



Interview with Linda Zilber

Kathy Hersh: We're here today interviewing Linda Zilber at her home in Bay Harbor Islands. The date is September 17, 2015. My name is Kathy Hersh; I'm the Kathy Hersh, and this is for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project. Linda Zilber, we're going to have a conversation about all the many engagements and things you've done for Miami Beach. Let's start out with your childhood memories of the beach.

Linda Zilber : One of the fondest memories I have, I was six years old. It was during the Second World War, and my mother was pregnant with my brother. I remember Mount Sinai Hospital, which was the old Nautilus Hotel, used to take in the soldiers that were here during hurricanes, and pregnant women. I got to go to Mount Sinai with my mom, because she was pregnant with my brother, and meet all of the soldiers. My father was in the Second World War; he was stationed in the Aleutian Islands. But Mount Sinai was so wonderful to us. It was so fantastic as a little girl, and I saw how giving they were. I said, "Someday when I grow up, I'm going to give back to Mount Sinai." That's why I'm on the foundation board, and that's why I've been doing so much for so many years with Mount Sinai Hospital.

Kathy Hersh: Your impressions as a six-year-old were pretty vivid, I imagine.

Linda Zilber: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: What was the atmosphere like there? There were soldiers everywhere?

Linda Zilber: There were soldiers. The mess hall that they called it – the soldiers called it – the cafeteria and everything, it was filled with soldiers and several pregnant women. Those women that were officers' or soldiers' wives that were fighting in the war, Mount Sinai took in in case of hurricanes – well, during a hurricane in case they would have to give birth or something went wrong. They fed everybody, they had entertainment for everybody. They couldn't do enough for you. It was fantastic. Here is a six-year-old, I used to love it because I got to talk to all of the soldiers and I spoke about my dad. I got to talk to them and hear what they were doing and hear about their families. It was just fascinating for me. Also, as I grew older – it was wonderful, especially when the war ended. I can remember as a little girl – it was 1945 – sitting in front of a standup radio, the ones that stood on the floor so high. I'm sitting there and all of a sudden they said, "The war is over." I remember going screaming for my mother, "Mommy, Mommy:

Daddy is coming home. The war is over!" [laughs] My brother was a few months old, so it was really exciting. That's very vivid in my memory that a war was over. That, to me, I thought was the best thing I had ever heard. Especially, I think, then I was about seven – right, I was seven by then.

Kathy Hersh: Were there celebrations in the streets here?

Linda Zilber: Yes, people were screaming and yelling. If you walk out, especially in South Beach or in front of like Wolfie's, or Pickin' Chicken back then. People, wherever they were, they were out in the street yelling and screaming, "The war is over! The war is over!" Everybody was excited. The kids were screaming, the adults were screaming. It was fantastic. I think television was just starting then and that's not how you got your news. It was up north, but it wasn't really here. We finally got – Channel 4 was our first channel here, and Alec Gibson, I remember, and Jackie Pierce, who were involved in television back then. Ralph Renick – Ralph Renick and I shared the same doctor, I remember, many years later. I remember taking him home. He lived in Miami Shores and his brother Dick was on the school board.

Kathy Hersh: We're going to be interviewing him tomorrow.

Linda Zilber: Oh, good. Good.

Kathy Hersh: When did Bay Harbor Islands open up? Tell us about that transition.

Linda Zilber: Bay Harbor Islands was incorporated in 1947. We moved here, I think it was in the '50s – early '50s. This was the beginning. There were a few houses, a couple of apartment buildings, and that was it. At the time, we moved into an apartment waiting until my parents were going into a house. The reason why they had to wait for the house is because the people that owned it was Marty Margulies's parents and their little boy had to finish school. That was Marty Margulies. [laughs] It was really cute. Then they moved into the house, and that was around the corner from Shepard Broad, which is across the street from where you are now. That's where my parents lived. Bay Harbor started building up. At first, some of the buildings that were here on the East Island – because the island is divided into three sections. There's the East Island, which are multifamily; West Island, which is single-family; and then Kane Concourse and 95th Street, which is the business area. At that time...

Kathy Hersh: They had that zoning from the beginning, then?

Linda Zilber: Yes, Shepard Broad set it up that way. The only thing he told me that he was thinking of doing is on this side of the island – on both sides of the West Island you have like a park area. He

said that when he and Ruth were moving here, he thought that maybe they should put the house and the park in that little area as opposed to on the water. Then they decided, well, no, they should leave that park so that all the houses on the water could look at some greenery. He was back and forth thinking about what he was going to do in beginning. He originally – I’m trying to think. He had some property in downtown Miami that he traded with somebody downtown to get this property that was mostly swampland when he developed it, along with Mr. Kane. Mr. Kane lived on 97th Street, on the other side. He really felt – he wasn’t really crazy about a lot of Shepard Broad’s ideas, so he sold out very early and wasn’t involved as Shepard Broad was. I remember a funny story when my son was little. I was always the mother that went trick-or-treating with all the kids. One day I’m trick-or-treating, and the boys – I had a son and it was all boys, and they didn’t want it to look like there was a mother going with them. They dressed me up as a football player because they could put on the pads that would cover everything here and put on the helmet. Off I went trick-or-treating with my little pumpkin basket with the kids. When we got to Shepard Broad’s house it started to rain. I took off my helmet and I said, “Shepherd, it’s me.” He says, “Why didn’t I ever think of that? I could’ve done that. I could’ve see everything that was going on with my kids, nobody would’ve known it was me.” He was so excited. I said, “Do me a favor. Can I leave the kids here? I’m going to go home and get the car so I can take the children home. I don’t want them to get wet.” He says, “Of course.” Now I’m running with my basket through the streets, running into other parents that think I’m out alone trick-or-treating. [laughs] It was just a fun evening.

