

## Interview with Leslie Rosenfeld

**Kathy Hersh:** This is the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs project. We're interviewing Leslie Rosenfeld. Today is October 24<sup>th</sup> 2018. My name is Kathy Hersh. Let's start, Leslie, with telling us how your family came to Miami Beach and how old you were, your earliest impressions.

**Leslie Rosenfeld:** Sure. My parents grew up in New York. When I was, I believe, 3 years old, we moved down to Florida and moved, actually, into Miami Shores. My grandmother joined us a couple of years later and moved on to Miami Beach at 85<sup>th</sup> and Crespi. She had purchased a building there, which is still there, by the way. I attended elementary schools in Miami Shores. Then my family joined her on Miami Beach. I started at Nautilus Junior High School at the time.

**Interviewer:** What was it like there?

**Rosenfeld:** It was a very small community. Everybody knew everyone. They had grown up together, so at first I was a little bit of an outsider joining the school in seventh grade, but I was welcomed very quickly and really, really enjoyed getting to know the youth, my peers, the youth of Miami Beach.

**Interviewer:** You're still friends with some of them?

**Rosenfeld:** Yes. Yes I am. Miami Beach is an interesting community. Many of us who went to middle school and high school together and went away for college have returned. I see many of them still within the community. In fact, I met my husband at Miami Beach Senior High School.

**Interviewer:** Did you know then when you met him that he was the one?

**Rosenfeld:** You know what's interesting? I think that when we met in chemistry class in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I certainly knew that he was someone who was very special to me. I think he shared that same view, but we were very young. When I returned from studying at the university, we got together and it was like not a day had gone by. We were married a year later.

The only reason it took that long was because I had a wedding to plan. Otherwise it would have been immediate, but we had a wedding to plan. Also, my siblings have both married Beach High



grads, so my life, as I had told you, is an ongoing reunion. I see people that I went to middle school and high school with all the time. Every time we have a family get-together it's really nice.

**Interviewer:** It's interesting. It sounds like a small town, but yet in a lot of small towns the kids go away to school and they never come back. What is it that has brought people back or that brought you back?

**Rosenfeld:** I think, for those of us that choose to come back to our community, I think it's because we feel that we have more to give. We really love this community and want to help it to grow, to improve, to be the community that we experienced.

Obviously there are changes. There are a lot of changes over the past 30-something years, but I still think that Miami Beach is unique because despite those changes, there's a small-town feel here. You can reap the benefit of having all that this community has to offer.

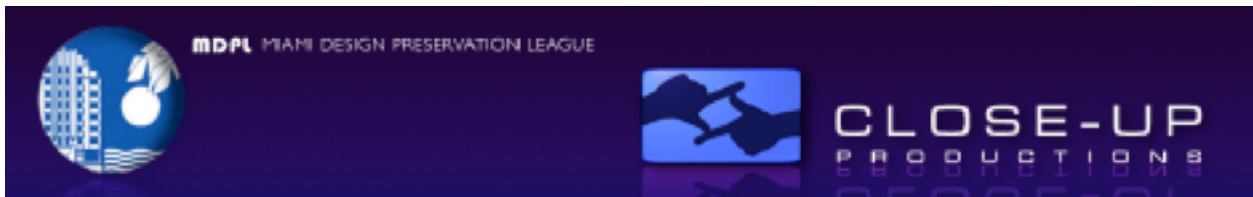
We get a bit spoiled living in a resort town, but you can also step away from that and have that small community feel. I interact with people all the time who have been here a long time and have embraced the changes but also remember the past and are bringing what was good about our community, maintaining that and improving the life as much as we can for everyone else.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that was an ethos that you somehow picked up in the schools or in the home or community organizations?

**Rosenfeld:** Yes. I think that there's a desire to sustain that feeling, that expectation. I'm very fortunate in my position in the job that I have. I get to really interact with the community, and I get to partner with different organizations that really help to infuse within this community what is demanded of our community for the good.

