so high.

Norman Ciment: Well Larry King, when he left Miami Beach he opened up a nationwide radio station from Washington and when I won the mayorship he called me up and he said, "You son of a gun, you did it again." He says, "I want you to come up to Washington or put you on national radio." I went and I was on national radio with him for like an hour. Yeah.

Kathy Hersh: Any other stories about – the funny stories or celebrity stories that you can recall that you might like to share?

Norman Ciment: Well if you want to say that I was invited to the Fontainebleau Hotel by the owner then who was Ben Novack and he threw a kosher dinner that night for Rabbi Lehrman who was the head of Temple Emanu-El and for me and my wife and for Frank Brickman who was the kosher inspector for the city of Miami Beach. We had a kosher dinner in the Fontainebleau Hotel and Frank Sinatra sang Happy Birthday to us. So that was a wonderful occasion.

Kathy Hersh: [laughter] That was very nice.

Norman Ciment: Yeah.

Carl Hersh: Was there a – you're straddling both sides when you talk about Barbara Capitman and the major hotel interest and developer interests. How do you feel that balance or was it a balance or was it a confrontation always?

Norman Ciment: No it wasn't a confrontation later on because the Art Deco hotels were all small hotels in South Beach and they still are small hotels in South Beach. They are the little places. You know the Victor Hotel, the Park Central, places like that, they all became the Art Deco hotels and they – so they weren't the big, the big companies, you know?

The big ones were, you know, the Carillon, the Eden Roc, the Fontainebleau and stuff like that, so there was no confrontation. They actually fed off of the South Beach hotels because they started attracting all these good-looking people.

First the models came, the females, then the male models came, then the entertainers came and then the nightclubs came and then the big hotels began to understand what was attracting all these things and today if you want to see what's really going on, go see the nightclub in the Fontainebleau Hotel. It's all young people and very, very expensive to get in and what have you.

So they're all catering to that element and it's very interesting. I mean we just finished the Passover holiday, Fontainebleau had 1,400 people for a Kosher program and if the Eden Roc and the Miami Beach Resort and the other hotels would do the same thing, they'd all be packed. Because they're not doing it, they're going to Orlando, they're going to the PGA and - I went to the PGA because it's owned by a friend of mine and one of my sons was hired to sing there for the holidays. He sings Frank Sinatra so he went and did that, you know? So we went up there. But there were 1,500 people there.

The Doral Country Club was sold out for a Passover program so that there is a tremendous, tremendous amount of tourists that would come to Miami Beach if, in fact, the facilities were made available to them.

To give you an idea, there is a company called Crescent Heights. They are the largest converter of rental apartments in the world into condominiums. I represented them 20 years ago when we bought the three buildings from the Carriage House people. We bought Carriage House, Carriage South, Carriage North, 850 units and before we closed, 82 apartments were sold to Orthodox families up north because we promised them there would be a kosher restaurant, which there is at 5005 Collins, there would be temples in each building, which there is and today you have a flourishing, you know, community on that strip.

But we lost so many thousands and thousands of tourists because the hotels were sold, renovated and they didn't bring back the programs that had been running here for so many years. Hopefully they're going to realize what they, what they gave up and they're going to come back to it.

Carl Hersh:

What do you see as the future? Miami Beach?

Norman Ciment:

Thank God I think it's dynamic, I think it's going from strength to strength and it's matured and I think the present mayor did an outstanding job with his centennial celebration. I think he's very motivated and he has his eye on the ball in promoting Miami Beach all over the world and he's doing an excellent job on it and I hope that they finally come up with something that is, you know, sensible and dynamic for the Convention Rehabilitation Center that they're working on.

That's very important. If they don't do that, then we're going to miss out on a lot of business.

Kathy Hersh: I think we can –

Carl Hersh: Yeah. I'm about ready.

Kathy Hersh: Any other? We actually – he is one of the people we interviewed and I was interested in his statement about that he didn't feel that a big, big, big convention center to try to compete with Atlanta and other places was correct for Miami Beach. That it – that Miami Beach is a boutique destination and that there needed to be, of course, improvements, etcetera but to try to match the scale, the beach just won't hold anymore people. [laughter] It's already, you know, pretty packed when there are a lot of things going on in the winter.

Norman Ciment: I happen to agree with that and I think we are a boutique, but even being a boutique you still have to have enough space to take care of that type of a group. So instead of saying, well we're a boutique and we only have space for 50,000 people, maybe you need space for 65,000 or whatever, you know? But you have to have enough space and enough parking to make it viable.

We have the restaurants, we have the hotels, we need the convention space plus parking. That's what we need.