Kathy Hersh: You know him from your girlhood, right?

Linda Zilber: Right. In fact, there weren’t that many people that lived in Bay Harbor, so they had what’s called the Bay Harbor Club. My parents and the people that lived here, they would have New Year’s Eve parties, they would go to restaurants. It was a regular club where they all socialized together. I can remember one New Year’s Eve going with my parents. It was at the Diplomat, because that was where the party was. Morris...

Kathy Hersh: Lapidus?

Linda Zilber: No, Morris Broad.

Kathy Hersh: Oh, Morris Broad.

Linda Zilber: Morris was there. Morris was older than me, but we were dancing. The parents, the adults were, “Oh, isn’t that sweet? Our Bay Harbor children are dancing.” It was very close back then. Eventually Ann got married – that was Morris’s sister – and moved to the Gables. Morris got married and moved to the

Gables, and Sheppard said, "You're my only hope. You're going to be the mayor."

Kathy Hersh: He said that?

Linda Zilber: He always told me that. He says, "I know you're going to be mayor someday."

Kathy Hersh: Even when you were a little girl?

Linda Zilber: Even when I was a little girl and especially when I was a young mother, because I became a president of the PTA in Bay Harbor. I was always doing things in Bay Harbor. I remember going to the Civic Association. My son was in the second grade. I was president of PTA, and the Civic Association was run by mostly older people that are probably like me now. Older people. Mr. Haas was head of it. I came in and I was taking notes, because when I would have my PTA meetings I would tell them everything that was going on in Bay Harbor. Here I was looking like a kid. I was in my early 20s, and I'm sitting there – then it was the 60s, I think. You wore like miniskirts, and I'm sitting there writing and taking notes. All of a sudden Dr. Haas yells out, "Okay, we'll have no reporters in here. I don't know why you're here and what you're doing taking notes. My meetings should not have notes taken. I don't want this all over." He started screaming at me. His wife said, "Stop picking on her." He says, "You have no right to be here." I stood up and I said, "I am president of the PTA and I am a property owner. I have every right to be here, and I have every right to tell every mother that can't be here because she's home with the children what's going on." His wife stands up and says, "She told you. When the meeting is over, you're going to apologize to her." This was Bay Harbor back in those days, everybody was really close. He did apologize to me.

Kathy Hersh: From your PTA involvement, you got involved in a lot of other things.

Linda Zilber: Right, I'm trying to think what I did. I was busy with PTA; it was then that they started to have integration in the schools. I wanted that to go smoothly. At that time I met Marvin Dunn, who was looking for a federal grant for promoting integration in a good way. I started working with him, and they were integrating Miami Beach High School. I remember working with the students, the teachers, in having a better understanding of the cultures of Blacks and Hispanics and Anglos, and working them together to still have that school spirit of being one. This was something we worked on for two years. I remember I would take a lot of the boys for rap sessions. Sometimes, I found out that students, when it came to a teacher one would say, "Well, that teacher doesn't like me because I'm Black." "That teacher doesn't like me because I'm Hispanic." Then the Anglos, "That teacher doesn't like me because I'm a boy." "That

teacher doesn't like me because I'm a girl." I said, "You know, guys, did you ever think it's a lousy teacher who doesn't like anybody?" They started thinking about it. I said, "It's not because of you. It may be because of the teacher. Every one of you are telling me that teacher doesn't like you 'because.'" So they'd stop and they'd think. When you see their little minds working and they get it, that's fantastic.

Kathy Hersh: Did it go smoothly?

Linda Zilber: It did at Beach High. I remember one of the boys came up to me – a black young man came up to me and said, "What are you doing this for?" I said, "I'll tell you why I'm doing it. My son is in the second grade. When he gets to Beach High, I want you all to be friends." He looks at me and he says, "Yeah, that makes sense." [laughs]

Kathy Hersh: That was honest.

Linda Zilber: It was honest, it really was how I felt. I wanted everything to be smooth and go well and people to like each other.

Kathy Hersh: Were there obstacles?

Linda Zilber: It was funny, when my son was in second grade at Bay Harbor, he had a black teacher and a white teacher. He came home and he said, "Mom, what is the difference between a black person and a white person?" I said, "You see mommy has freckles? The brown, that's pigmentation in the skin. If all my freckles ran together, I would be black instead of white." He went to school the next day and told everybody his mom was black and white. This black teacher came up and said to me, "I didn't know you were a sister." I said, "What?" "Well, your son said you were part black and part white." I told her the story. She said, "You should write a children's book. If everybody taught their kids that way, what a better world this would be."