**Interviewer:** Tell us about your job and how you came to have this job. What started you? There was a department that you got involved in.

**Rosenfeld:** Actually, coming out of college, I taught in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. A few years after I taught for a couple of years, I really felt like I wanted to have a greater impact. I became an administrator. I both taught and was an administrator at two schools here in Miami Beach, Nautilus Middle School and Beach High, both of which I had attended.



I was happy to learn that after 10 years beyond your graduation that your records are no longer at the school site. When I joined Beach High as an administrator, I was in my late 20s. I was glad to hear that my...

**Interviewer:** They couldn't look you up to see what your grades were.

**Rosenfeld:** Exactly. I was a good student, but just better to not have that so easily accessible. In 2004, the city was creating a new department, budget and performance improvement. I was invited to join the city on the performance improvement side of that department. I was involved with organizational development and performance improvement and also strategic planning.

In 2005, the city conducted its first community satisfaction survey, statistically valid survey. One of the questions in that survey asked our community their perception of our public schools. The results were not what we were hoping for. I believe it was somewhere in the 50 percent where the community just was really not as satisfied as we felt they should be. If you really are going to be an exceptional municipality, you have to have excellent public schools.

In 2007, because we conduct these surveys every two years, we went back to the community and asked them if they would be interested in the city getting involved with enhancing public education because it's not a core function of a municipal government. That's the school board that does the public education.

Our community, over 75 percent of their respondents from the survey said yes, they would like the city of Miami Beach government to get involved with public schools. As a result of that, we reached out to the school system and entered into an education compact.

The superintendent often refers to our compact as the gold standard for compacts because it is very robust. All of our objectives are very measurable, and it requires action, not only on our part but on the part of the school system. In January of 2008 we signed that agreement. My position was flexed, I guess, to include education and to serve as a liaison to all educational initiatives within the city. We've been involved with public education for a little over a decade.

We've been very fortunate. The school system, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, has been a great partner. We have many other community organizations that partner with us as well, including some



of our neighboring municipalities. We've really done some wonderful enhancements.

**Interviewer:** Tell us about some of those programs.

**Rosenfeld:** One of the first things that we did was we implemented the International Baccalaureate program. If you're in the world of education, and actually even if you're not, the International Baccalaureate program, specifically the diploma that you can achieve upon graduation from high school, is an internationally recognized best practice teaching methodology.

The implementation of that actually took several years because we wanted to implement it in all of the public schools within our city. We have six. That was a big undertaking because it was very, very important to our elected officials at the time that this not be implemented as a strand or as an academy where only an elite few students would have access.

We embarked on implementing it across all of our public schools but making it whole-school implementation. In partnership with the school district and the International Baccalaureate Organization, we trained about 5 or 600 teachers in 2009/2010, about 98 percent of the teachers at the time that were in the six public schools within our city limits to train them on what the IB is all about.

For those in elementary school, it was the IB primary years program. Then we have a middle years program for the middle school and then the diploma program for the high school. After two intensive days of training, the teachers and the administrators and the schools went back and started developing these programs and were able to begin the implementation.

**Interviewer:** That is the education that all children receive?

**Rosenfeld:** Yes. In our—

**Interviewer:** It's not an option.

**Rosenfeld:** If you enter into a public elementary school on Miami Beach or our middle school, you are automatically enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program at that school because the programs are being implemented whole-school. Every child has the same access.



Then when you get into high school, the youth really need to have options and choices. The diploma program is not for every student. It's very, very rigorous. It's very demanding. The students, when they enter high school, decide what path they want to go and what academy they want to go into. Some choose to pursue the IB diploma.

We're very excited about the success of youth who are choosing to go that path because the graduation rate of youth who choose to go in that direction is higher than many other IB diploma programs with about 88 percent on average of the youth who choose to go that route attaining the diploma.

