Interview with Annsheila Turkel

Kathy Hersh: Today is January 9th, 2018. We're interviewing AnnSheila Turkel. This is for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Project, and my name is Kathy Hersh. I'm the interviewer.

OK, we have a lot to talk about, but I'd like kind of get a grounding on when you first came to the Beach, and what brought you here.

Annsheila Turkel: Well, we came to the Beach the day after we were married. We came in 1956, June 21st. What brought us here? We had a choice of living in New York or moving down here, and we selected for a variety of reasons to move down here. And, we've lived here ever since.

Interviewer: Since 1956?

Turkel: Since 1956, yes. Our children were all born here.

Interviewer: You came down from New York?

Turkel: Came down from New York.

Interviewer: What did you experience, some of the culture shock that I've heard people talk about?

Turkel: Yeah. Well, Leonard and I had each gone to a city college. He went to City College, I went to Queens College. He was already out of the Air Force, so he had been involved in some integration projects while he was in the Air Force.

For example, he told me that at one point they were moving their base from Texas, someplace I think it was Austin, but I'm not sure, to South Carolina. When they got to South Carolina they discovered that the dances that were held were segregated, that the women from the town - the white women - were invited on Friday night or Saturday night, whichever, with the white officers. On the other night the black women were allowed to come for the black officers.

So, Leonard and a group got together and said, "That's not acceptable. Either we have integrated dances, or we don't have dances." For a few weeks there were no dances. Of course, that got everyone upset, and then they began to have regular integrated dances. So, Leonard had a history of having done this.

When I went to Queens College, it was during the McCarthy era. I babysat for a professor who was going down to DC every other weekend to be interviewed by McCarthy, by whomever, by Congress I guess to determine if, in fact, he was going to be indicted.

So, you know, our history was back there. That's how we came. We

came here, and we lived on the Beach. Of course, the beach was all white. Once our children were born...I say, "Once our children were born." I'm going ahead of myself a little bit, but we of course discovered the black and white fountains.

We used to tell our oldest son, Bruce, that he should drink from the black fountain because the water was the same. I used to take the kids out to a shopping center in northwest Miami, which was rather upscale for that day, it had nice stores, but it was a black shopping center, so they could see that blacks were living the same as everybody else. That's how we got here. We got here and never left.

Interviewer: So, you got involved with a group of politically active, mainly Jewish, people, right?

Turkel: Yes.

Interviewer: Who was in that core group?

Turkel: Well, I have to explain that. It started not with a group of integration. There was a guy who was a freshman representative, Jack Ohr, in 1986....Did I say '86? I'm sorry, '56. That's when we had moved down here, in '56. Who was the sole vote in the House against the move on the part of everybody else to overcome the Brown V board 1954 decision.

Jack Ohr was the sole person who got up and spoke in opposition, voted, "No," on the way they were trying to overdo or overcome that decision. Jack was running for office again, and he had no opposition, so he did win a second election. Then we he ran again in '58 he lost. A group of us, not knowing each other, got together. We used to meet up at the Dupont Plaza every, I don't know, every Saturday, every week. It was a group of all Jewish couples. All from south Miami Beach, except for one couple who came from south Miami. We all got together to help him campaign.

Leonard would go with them to different campaign sites. We would call people. We would send mailings, etc, etc. As a result, because of that little involvement, again, they were mostly from Miami Beach, that's how we got to meet these other people who were involved. That's really what started it.

Jack was notoriously brave, and he died early. He became mayor of Miami for a little bit, married seven times. Once, twice, to one person, but he was a delightful, fabulous, guy. That's what really started us involved in integrating, or trying to integrate, Miami Beach.

Interviewer: Was it dangerous?

Turkel: We didn't think so at first. There were times, ultimately, when yeah, we realized we could be jailed on the sit-ins. We were told in advance

that we might go to jail. We thought it was kind of interesting to end up in jail, and then it became dangerous again, but never really that it panned out. It became dangerous when we fought against the Vietnam war. We were threatened with, at worst, being splashed with red paint, but we never felt really endangered. At least I didn't. I don't think Leonard did. I don't think we did. We didn't feel it was dangerous.