Kathy Hersh: Tell us about your involvement with ADL, the Anti-Defamation League, when you were still in high school.

Linda Zilber: They had a dolls program [Dolls for Democracy] – St. Francis of Assisi, Golda Meir, and I forgot who some of the other dolls were. I went around to the elementary schools and I pretended to be those people with the little dolls. The children would ask questions, and it was to learn and get involved with other cultures to see that there are special people in every culture. This is something that I felt was very important. I guess I always grew up believing that way. Everything that I've done in life, it was to try and bring people together and better understand people. It was fun going to the elementary schools and having the children ask me, "How many children do you have?" Or, "Was your husband happy with you doing this?" Or, "Was your wife happy with this?"

Kathy Hersh: They were talking about the doll character?

Linda Zilber: Right. They were allowed to ask questions as if I was that doll. It was just really cute. Of course I had scripts, and at that time I knew everything about whatever people I was talking about.

Kathy Hersh: How did you find out about this program?

Linda Zilber: I think somebody came to me and asked me. Back then, I was always doing theater. In high school I had my own radio show, WAHR 1560, "last one on the dial." I started MCing as motels were opening up. I would be with people like Tony Martin, Cyd Charisse, and I just would go along doing my thing.

Kathy Hersh: You were in high school?

Linda Zilber: I was in high school. I was very busy, always. I was doing this in high school, doing the dolls and my weekends were stuffed. Then I would have my days where I'd get excused in the morning because I was doing this program to go to a school. It was fascinating for me. Of course, in my evenings I was filled with – Saturdays I would do my radio show. Then in the evenings, if a hotel or motel was opening up, I was cheap so they'd get me to MC.

Kathy Hersh: So you were a local celebrity as a high schooler.

Linda Zilber: Right. I never thought of it that way, I just continued doing my thing.

Kathy Hersh: What did you do on your radio show? What kinds of things?

Linda Zilber: I was a DJ, but mostly we'd talk about the schools. I had call-in programs. It was interesting, this was back in the days of Julius La Rosa. He'd send me records to try and give them out to all the kids. I would talk about anything that I would know, or information that would come in to the station. I would talk about the celebrities that I was going to spin the record. I would have contests and give out records. The interesting thing was that I also worked with Brad Sherman, who did the news and was the station manager. We just worked well. How it happened. Every school sends somebody down to the station to report on their school from one Saturday to the other. When I went down to do it, the owner of the station said, "I like her voice. Tell her we would like to hire her for every Saturday." That's how it happened. I would just fall into things.

Kathy Hersh: You were asked to organize an ADL event that involved Martin Luther King and LeRoy Collins. Would you tell us about how that got started and about that event?

Linda Zilber: While doing the dolls program I was involved with ADL through B'nai B'rith, B'nai B'rith Adults. Every year they honored two people. This particular year, they were going to honor two people and asked if somebody would run the dinner, which was at the Deauville. I was right there, "Sure, I'll run a dinner." It sounded fantastic. I was excited that we were going to do Governor LeRoy Collins, and also Martin Luther King. I really didn't know much about Martin Luther King at that time other than he was a terrific speaker, and he was trying to make peace in the black community.

Kathy Hersh: What year was this, roughly?

Linda Zilber: It was either 1955 – I think it was around 1955, '54 or '55. I was able to meet several hours earlier, before the dinner, Martin Luther King. He was a very special man. There was an aura about him and he was so peaceful. It was almost – I'm not Catholic, but if I was Catholic I would say to you it was almost as if I was talking to a saint. He was really enthused that I was so young. He opened up to me because he said, "It's the people your age that have to make it a better future for everybody else." This was why he was so happy to meet me, because he got to talk to a young person. He was really, really involved in making young people better. That was very special. I never realized it then. I would go along doing whatever I was doing, never realized it was special or not special. It wasn't until years later – "Gee that was kind of special" – that I realized it, especially after his famous speech.

Kathy Hersh: Did you see that on television?

Linda Zilber: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: You must have been proud.

Linda Zilber: I was very proud.

Kathy Hersh: "I know that man."

Linda Zilber: Right, I was one of the few at the time, especially in Florida that knew that man. It was very special to me. As I'm talking about it right now with you, I have goosebumps.

Kathy Hersh: What about Governor LeRoy Collins? Did you spend any time with him?

Linda Zilber: Yes, Governor Collins was really open to making the people of Florida to engage more with each other. I was too young to tell you anything politically about him other than the kind of person that he was. He was the type, even before Governor Graham, who went around to every business, who got involved with everybody. He really wanted to bring Floridians closer. People that went into that type of thing in my life, whether I knew

them or not, always attracted me. He was a special man, and that's why he was getting an award from ADL. As you look back, Governor Collins was a special governor. I feel that when Bob Graham became governor, he emulated a lot of that within him. When Bob Graham – his first year as governor, my son was appointed as one of the...they help in the Senate.

Kathy Hersh: Oh, yes, Pages.