It's very successful. I'm very proud of the teachers because it's a lot of work, and the administrators. It's a lot of work to sustain that level of implementation and access and excellence. We're very proud. That partnership is ongoing.

The city continues to fund professional development of staff at our schools to ensure that if you enter a classroom, that the teacher who is teaching you has received training from the IB and that everyone has the same opportunity so that when they get to high school, they can choose to pursue the diploma or not. It'll be their choice, but everyone has the same opportunity, same access.

That has been the leading point in anything that we do in the city. When we implement any type of educational initiative, we make sure that it's accessible to as many students as possible and that our community is well informed and that they know that this opportunity exists and that all children have the same opportunity for that access. That's one program that was immediately implemented upon the signing of that compact.

Then since then, our elected officials have in communicating with the community identified other educational initiatives. When you and I spoke, we implemented in partnership with The Children's Trust and Borinquen and the Chamber and our neighboring municipalities, a nurse initiative so that the schools that didn't have a full-time nurse did.

Then after implementing that and funding it for several years, we were very fortunate The Children's Trust picked up the three schools that we had been funding. They're now part of the trust program to have a full-time nurse.



All of the partners that were involved wanted to sustain that partnership, and so the city has implemented mental health, behavioral health specialists in each of our schools. We're actually in year four of implementing that so that all youth in our public schools have access to a mental health professional.

**Interviewer:** That mental health professional, every school has one that's based in that school or does it travel?

**Rosenfeld:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Does the person travel?

**Rosenfeld:** Well, each school has a different number of days. This year, Miami Beach Senior High School students have four days a week of access to a mental health professional. Our middle school and our K-8 center have three days. Each elementary school has two days of access, and that is funded by the city of Miami Beach.

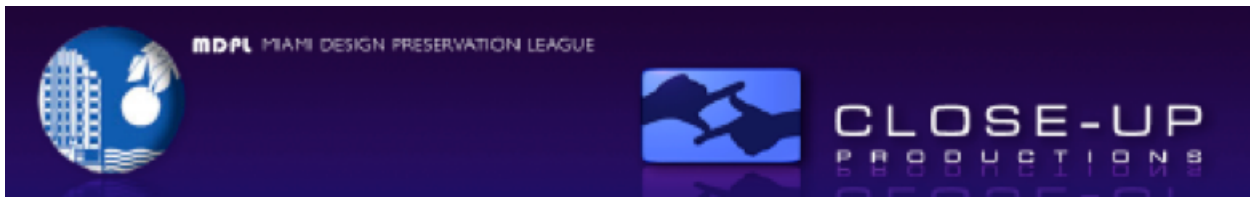
For the schools that are outside of our city limits but within the feeder pattern, we partner with our neighboring municipalities and we share the funding as well as the Chamber Education Foundation. We have many partners, The Children's Trust, Borinquen. It's a big undertaking, but it's very important.

Last year, a little over 1,300 youth took advantage of that access and sought out support from the mental health professionals in our schools. We're very, very proud of that particular initiative and the fact that our children value it and understand the importance of it and, more importantly, use it, use that resource.

**Interviewer:** I don't know how tightly you track this, but since Parkland last year, has there been an uptick in students using that or taking advantage of the mental health nursing facility?

**Rosenfeld:** We're in year four. I think that our utilization has been consistent. However, awareness, I think more children are aware. I think that there has been a big effort to help youth and families understand that if you need assistance or you need support, then be healthy and seek it out.

Avail yourself to this resource because it's important. There's nothing wrong with reaching out and asking for help. I think that the



awareness of it has improved and the support for it has also improved, especially amongst our families.

**Interviewer:** People are very much aware of the stresses now, especially with campus shooters and so forth. I was at Key Biscayne at the MAST Academy doing a workshop. I was being escorted by a student to where I was to go. I ask if she ever thought of places to hide should there be a campus event. She said every day she thinks of that. I thought, "How sad".