Interviewer: Do you remember the first sit-in that you did?

Turkel: Oh, I remember it very clearly.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about that please?

Turkel: Sure. Actually, you know the first sit-in happened in Miami, before the one that is historically famous, the one in Greensboro. That one happened in February of '60. Our sit-in was the end of April in '59.

Interviewer: '59?

Turkel: '59, so it was almost a year before the Greensboro sit-in.

Interviewer: And, what happened?

Turkel: Well, what happened was we all decided that we were going to sit-in at the five and dime stores. The leadership at the time was John Brown, who was the president of CORE. CORE by the way, which is what we were involved with, we started the first CORE group down here in the south in 1958.

Someone, [phonetic] [08:05] Thadia Stern, reached out to CORE. I know I'm going back, but I guess you want the history. Thadia Stern called the national CORE up in New York, and they sent down two field secretaries, Gordon Carey, and a principal of a black high school, his name was James Cane. I think that was his name.

So, we formed a small group of CORE in Thadia Stern's house, and then they met in my house. We were taught about non-violent resistance. We would go over to the Sir John, which was in Overtown and train other people to do it.

There were two black young women from north Florida who were involved with us. They were very active, and very good. Getting back to the sit-ins, so the first thing that happened, and I don't know if it happened before or after, John Brown, for whom my husband built a house in Liberty City, and I'll tell you about it, was an ophthalmologist, and he was obviously very smart, very outspoken, and kind small and handsome guy. And, he went to the city of Miami, to the mayor, and he said to him on such and such a day, there are no black policemen at this time, or if there are they are not very prominent. I don't remember.

On such and such a day, there will be a black policeman on the corner of Flagler Street and First Avenue, southeast First Avenue I guess. Yeah, southeast First Avenue, by such and such a day, otherwise there will be a boycott. I don't think he knew what we would boycott. I don't know. John was smarter than I, so he might have. Don't you know it, whenever that date was set, there was the most handsome, tall, central casting, black officer.

Interviewer: Sidney Poitier.

Turkel: Sidney Poitier, and maybe even better looking, taller, but yeah, he was central casting. So, I don't recall if that happened before the sit-ins, or right afterward, but that was part of the dynamic at the time.

So, the first sit-in a group of us, mostly women as best I recall, mostly Jewish women, but that isn't true. There were Quakers. There were other people from Miami, but the leadership was Thadia Stern, [phonetic] [11:01] Charlie Zoloff, maybe Barbara Gordon, Thadia' sister, all from Miami Beach, all of us Jewish women were from Miami Beach except for Shirley Hutner, who wasn't in that, OK?

What we would do is we would do is we would--

Interviewer: Did you say Shirley Hutner?

Turkel: Shirley Hutner. You knew Shirley Hutner?

Interviewer: They were our neighbors in Lakeridge.

Turkel: OK, so you knew Bernie. I still communicate with one of their kids. Yeah, Shirley and Bernie were involved, but not in that first sit-in, as I recall. Anyway, we decided we were going to sit-in, both in Woolworth's and Grant, but I think the first one was in Woolworth's, maybe [inaudible] [11:55]. What we did was we organized such that we would sit down, we white women, or men if there were some, at the counter, and as we were ready to order, some black people would come and we would say, "Oh, this is my friend so-and-so. Let her sit, because I know she has to get back to work."

That happened at a few different seats, at which point the manager came out and the waitresses stopped serving. The manager would say, "I'm sorry. We don't serve Negroes." As John Brown said, as he would say later, "We don't eat Negroes." So, that was done.

Anyway, what happened was that they shut the lunch counter down. The manager's explanation was, "We don't discriminate. If we don't serve Negroes, then we don't serve anybody, and therefore, we will not serve anyone." A couple of hours later they opened again, and then I think we went across to Grant's and did the same thing. I don't remember how that happened. I think perhaps the blacks sat down.

You know, there were different ways of doing it. Perhaps the, we call them blacks now, they called them Negroes then, the blacks would sit down and the manager would say, "I'm sorry, we're going to have to close down the shop." and they closed it down. That's pretty much how it went.