Linda Zilber: A Page. He was appointed as a Page. I was up there, and Governor Graham won the outstanding junior senator at that time. He wasn't governor yet, he was just senator at that time. I remember my son, eventually, and his daughter went to school together. He was very excited with my son because we were staying at the hotel right down the block in Tallahassee. All of the senators from the Miami area, the *Herald* didn't get there that morning. My son said, "Mommy, you've got to bring the *Herald*. All of our Senators didn't get the *Herald*. They don't know what's going on." I remember carrying seven newspapers, and my son went and delivered them to all of our senators. That, in turn, had Senator Graham say, "I would love for you to have dinner with our family tonight."

Kathy Hersh: Tell us about your attempt to become an engineer and go to engineering school.

Linda Zilber: First of all, let me start with when I was in college. I remember during orientation, they were going to have a show at the Ring Theater. I remember saying to my mom, "You know, I would try out, but I think I haven't even started college yet." She said, "Linda Zilber, if you don't try, you don't learn. Try out. Say you don't get it, but you're definitely not going to get it if you don't try out. Go try out and learn what it's all about, and get to meet the people." I tried out for Billy Budd, and I got it. They only had one woman in it, it was mostly all men. I got the part. When I started out and college started for everybody, it was written up in the newspapers. People started to know me. Here I was with a role in the Ring Theater, and I was all excited. I took communications, but I minored in math. At the same time – I have to really be honest. I was sitting with a bunch of boys for lunch and they said, "We have to take an exam." I said, "I don't remember taking that exam." I went with them and took the exam. When I sat in there, I saw it was all boys. I said to myself, "I don't think I belong here, but I better stay here and just take the exam. What have I got to lose? I'll look like a fool if I get up and walk out and say to the professor, 'I don't think I belong here.'" I took the exam. I placed in the highest 10 percent for entrance into engineering school. I was all excited because I thought, "I would love to be an architect." The problem is, the Dean came to me and said, "You're going to have to talk to the professors, because none of the schools take girls into engineering school." I spoke to the professors. They said absolutely not, they're not teaching a girl

in their class. The other schools, nobody – no place had girls in engineering school until years later when this young woman, who made the cover of *Life* magazine, entered an engineering school. I went through the back door and I started doing set designs for both the Ring Theater and also Coconut Grove Playhouse that I had been involved with and had been in some plays, and started working with people that did it in New York that would come down and do it at Coconut Grove Playhouse. I started doing set designs. From there, later in life, I opened my own design firm. Things have changed, and I'm so happy for women that can do everything and anything, and sometimes a lot better.

Kathy Hersh: You got to know some interesting people, then, through the Ring Theater and doing the set design.

Linda Zilber: Right. While I was working on the shows I got to meet Tennessee Williams, who was working on "Cat On a Hot Tin Roof," and Elia Kazan at Coconut Grove. They would come to our theater and see what we were doing. I used to go to the Merry-go-round Restaurant Playhouse – no, it was Merry-go-round Restaurant across the street from the University. Tennessee and I would go there, and Elia Kazan sometimes would join us. It was interesting, because Tennessee Williams told me that with "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" he had written two different endings. He said that one of the endings, he felt, the people in the United States wouldn't understand, so he went with the other one.

Kathy Hersh: He didn't ask you what you thought?

Linda Zilber: No, I think I was only 17. I started college early. I remember he spoke to me about in the United States, if a man hugs another man it's frowned upon, but in Europe it's accepted. As most people knew, he was gay. He spoke to me about it and he spoke to me about his feelings as a gay person. Back in those years, people didn't talk about that. He invited me to cast parties. I remember I thought myself, at 17 I might not be mature enough to handle what I don't even know I might see. Just in case things came up, I felt it was more of a mature and adult world and that I shouldn't be there. I thanked him profusely and said I was going home to my parents, and wouldn't be able to make his party. It was very interesting talking to him. The feeling that he had toward the American people, that they weren't ready yet for gay people and for love between gay people, and how it was already being accepted in Europe, but not here. It hurt him greatly. I think that left an impression on me later on in life, because I became more acceptable to people and could understand from their perspective without them realizing, because this is something that was very dear to Tennessee Williams' heart in sharing with me as a young person. As I look back, that was a wonderful experience for me to be able to talk to a man about that.

- Kathy Hersh:** Rather amazing for the time.
- Linda Zilber:** Right, we're talking about the 50s and he's discussing that with me. I hurt for him because he had this love to give, and people didn't understand it. Now, finally, after over 50 years, people are beginning to say, "Okay, we accept it."
- Kathy Hersh:** You must have had exceptional parents to have been as open as you were to experiencing new and different ideas and people.
- Linda Zilber:** My mother and father – my mother was a very open person. My mother was the one who would speak to me about everything sexual, even contraceptives, everything. She just told me everything the way it was. She originally, when she was young, went to Margaret Sanger. This was very special to me to learn that she was like with the person that headed up contraception for women. My mother always believed in being very open with her children. She – how can I say it? Yet she was strict, but she believed in people understanding people. My dad was the same way, but of course my mom would say to my dad, "She can do no wrong, that's your daughter." That was my dad, I could do no wrong. Mom explained everything. I remember an instance that happened when I was in school. I remember telling another little girl about contraception, about things. The girl went home and told her mother. I wound up in the Dean's office because her mother came and said, "How dare this girl be talking to my daughter that way?" They called in my mother too. My mother just looked at them and said, "What a shame that she had to hear it first from my daughter as opposed to from her mother. I believe in educating my child about everything in this world that I know." That was the end of that. Yes, my mother believed that I should be open to everything and anything. She said, "You're going to meet a lot of people in your life. You may not believe as they believe, but as long as they harm nobody then they're good people. Find out the good; there's good in everyone, even a criminal." There's good in everyone, that's what I was taught.
- Kathy Hersh:** Let's talk a little bit about your design firm that you founded and the kind of clientele you had and how successful it was.
- Linda Zilber:** Mostly, after I got married...I really didn't do that much of it when I first got married because I was involved in children's things – involved in PTA, involved in opening up the McLamore Center for abused and abandoned children.
- Kathy Hersh:** Was that on Miami Beach?
- Linda Zilber:** No, that is now the Children's Home Society and that's off of 12th Avenue in Miami. There was no home here. But McLamore, who owned Burger King, was interested in building