**Rosenfeld:** It is very sad because our children shouldn't be thinking about those things, but again, our elected officials are very responsive to our community. Immediately following that incident, our mayor, along with our commissioners, reached out to Miami-Dade County Public Schools and requested to partner to provide armed Miami Beach police officers in each of our public schools.

I believe we were the first municipality to sign an agreement with MDCPS. Our community is very thankful to our elected officials for being the lead and making that happen because who's more important than our children?

**Interviewer:** You talk about this being a compact with Miami-Dade County Public Schools. What is their obligation, their side of the compact?

**Rosenfeld:** It depends on the initiative. With the International Baccalaureate program, our commitment to the implementation of that was all upfront costs. Then once the schools attained authorization, the school system continued the program. There are costs associated with sustaining it, but the city wanted to continue to fund professional development of staff to ensure that, again, every child had access.

We have so many different wonderful partnerships. We partner with Florida International University Miami-Dade College to expand access to college courses on our high school and middle school campus. Those are called dual-enrollment classes.

It's a really beautiful partnership because the city funds the cost for the adjunct professors. The universities identify eligible professors and supervise those professors. Miami-Dade County Public Schools funds the books. Books can be very expensive, so it's a really beautiful partnership.

Three years ago, there were no dual-enrollment courses offered at



Miami Beach Senior High School. This year, three years later, I believe we have 14 courses, which is about 20, 25 classes and about 600 children taking advantage of these college classes at the high school and middle school campus.

The wonderful thing about this partnership and bringing these courses to the high school campuses, number one, it's super convenient. There are no transportation issues for any of the kids. They're already at the high school or the middle school, so they can take the course. There's no cost to the families because the city is paying for the adjuncts. Miami-Dade County Public Schools is paying for the books. It's just beautiful to have this available.

In the past three years, this partnership alone has saved Miami Beach families about \$850,000 if you were to calculate how much it would cost if they were to pay in-state tuition. That doesn't include books. \$850,000 in savings over the past three years to our families is quite substantial.

Not only are the students reaping the benefit of having the opportunity to take the courses and interact with university professors, but it makes them much more competitive in the college application process. We want our students to have every possible opportunity. This is just one other way in which our government supports our youth and supports our families to open additional doors for them down the road. It's a really fabulous partnership.

**Interviewer:** Are other municipalities studying the city of Miami Beach and this initiative?

**Rosenfeld:** Other municipalities have reached out to us, especially those that have, since the signing of our compact, have ventured down the road to enter into a compact with Miami-Dade County Public Schools. They've looked at ours. [Clears throat] Sorry. They've spoken to us. They've looked at the different initiatives that we're implementing. Some of them are working to implement some of these similar programs.

We're very proud that we are perceived to be very innovative in this space and really not supplanting or trying to do Miami-Dade County Public Schools' job. They do their job. They do it very well. We're just here to support them and to enhance and to really improve opportunities for the youth here in Miami Beach.





A consequence of our involvement is Miami Beach is known as a wonderful city to live. If you happen to have school-aged children, the public schools here are excellent. We think they are very good without us, but we know that they are better with us. We're very proud of these partnerships.

We do so many other things. Recently, as you and I were talking about, some of the newer initiatives that our elected officials approved have to do with after-school enrichment. When people think of Miami Beach, they think of affluence, but we have the whole spectrum within our community. Yes, we have very affluent community members, but we also have community members that struggle, that live in poverty.

Within our city, our public schools, the socioeconomic level of the children varies. Two of the schools in our city, about 95 percent of those children are on free or reduced lunch. It's very challenging for those members of our community to provide after-school enrichment to their children. Seeing this gap, our elected officials allocated funding this past April.

The city is implementing after-school enrichment in those two particular schools at no cost to the families. This is our first semester. We have 220 youth who are participating. They're being exposed to robotics and JavaScript and mathematic logical games and MIT Scratch. They're really having some fabulous experiences that perhaps wouldn't be available to them had we not stepped in. We're very proud to provide this access to our youth for free for them.