At the same time there was a group, Leonard, my husband, and Jack [phonetic] [13:38] Duntio, and John Brown, would visit various things like the Royal Castles, and check to see. John would sit down, and he wouldn't be served, so he would leave. Leonard would listen to the conversation that would go on. In one Royal Castle I remember hearing that John sat down, and he was served. Then when he got up to leave, Leonard was sitting there listening to the conversation.

One of the servers said to him, "Hey, that was a Negro you served." The other guy said, "Oh, no, no. He was an Indian. You could see his color, he was Indian." So, that was how they resolved the matter, that they had served a black man.

Interviewer: In that particular--?

Turkel: In that particular Royal Castle, the others, they didn't serve. Then, one time they went to the Dupont, Leonard and John, coming together to have coffee, and they were told, "Sorry, we can't serve you here, but we will serve you in the back, in the kitchen." They said, "No, we're going to sit over here." And they said, "No, you cannot." So, they left, because they weren't into causing a riot. What they were doing was observing what the dynamic was at the time.

Soon after that, at one point we went into Wolfy's, Leonard and I, and maybe one or two others with Reverend Shuttleworth, and we were served. It was a different time, maybe it was a year or so later, and we were served. Wolfy's, maybe being on the Beach, had a different way of interacting with blacks.

Interviewer: Well, maybe yes, being Jewish, having experience with discrimination.

Turkel: [crosstalk] [15:28] Maybe. Maybe so, yeah. I mean, you know, everyone in the restaurant looked up, but Reverend Shuttleworth just ignored it, and it was all fine.

Interviewer: Did he come to town often, Reverend Shuttleworth?

Turkel: I don't know. I know that he came to town with us, to meet with us, a few of us. Very dynamic. I see he spoke in one of the black churches. He was very dynamic.

Talking about the black churches, we were really involved with the black churches. There was what was called The Minister's March. I don't remember exactly...I have the dates someplace, I can provide

that for you later. It was in May of '60 or '61. It was led by Reverend Graham, Ed Graham, and Theodore Gibson.

Reverend Graham was perhaps the most well-known black clergyman, and Theodore Gibson was the most outspoken and active, but Ed Graham was very impressive. He spoke with a booming voice, beautiful. They formed a Minister's March, which came down southeast First Street, made a left on Miami Avenue, and at that time, Burdines had a coffee shop across from the Burdines. The main Burdines on Flagler Street, which I heard is now closing.

A coffee shop, and Leonard and I were inside to observe what would happen. We look like teenagers when I look at those pictures, we were not quite. The Minister's March walked down Miami Avenue, heading north, and stopped at the door to the coffee shop, obviously with the intention of walking in. And, it was either the manager or the security guard, I read someplace that it was the security guard, I always thought it was the manager, and he stopped at the door as they were approaching and he said, "You may not enter. I am blocking your way."

Reverend Graham, in this deep gorgeous voice, said, "You have been blocking my way for 300 years," maybe he said, "You have been blocking our way," I don't know that he said "my," "for 300 years." So, they shut down the coffee shop. From there, the ministers went over to, I believe it was Woolworth, and of course they experienced the same thing, shut down. But, it was a beautiful sight, for us particularly, because we were sitting in there watching all of this that happened.

Interviewer: So, you were already in the coffee shop?

Turkel: We were sitting in the coffee shop, at stools. I think a video shows that. You can't really see us, but I know just where we were sitting. We were there to observe what would happen.

Interviewer: OK, I think that video was in the Florida Moving Image Archive.

Turkel: It might be, yeah.

Interviewer: It's probably in there.

Turkel: I could see Leonard, because he was taller than I. Yeah, you can see it.

Interviewer: That march was not the march in solidarity with Selma, what happened at Selma, was it?

Turkel: I don't recall any--

Interviewer: That's a Minister's March. It was a separate event?

Turkel: Oh, totally separate.

Interviewer: OK.

Turkel: Now, whether it was inspired by that, I don't know.