one. I was very involved with the Children's Home Society. In fact, I used to do their books and I used to handle all of the accounting for them. I gave my time to do that. How did I know all of that? Because I had a marvelous Mr. Ruby in Beach High who taught accounting. I used that, and I used it even in my separate jobs. I was able to help them out. We had a lot of children that had been abused and abandoned that would go into these facilities that was not really good. Mr. McLamore from Burger King decided that he would like to help build a building for them, a home for them. I remember we had a big tent on the property where the building was going to be. He had all of his waiters and people that worked for him at all of the different Burger Kings come in white-glove service, and they served little mini hamburgers – now they'd be called sliders, but we didn't know from that back then, they were just little mini Burger Kings – and raised a lot of money and opened up the home. That was very, very special. I was really involved in things that had to do with children then because I had a young child. This is something that was very important to me. You had asked me a different question.

Kathy Hersh:

Then you decided to open a design business, how did that happen?

Linda Zilber:

I found that once my son started going to school, besides PTA I had time on my hands. I needed a creative outlet. I had a lot of friends that were always asking me, "Would you help me with this? Would you help me with that? Oh, I love the way you design things. I love the way you see things." I decided to go ahead and open up a business, and it was called Linmar Interiors. I started doing design work all over Dade County. Then I had people that would move that were in business where I worked for them. I did work in Hawaii. I did work in Sutton Place in New York. I did work in Chicago, and it just grew. I still wanted to do the other things. Fortunately, I didn't have to earn a lot of money. For me it was a creative outlet. Most of the time, I would only take one job at a time so I could devote myself totally to that and to create. That's what I've done.

Kathy Hersh:

Did you do the whole interior of the home in Hawaii?

Linda Zilber:

Yes, I did apartments in Hawaii. It was very interesting, especially meeting some of the Hawaiian people. I found them to be fantastic people – very giving, very warm. It was interesting working in Hawaii because if you needed something, you used to just hop on a plane and go from one island to the other. They would leave every 15 minutes. I was working on the Big Island of Hawaii. If I needed something in Maui, I would jump on a plane and go to Maui. If I needed something in Oahu, I would do that. You would just go back and forth, you used them like taxicabs. I had a lot of fun doing it. When I was there I met Desi Arnaz Junior. He had a house there, and

he had all of his young friends that would come and visit. He was growing Maui Wauai or whatever [laughs]. That was a whole other culture I wasn't into, but he was into. I would meet interesting people.

Kathy Hersh: The business is still going?

Linda Zilber: I'm semi-retired. If somebody calls me or asks me to help them I will, and certainly I get a lot of discounts as a designer. I have a tax number, so when there's family or friends that are involved in buying something, I help them out with that.

Kathy Hersh: What made you decide to get involved in politics on Bay Harbor Island?

Linda Zilber: My love for Bay Harbor. It was different then than it is now. Politics weren't really politics in Bay Harbor. You had people like Shepard Broad and Stanley Tate. People that were involved, they had already been successful people and wanted to give back to the place that they loved, their home. That was the old days of Bay Harbor. People weren't looking to be voted in and then use it as success for their business that they had besides being involved in Bay Harbor. I decided that I was going to run because I cared, I had the time to do it.

Kathy Hersh: You were going to run for a Commission post?

Linda Zilber: For Commission, right. Vivian Levinson had been on the – she was the first woman that was on the council in Bay Harbor, and she was getting ready to retire. She says, "Linda Zilber, why don't you run?" I said to myself, "Let me think about it, and I will let you know on Monday." Meanwhile every Thursday, at that time in my life, I spent with my grandchildren. My granddaughter wasn't born yet; my grandson was three years old, he's now 22. I took him and I said, "You know, I'm going to take you to a place and I want you to tell me if you think grandma should sit here." I took him over to the town hall. I took him up to the chambers. I said, "This is where people make the laws in Bay Harbor." I showed him the seats, and there were seven seats around the dais. I said, "Sit down in one of the chairs. Do you think grandma should sit here?" He jumps up and he says, "No. Grandma should sit here." Takes the gavel and starts banging it. I figure, "This is it." He gave me his blessing. That's who I'm going to discuss it with, my three-year-old grandson. When I told my son, "Michael already told me I should do it." My son was hysterical. He says, "That's who you spoke to, Michael? Did you talk to me? No. Michael told you to do it?" I said, "Yes, he already has me as mayor." That's what I did. Actually, the first year that I ran I had no opposition, because I wrote a letter to everybody in town. I told them how I lived here, I told them how I'd been involved. I put my phone number in. I said, "Call me if there's anything you'd like to know," and why I wanted to give back to this town that I