**Interviewer:** The entire community supports this?

**Rosenfeld:** Yes. As a matter of fact, about a year and a half ago, we surveyed the community, specifically the parents and guardians of youth in our public schools. We asked them to take a look at our compact and to let us know "Is what we had agreed to back in January of 2008 still relevant?" and "Are we missing anything?"

The feedback was very positive. We are definitely implementing programs that our community has identified as being significant and some new programs as well. We're constantly in communication and making sure that we were addressing new needs and making sure that we're implementing as anticipated.

In fact, in addition to the after-school, some of our students really



struggle to pass standardized testing. As a result of that, an ask was to perhaps provide some in-school support during school hours, again because if you provide things after school, the challenge of gaining access comes into play.

The students are in school during the school day. Sometimes implementation of those types of programs is easier. We have partnered with a university. We are providing reading interventionists and math interventionists. Those interventionists go to the schools, the six public schools within our city, and they provide one-to-one or two-to-one small group intervention either in mathematics, in math.

At Nautilus Middle School, it's for students who are perhaps taking algebra one and geometry to have to pass an end-of course exam. At the high school, it's the youth who are perhaps in the lower 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for the state exam that they have to pass. Then for the reading intervention, those are students who are perhaps struggling a bit with reading fluency.

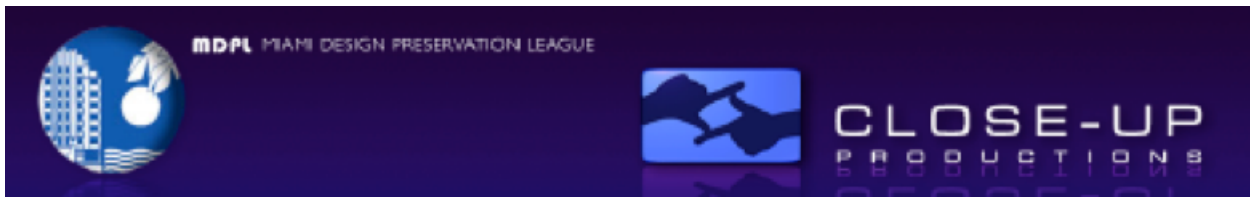
These university students that we have hired as reading and math interventionists come into the schools and work with the experts in the schools. These are students that are majoring in elementary education and majoring in mathematics, so they have the knowledge. They work with our youth to help them gain those skills so that they can be successful. That's a new initiative that came out of our more recent conversations with the community. We're very proud of that too.

**Interviewer:** You really get your initiatives coming from the public, from listening to what the public wants.

**Rosenfeld:** We listen to our community, absolutely. We also involve the school district in the conversation as well because we want to make sure that as we are venturing down this road of creating these rather innovative initiatives, that they're going to work and they're going to fit within what's currently taking place.

It's a good dynamic because we have multiple stakeholders at the table all involved in the conversation, helping us to identify the best route where we're going to get the max number of students having the opportunity to gain access and really, really having a positive impact on their performance and on their experience.

**Interviewer:** Very good. Carl, question?



**Carl:** I was just wondering if there was a follow-up to that first study that showed that 50 percent of the [Crosstalk] [30:57] community did not have a positive or had a neutral.

**Rosenfeld:** Community.

**Carl:** It was a balance in a sense. Have you gone back and looked?

**Rosenfeld:** Yes. The city conducts community satisfaction surveys every two years for the most part. We've done one in 2005, which is the first one, and then 2007, 2009, 2011, '14, '16, and we'll do one now in 2018. These are very robust surveys, and they are statistically valid surveys and so that we can track out performance and our impact, we ask similar questions year after year.

We've been asking the question about the perception of public schools since 2005 in every survey we've done. We have seen steady improvement in each of our surveys. I think in 2014, about 90 or 95 percent of the community was very satisfied with the public schools, which is incredible, especially coming from 50 percent.