Interviewer: There was a big march involving a lot of white, and black, people that took place after the events at Selma.

Turkel: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Were you--?

Turkel: I was not there, but I do have pictures of it, yes. We were not there. I don't know that Leonard was or wasn't there, but I was not there, no.

Interviewer: According to Mr. A.D. Moore, who was involved with CORE--

Turkel: Yes.

Interviewer: There was...Were there violent incidences that occurred?

Turkel: I'm sure there were. I'm sure.

Interviewer: That there was cooperation from the police, in fact?

Turkel: In Greensboro?

Interviewer: No.

Turkel: Here? Oh, I'm sure there were. Somehow, I was familiar with it and I knew it was happening, but the group that I was involved with, the Jewish primarily at that time, we were not harassed more so than just being told to leave. We used to get a license, a permit. You don't have a permit, we had all of that going on, but we were never in any way...We thought we might be jailed. We were told by the police that if you continue to do this, but we had a permit, you might be jailed. But, they never went through--

Interviewer: You never had a backlash of white people throwing things at you, or dumping ketchup on you?

Turkel: No, but, that was the threat that we had during the Vietnam protest, that they were going to throw red paint on us, and I think that--

Interviewer: [crosstalk inaudible] [20:33] was saying that the most violent thing that ever happened to him was that someone cut his tie off at the knot.

Turkel: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Do you recall that incident?

Turkel: I don't, but A.D. was very, very, active. A.D. was an amazing, amazing, man. He and Leonard had, really, a very long-term relationship. Long after our events, and A.D. was very spectacular. He just did not anything, from anybody.

I don't think he was aggressive, but he was very clear, as was John Brown, as were most of the people who were involved. We believe in non-violent resistance, and so we had a choice. We could not counter their, whatever, with anything that would be seen as being attacking.

Interviewer: Was there any time when you felt tempted to?

Turkel: No. I think we took great pride in the fact that we wouldn't. There was a sense of solidarity with the whole concept. Again, for us, women that I'm speaking about, it never really came to that. We were never physically threatened, but I think we would have done what we were supposed to do.

Interviewer: The training had really ingrained that in you?

Turkel: Yeah, philosophically we bought into it, because it made such good sense to us not to do that. That was part of what we were trying to espouse to the world at large.

Interviewer: Did you participate in other places, like Selma?

Turkel: I did not. We were very much Miami oriented. I did participate in another, when we tried to integrate the schools, which I'm skipping. I assume that you'll--

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Turkel: OK. Well, my daughter then, Bruce was already in high school, but my daughter was at Ida Fisher Junior High. We, with a group other women, no, couples, from Miami Beach - I remember the Caplans, the Feders, some other people - and we decided we wanted to integrate Fisher Junior High. What we did is we went over to some section of Miami, one of the schools, we met with some of the parents. We talked to them about the idea, and they agreed to it. They agreed that they would let their children be bused over to Fisher.

At some point, now I can figure out when it happened, because Amy then was 12, '60s, so it was in '72 or '73, somewhere around then. We arranged for it. We arranged, of course, with the administration at Ida Fisher, and black children were bused over to Ida Fisher. No white children bused into the black schools, which was part of the idea that we wanted to have happen, but for the moment that's what happened.

Just as an aside, I will tell you that Amy then was, I guess, a freshman. In her sophomore year it was now integrated, or in her junior year, I don't remember. And, the school became, really, very dangerous.

Interviewer: Which school, Ida Fisher?

Turkel: Ida Fisher. There were gangs. It was very dangerous, and Leonard and I felt that we should not impose on our daughter what we believed in, that she now had to suffer the consequences of it, that it just wasn't fair. It just wasn't fair.

So, we went to her, she was all of 13 at the time maybe, and said that we'd decided, again, that it's not fair that you should have to suffer, because it was really getting very dangerous at the school, security, police, whatever else, and so we want to send you to a private school, which is really not philosophically what we liked. But, we felt that we couldn't do it to her.