loved. A couple of them called up and said, "Oh, are you Brownie's daughter?" They knew my parents for years, and of course Shepard said, "You've got to." I was the second woman in Bay Harbor to be elected to the council. We did not even have an election; I got in automatically, nobody ran against me because I had started so early and had been working on it for over year. That's how I started. Things started changing, though, on the council. It became very political. People got involved with the council because they wanted to get their name out there for their business. I remember sending out my letter and saying, "My only business is Bay Harbor Islands." At that point I didn't even take design jobs, I just devoted myself to Bay Harbor.

Kathy Hersh: What were some of your accomplishments that you're proud of?

Linda Zilber: First of all, bringing art to the center of the street. I first got involved with Robert Indiana. He came to Dorothy Blau's art studio. Back then we had four or five art studios on Kane Concourse. We'd have art walks that I had started every Thursday night. You'd go from studio to studio and see all the new exhibits. Indiana was one of the exhibits at Dorothy Blau's studio. I was thrilled to meet him. I had a merchant's association, which they don't have now, but I had that while I was involved where I had all the merchants together with ideas of what they thought we could do to improve the pedestrian traffic for the street. They raised the money through me for this first purchase of the love sculpture. It was years later that I remember going to – we have a Britto sculpture there too, the heart. I remember when I was running, Tauber had just moved to the island. I remember going to him and he said he wanted to give me money because I was running. I said, "Sorry, I don't take any money from anybody. I vote my conscience."

Kathy Hersh: You didn't receive donations?

Linda Zilber: I would not take them.

Kathy Hersh: At all?

Linda Zilber: At all. Oh, yes, from my mother, my brother, my husband, my son. Other than family, no, I would not take a donation. Back then it didn't cost that much. You didn't do TV, you were in the local paper or whatever. If the whole election cost \$3,000, that was a lot. Now it's like \$20,000 – here it goes up, up, up. Back then, it didn't cost that much and I did not want to be beholden to anybody. I would not take any outside money. When Tauber said, "You know, your opponent took money. Why can't I give you the same thing?" I said, "I'm sorry, I won't take it. If you want to do something, do something nice for Bay Harbor." That was me, and that was how we got the Britto. He wanted me to be the person that was the connection to buy it because his ex-

wife worked for Britto. I hope this shouldn't be in, but anyway this is the truth. He didn't want to be the one that was doing this, but he was very gracious in doing that for Bay Harbor Islands. I was glad that we were starting to build up the artwork in public places. I think one of the first things that we had when Joe Gardner had been mayor, he had a son Carl that was very artistic and had done art in public places all over the country. Carl wanted to do something for his dad when he was mayor. If you go over to the town hall, you will see in the middle they have like a pond of sand and these beautiful metal fish hanging down. This is something that Carl did. Art and people, I love that.

Kathy Hersh: Were there any hard issues at the time?

Linda Zilber: Yes. One of the big things was we had two buildings that were built, which were allowed to be built that were nine stories. They formed a coalition and they decided nobody wants anything more than 75 feet, or unless it has to go to the voters. They got that on the ballot and everybody was carrying on, they don't want any tall buildings in Bay Harbor. That was one of the big things that was going on at that time. People voted in a 75-foot height.

Kathy Hersh: Are there any historic preservation issues? There are some now with the MiMo.

Linda Zilber: Right, Terri – I can't think of Terri's last name right now. Terri [D'Amico], who is very involved with the MiMo, had written a book and also teaches it at Dade. She had told us originally – I'm going back to even when I was in – she spoke about the MiMo that was coming up back then. Once it was 50 years old, it would become historic. She was very involved in getting people to accept and like MiMo in Bay Harbor, and thought at that time that they could create districts or buildings that would become like South Beach. There were a lot of people against it. There were people that are in office now that they don't want buildings to be historic because then they can't change. They want to be able to change, and they're more for developers than they are for historic. That's what's going on now.

Kathy Hersh: What's your position on that?

Linda Zilber: I believe that if a building really has some historic value – which we do have a few on the island that really do – I can understand that people may not want to live because the apartments are old. I believe in preserving the façade and let them do work in the back and fix up the whole inside, etc. There's nothing wrong with preserving the façade so that you could always have a feeling of the progression of architecture in our world today. It's really funny, because when you talk about a building here that's 50 years old, they're talking old. Yet you

go up north and their buildings are hundreds of years old. Why is that mentality here? I never understood that.

Kathy Hersh:

One of your other involvements has been on the Senatorial Trust. I'm not even familiar, what is that? Tell us about that and how you got involved with that.