In our most recent survey, we saw a bit of a dip. As a result of that, we went back out to the community to better understand what are some other things that we can do to enhance the experience for our youth. As a result of that, you see us providing reading interventions, math interventions, after-school enrichment. We expanded our mental health presence. We've placed Miami Beach police in schools for safety, so we continue to partner and address those concerns.

**Interviewer:** Well, also as the public comes to expect more, that could also have an impact on their satisfaction level. When they weren't expecting much, maybe it was okay, but now that the standard has been raised...

**Rosenfeld:** Yes. That could be. Our community is very vocal, which is good. I'm a member of this community. I'm a vocal member of this community. I think that the community likes us in this space in particular. It is unusual for a municipality to be involved, but you listen to the needs of your community.

Like I said, we are not supplanting in any way. We are truly enhancing. Our community likes us here. I'm very proud to be able to



be a part of these initiatives and have the opportunity to be creative and help positively impact the lives of our youth for many generations.

**Interviewer:** Very good.

**Carl:** I'd like to go one step farther. That is if you project into the future as the community has changed dramatically in the last 30 years, I think the projection could also be that there are going to be some distinct changes within this community now. Has your department taken into account these kinds of projections? Where do you see Miami Beach being in 10 years and how your role participates in it?

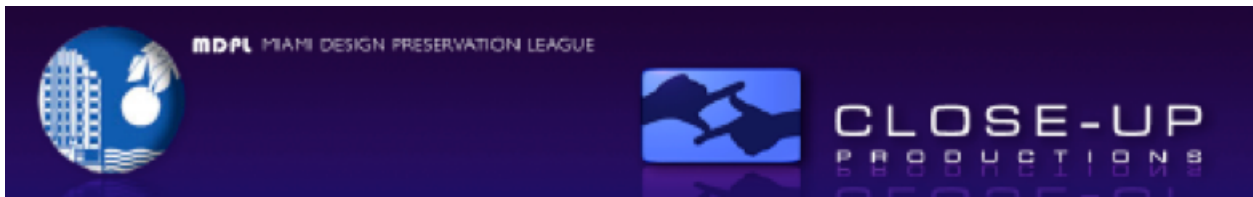
**Rosenfeld:** Well, that's an interesting question. Miami Beach has changed a lot. When I was a little girl on Miami Beach many years ago, I think the average age was somewhere in the 60s. I'm pretty sure of it. In the last 10 to 15 years, the average age is now somewhere in the 30s. Our community has changed a lot.

I think that we continue to look and monitor the community. This is a tough question for me to ask because my responsibility is whatever the mayor and commission deem more appropriate. Then I work under the city manager, so I have the opportunity to create and develop programs that our elected officials identify through their interaction with the community.

I think that we'll continue to support the needs of our community, specifically in the area of education, as much as we possibly can. Again, things change. As you mentioned, the population may be changing. There are other priorities, but I think that this is one arena where we will continue to have a presence simply because it's so important to thousands of our community members.

These enhancements that we implement are really just very impactful to our youth and to our families. I think there'll continue to be support. What types of resources are available? It may flex over time, again depending upon competing priorities, but I think where our youth are concerned, at least in this arena, we'll continue to support them here.

If you look at the enrollment in our public schools, we're pretty consistent. We've had changes, but our public school enrollment has been consistent. In fact, I would say we've had a bit of an uptick in the last few years. I think it's because of how attractive our public



schools are. They are desired public schools, and so this community is one where you can really have.

For me personally, I feel like I have the best of everything, like I mentioned. My husband likes to refer to the pocket in which we live as the suburbs of South Beach. We really feel like that. We can come home and we have our small, quiet community in our pocket. Then if we feel like we want to go out to dinner and go see a show, there are just so many options here. It's really nice.

I think that Miami Beach will continue to be a place where families choose to live and raise their families because you have it all. There is nothing being neglected, especially our children.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]