My daughter, to her credit, said to us, she raised her finger and she said, "Don't do that to me." She said, "I am learning more here about how to deal with people than I will ever learn if you send me to a private school." Well, I get goosebumps when I think about it. It was pretty horrifying for us to hear that, and because we had a great faith in Amy, she was an old soul, so we said, "We really want to do this." She said, "Don't do it to me, please." When your 13 year old says, "Please," and we let her stay.

The truth of the matter is that she has some of the greatest interpersonal skills of anyone I know. She is now, as a matter of fact, she's a Director of Philanthropy for the American Civil Liberties Union here in Florida, and she just is that person. And, she managed to not get hurt, and went on, you know, to do what you had to do. I know I'm jumping around--

Interviewer: That's OK.

Turkel: These thoughts come to me as I say it. So, what else do you want to know?

Interviewer: Well, the integration, Miami was a bit behind in that regard, right?

Turkel: Behind, compared to [crosstalk] [26:25]. Well, I went to an integrated school. My high school was integrated, I didn't know it. I went to a college that was integrated. We didn't even realize at the time, that was...I guess I must have known it, but it was not a thing that we talked about.

Leonard was in the service with blacks, the Air Force, which was

already integrated. So, yeah, that's what you did.

Interviewer: How southern was Miami?

Turkel: Miami was not southern.

Interviewer: Not southern?

Turkel: No, Miami was. Miami Beach really was not. Miami, I think there's that book by Raymond Mole, who was a distinguished professor at the University of Alabama, and then he taught at Florida Atlantic for a little while, and he wrote a book called, "The South of the South." He talked about the fact that Miami, per se, was not a southern town. Although, many things went on that were strictly southern.

If I may, I'd like to read what he said about our group. It's in his book, "The South of the South." Now, talking about the Jewish women on Miami Beach, men too, because the men of course were more than peripherally involved. They have their own place.

He says, "Migration, family backgrounds, and motivation, played key roles in bringing Miami's peace and civil rights activists together in a new place. A massive Jewish post-war migration was unique to south Florida, and possibly Los Angeles." He said, "Most of Miami's activists were northern transplants. For example, Jack Gordon, moved to Miami in 1946 from Detroit. Leonard Turkel, simultaneously active in CORE and SANE, migrated south from New York City. [phonetic] [28:34] Bobby Graf, Charlie Zolof, and Thadia Stern, and her sister, Barbara Gordon, were from New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. The cultural--"

Oh, let me go back, "The relatively small group of Jewish activists, never more than a few hundred, served as the social conscience of Miami in repressive times. The cultural and political traditions that the immigrant generation brought to The United States, one scholar has written, were rooted in the values of secularized Judaism. The activists discussed here," he's referring to his book, "often marched out of step with Miami's large mainstream Jewish community, but they had been sensitized to social justice issues in their youth, and developed over time a vision of the future they sought."

And, it's true that there were many Jews in Miami, and Miami Beach, who looked askance at us. We were definitely out of the mainstream. There was one rabbi on Miami Beach, Leon Kronish, who was supportive. One rabbi in Miami, Joe Narot, but you know, they were supportive, but they were not involved in the activities day-to-day.

They were very supportive of us, but for the most part, I don't want to mention organizations, but people who belonged to the more conservative Jewish organizations did not look favorably upon what we were doing. Although, they were liberal in their way.

Interviewer: How did they rationalize that?

Turkel: I don't know.

Interviewer: Did they write? How did they show their disapproval?

Turkel: They didn't join. We would ask them to participate, they said they were not in favor of doing that. They believed in gradual integration, as we did, we weren't looking to overrun the government in any way. I had many friends. I was close to them, but they were more, for want of a better word, middle-class, but that's not quite the word. They were more representative of a different way of looking at integration and living.

They were good people. They were very strong on Jewish issues, but they were not involved with this.

Interviewer: That's like not all Quakers were abolitionists.

Turkel: OK.

Interviewer: Some were gradualists, and they felt it would be irresponsible to suddenly free them, and then what?

Turkel: Yeah, and I know they were very generous with their housekeepers. I know that for a fact, but integration was a step too far for them.

Interviewer: So, it was actually integration that they were not in favor of?