Linda Zilber:

Actually, by supporting different senator. They called up from Washington and said that they had a senatorial trust. Then it was only Republican, the Democrats didn't have it yet. It was a Republican senatorial trust, and they asked if we would belong. Actually, it was money that you gave to those people that were running from wherever. Being part of the trust, you got to go to the meetings every other month and could actually have input with your senators, and at the meetings. It was very interesting learning about our government firsthand, being in Washington, meeting with the Senators. They would always have parties for us or dinners for us at their homes. We would spend a lot of time there. I met most of the Senators. I was invited to the White House for dinner when President Reagan was president. Also when the Bushes were there, and when they were vice president – the older Bushes – they lived on the naval base, so I would be there. There's something that I want to tell you about Barbara Bush. Everybody thought that Barbara Bush is this very strong, opinionated lady. I have to tell you about Barbara Bush. Every time I was in Washington, which would be I guess every other month, I could never leave Washington without Barbara finding me and saying, "Don't forget, when you go home you give my Jebbie a big kiss from me." She was really all mom, too. There was that whole soft part of her that I saw that most people don't even realize existed.

Kathy Hersh:

Did you give Jebbie...?

Linda Zilber:

Of course I did because Jebbie then, it was before he became governor and he was getting involved in Florida politics. He would come to the Children's Home Society to find out our needs for children. When he got involved as governor of Florida, he wanted to help children. He wanted to know the needs. I knew him right from the beginning as soon as he got here. Every time I would see him he says, "I know, my mom said you have to give me a big kiss." She would attack everybody. There was a lot of love in the family. When George Junior – I remember being in Washington and meeting Laura. We were very proud of our library when it was the little Bay Harbor School before it grew as it did now. I asked her if they were in Florida, if she would come talk in our library in Bay Harbor school. She said, "Of course." She sure did. She came here and spoke to the students and the teachers about the importance of reading. I was so excited that she did that. She was such a soft, sweet, lovely lady. Telling her how important it was to read and how fantastic books were, and that when she

was a little girl and she would get a new book, that was like a prized possession. She always loved to have a bookshelf where she could put her book in there. She was very, very special. The children really enjoyed having her come and visit. I would bring Washington back home.

Kathy Hersh: This was after you were mayor?

Linda Zilber: Right, this was after, but Bay Harbor has always been my home. I'll love it forever. Even though I may not like some things that happen, I still would do anything to help those if they needed me in Bay Harbor.

Kathy Hersh: What's your next plan? Or like you say, you didn't really plan, you got asked to do things.

Linda Zilber: Right. I started all over again, because my grandchildren – they had a grandparent program and they needed a chair. I followed Judy Weiser. Judy asked my son and said, "You know, your mother would be great for this. Do you think she would do it because your children are now coming into school?" He said, "My mother loves things like that." My son promoted me and I became grandparent chair, and I worked with the grandparents. We'd have grandparents' day, and we would have programs where the grandparents got involved with their grandchildren, and it was fantastic seeing them together.

Kathy Hersh: Did your grandson approve of this position for you?

Linda Zilber: Not only did my grandson approve, my granddaughter also approved. On Grandparents' Day I would have to give a speech in the auditorium in front of all of the children and the grandparents. My grandchildren would have to check my speech before I gave it. Now, when my grandson graduated my granddaughter was still there. I remember when I spoke, I spoke about the fact that he graduated and how well he was doing in college because of his background here. I thanked the teachers for everything that they did, etc. Then I said, "My granddaughter is growing up to be such a wonderful young lady." She was still in school. Afterwards, my granddaughter came to me and said, "Grandma, all of the kids have come up to me and said, 'Your grandmother spoke 20 minutes about your brother and only gave you one line.'" I said, "Next year you get 20 minutes and he gets one line." They held me to it. The next year I spoke all about her and the things that she was doing in school, and how fantastic it was, "And my grandson is still doing fantastic at the University of Maryland." Period. I made up for it. Then I got involved. They formed the CIT. The halfpenny surtax was passed for Miami-Dade County for transportation. The CITT, as part of the planning, it became law that they had to have citizens involved in the surtax for transportation.

Kathy Hersh: What is the CITT?

Linda Zilber: CITT is the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust. I became involved when it first started. Marc Buoniconti was in it then. It goes back with a lot of the people – Cosgrove, some of the...

Kathy Hersh: When did it start?

Linda Zilber: It started about 15 years ago, whenever that was passed. It was a few months after Mike Abrams started off as the representative for District 4, but he was moving out of the district and had to leave. Sally Heyman asked me if I would send in a resume or something because my husband had been in the transportation business, but we no longer had anything to do with it and he had passed away. I knew about it, so would I please send in a resume? The Dade County Commission chose me to be the representative from District 4 on the transportation trust.

Kathy Hersh: It is a representational...?

Linda Zilber: Right, from different districts. We also discussed how we were going to spend the money, which is something like \$300 million bonded out to billions. Our first project that we did was we elongated the airport so that it went into what is called the MIC [Miami Intermodal Center]. The MIC is where every type of transportation comes in to one area. You can get cabs, you can get tri-rail, you can get trains whenever you come in at the airport. If you went there, you can maneuver any transportation you wanted. We built that, and there's a plaque up in that section on a wall with my name on it. I got a little thing that showed a copy of the plaque. For some reason my son wanted it. I said, "It's yours." I don't know why he wanted it, but he wanted it. I've working on the trust ever since. It was supposed to be for 3 to 4 years, but it's been over 10 years now I became chair. I'm no longer chair. After three or four years, I know it was supposed to only be for two years, and then they changed the bylaws to keep me longer because I got along with everybody on the commission. If we had to get anything passed, everybody liked me so we got it passed.