Turkel: Well, the sit-ins. I guess they were afraid of the physical involvement. I think they would have been in favor of integration if it could have been done in a more acceptable, comfortable, way. They did not want to participate in the sit-ins.

Interviewer: They didn't want to rock the boat.

Turkel: They didn't want to rock the boat. That's one, yeah. They didn't want to physically be part of that organization. I guess that's what I could say. They didn't see themselves willing to do that. They were for all the right causes. They were philanthropic. They were good people, for the most part as far as I knew, but that's not what they were going to do.

Interviewer: So, after this period of time, you got involved in labor issues, the nuclear freeze issue?

Turkel: We got involved in all of that. Yes, many of us got very much involved in SANE, Stop All Nuclear Explosions, he started that group.

Interviewer: He started the local chapter?

Turkel: He started the local chapter, right, not the one in New York. We got involved...I've started, along with a friend, Phyllis Resnick, the Women's Strike for Peace. We were emulating something that had happened in other cities around the country.

Actually, we were on TV. We were interviewed for our position on that. We were just opposed to the Vietnam war, and what it was doing. It goes back a lot of years. I think was 25 or 26 at time, as were most of the women. Well, I can't say that. The ones who were interviewed were all Jewish, but I'm sure that there were others, because that was...The Quakers were involved. I can think of some of the women who were there with us.

Interviewer: Do you remember names?

Turkel: Well, you mentioned a name, that guy--

Interviewer: Warren Hostens?

Turkel: Warren Hostens, yeah, he was very active. There was a Jay Cox. There was a Heather, somebody--

Interviewer: Moyer.

Turkel: Heather Moyer, there you go. They were also involved.

Interviewer: So, you must have had some interesting dinner table conversations around that.

Turkel: Pretty much one very focused on...In fact, Thadia Stern, who was the total activist, she led us all in everything that we were ever going to do. I shouldn't say that, because I don't think she was involved in the Women's Strike for Peace. No, I think she was beyond that, by that time.

We used to be invited to Thadia and Phil's house. She would serve rice, for Vietnamese. That's how we ate at her house. If she was going to be very generous, she would make chili. Not that she wasn't generous, but she was going to remind us all the time that we had work to do.

Dinner table conversation was not unlike conversation today. It was of the moment. It was very vigorous. It was very adversarial. We each had different points of view about what we should do, how we should do it, but we all came from the same point of view, that what was in existence didn't work. Didn't work for us, wouldn't work for our children. We didn't want that for our children.

Interviewer: Your children grew up in that milieu then?

Turkel: Sure they did. Sure they did, and I know my children, and I can think of others. Well, some fell away, others continued. You know, there's no predicting, but my kids have been pretty good about staying with it in their own way, each of them. Yeah.

Interviewer: How many children?

Turkel: I have three. Bruce is the eldest, Amy in the middle, and my younger son, Douglas.

Interviewer: Douglas?

Turkel: Douglas.

Interviewer: And, what were his experiences like in the school system coming along?

Turkel: Well, Douglas had an interesting...Douglas was, I dare say it, he was not, what did Tom just say, a stable genius. He was just very, very, bright. He got bored very, very, easily. He went to Miami Beach High. He didn't pay much attention. Well, even early on, even when he was in grade school. He was in a spelling bee once, and he lost out at some point. He came crying to me saying, "Mommy, the teacher didn't even know to pronounce the word." That upset him.

Then, he was in the Gifted Child Program, and I finally had to pull him out, because he was duping the teacher up there that he was too busy at school here, and would tell the second grade teacher here that he had so much work from the other program that he couldn't do the work there. Finally I had to pull him out, because I didn't know what to do.

His high school years, we had to send him to private school for a little while, because he was just impossible. He had his own way of dealing with things, very smart, too smart. Anyway, he turned out to be pretty damn good.

He started a program. He brought a national program down here that was called, "Radio Lollipop." Douglas is a voice-over talent. You should be interviewing him. So, what they would do is they would go into the hospitals, particularly Mercy, not Mercy, children's hospitals, and set up a radio station, and then they would go from room to room and interview the kids, so that they could have some camaraderie with other kids, those who couldn't get out of bed or whatever else.