Kathy Hersh: It sounds like you were so exceptional getting along with everyone that they had to make an exception.

Linda Zilber: Right, I just knew everybody because I had been involved with the county, and been involved with everybody for so many years living here my whole life. These were all people that were just part of everything that we did.

Kathy Hersh: Where do you see that going?

Linda Zilber:

There's a lot of controversy now. First of all, traffic is horrendous, but it's not our fault. It's just that there's more people than there are large roads to accommodate them. The original transit lines, it's just too expensive to build them. There are other types of transportation where we have certain lanes with certain buses, etc., that could be express buses to work for alleviating traffic. Everybody is arguing, not on the trust but on the commission, "It should be out south." "It should be out West." We had decided that we were going to do next the crossover from Miami to the beach on MacArthur Causeway, because it would take so many cars off the road. Now with all of those buildings that have been built on the Miami side, you're talking about thousands of cars that would go over to the beach in the evening where the young people would go and party, and go to events, etc. Then you talk about everybody that was living on the beach that would come over and go to like Adrienne Arsht and go to all of these wonderful things, and our athletic things that were held on the other side. This is what we wanted to do. We were told that they had to do an environmental study that would take four years. I opened my mouth and I said, "It's going to take you four years to figure out if you get thousands of cars off the road that it won't be healthier for people?" Now they're talking about, we should do something to connect to downtown. The thing that's going to be fantastic, and the reason why they're talking about that is because All Aboard Florida, which is private, is going to be running in the next two years on the old FEC railroad tracks. You're literally going to have a train that's going to be going from the Keys all the way to Palm Beach. Hopefully it will make a lot of stops along the way. Not a lot, but at least one in North Miami. The last thing I told everybody is, "I hope I live long enough to see it." Then we were talking about connecting to it. 20 percent of our money goes to every community. That's why you see all these little minibuses, we pay for that. You have them in North Miami. We have a little minibus here. You have the trolleys in Carl Gables, and also Miami. We're the ones that put up the money for all of these little minibuses so people could get to whatever major transportation lines or bus stop or wherever it was that they were going, or going to doctors at grocery stores, etc. People should know this because that is supported by the transportation tax, which is paid for by everybody. You can get on any bus you want in any town; that is open to all of the people that live here. That's what I'm involved in now.

Kathy Hersh:

The Jewish Museum. You are currently the president?

Linda Zilber:

No, I used to be president. Right now the president – I haven't been there for several months, but the last was Elliot Stone, who is Dick Stone's son, who was our senator and also Secretary of State. He's very involved with the museum now. When I first got involved with the museum, Marcia Zerivitz, who was the original director and also was the one that raised

the money to open the museum, because the museum was built in an old temple on 3rd and Washington. The Gillers were very much involved. Ira Giller is an architect, his father was as well. His father did most of the designs, and Ira has taken over. As we moved into other buildings, Ira Giller has also worked on the designs. They have been fantastic, and we've had fantastic people all over the state of Florida that were involved in having the history of the Jewish people that came to Florida originally, to have a place where all of this information is housed. That was really Marcia's big thing. Marcia is no longer there, she's retired, Jo Ann [Arnowitz] has taken over.

Kathy Hersh: Jo Ann Bass?

Linda Zilber: No, Jo Ann Bass is...

Kathy Hersh: I know she was involved in the Jewish Museum.

Linda Zilber: All the Jewish people down here were involved. In fact, I'll tell you what Jo Ann Bass does because she is Joe's. Whenever we have events at the Jewish Museum, all of the key lime pies come from Jo Ann Bass and Joe's. They give us as many key lime pies as we want. That's her connection. They were fantastic people, and especially, like you said, there were so many great people that came out of Beach High, etc. A lot of our stories are housed at the Jewish Museum of Florida. I was very much involved with FIU becoming involved with the Jewish Museum. There were other schools that were interested too, and there were other people that wanted to be involved with us. After sitting for hours and days and months, we decided on FIU. Lenny Wien is very involved, Leonard Wien, Junior.

Kathy Hersh: What made you decide on FIU?

Linda Zilber: They were really open to the arts. They were open to the information of the families. Howard – his first name is Mark.

Kathy Hersh: Mark Rosenberg?

Linda Zilber: Mark Rosenberg was fantastic whenever he would come to us. They also gave us promises. Number one, it will always be the Jewish Museum. If for any reason the property was ever to be sold or it wasn't the Jewish Museum, we get it back. He signed and did everything to be sure that we would be happy. That was very special because I knew that with the school involved, not only is it more prestigious for the museum, but it also guarantees that's going to be there forever. That to me was very special.

Kathy Hersh: It was during your time as president that the FIU deal was made?

Linda Zilber: Exactly.