He did that, in fact, he was on the board of Radio Lollipop for a lot of years. So, each of my children, in their way, has done...You know Bruce, so you know what he has done, and so each of them has done some pretty amazing things. That's their burden, what can I tell you?

Interviewer: I'd like to hear a little more about how this community of people supported each other during these turbulent times, even though there wasn't a lot of dangerous backlash here like we saw in Selma, and Birmingham, Mississippi. You met weekly?

Turkel: Well, I don't want to say that we met weekly, religiously. I want to say rather that we met when it was necessary. When we did the CORE training over at the Sir John, that was happening for maybe a couple of months. It was mostly to get the other kids, mostly kids, involved in learning what the program was, how you do it, and practice it. We pushed around. We pushed each other, and did other things like that, just to learn how you've got to react when it does become violent. Because, it could be and it did, not for us, but for other people.

What are you going to do when the police come, and they push you down, or they pepper spray you, or whatever they did. It didn't happen to us, those of us that I'm talking about, but it happened to many of the people who were there with us.

Interviewer: Did you...Martin Luther King gave one of the trainings at the Sir John, did you ever meet him?

Turkel: I did not meet him, but Leonard met him. But, Leonard met him in New York. His brother was manager of one of the big hotels in New York, and Martin Luther King was scheduled to speak there. We were in New York at the time, so he called Leonard down, and when Martin Luther King walked in, my brother-in-law introduced Leonard as someone who had been active in CORE. Martin Luther King thanked him and said, "Yes, I'm sure we've met before." And, he walked on. I did not have the pleasure of meeting him, no.

Interviewer: Your husband was a builder [crosstalk] [40:29], correct?

Turkel: He was, yes.

Interviewer: Tell us about the experience of doing the home for John O. Brown, and the swimming pool?

Turkel: Well, John and Marie Brown, they had four children. John was an ophthalmologist, he had a great practice over in Liberty City, but he was very active. He was kind of a lead guy over at CORE. I think I told you already about getting the black policeman, on Flagler Street.

So, they wanted to build a house. They bought a property, a nice, big, corner property on, I think it was 61st Street, but I don't remember. I'd have to look at the files. And, they wanted Leonard to build it. Well, Leonard had never built a private home, and they also wanted a pool. He had never built a pool. He was building low-rise apartment houses on Miami Beach at the time. After he built the first condominium on Miami Beach.

They convinced him that he should build it. They knew him. We were very close friends, and so he did it. He built a very lovely home for them, four children, so it was a big house. Then, he arranged for a subcontractor to do the pool. When it was finished, he called the city of Miami to come, for an inspector to give it a permit to be used.

The inspector walked in the front door, when you open the front door, it opened to the pool. There was a living room, then Florida room, and then the pool. He saw it from the distance and he said, "The first nigger pool in Miami? Rejected." And, he turned around and he walked away. Well, Leonard immediately got in his car, went to whatever department, I guess it was the building department, told them what had happened, and he said, "I want someone out there immediately." First of all, he mentioned who it was. I don't know what happened to that guy, or if anything happened.

He said, "Immediately, you will send someone and see that pool. The subcontractor is licensed, permitted, all of that." Of course, the same day someone came, permitted it, and that was it. I mean, it was a shocker. It was not to be believed, but it happened.

Interviewer: You probably heard the N-word a lot, during those days.

Turkel: Yeah, I guess we did.

Interviewer: But, to have it so blatant...

Turkel: But, that one was just...You know, even when you went to Wolfy's, not Wolfy's, you went to Woolworth, or, they went to Wolfy's I didn't, Leonard and John, or some other places, they wouldn't have said, "Nigger," they would have said, "Negro. We don't serve Negroes here. Negroes are not permitted." Many of them were permitted to stand and have their coffee, by the way. I should say that. There was a place for them to stand. And, the other thing that was interesting was that blacks, at that time, were not permitted to try on clothes in Burdines, or in any place. They could buy the clothes. Of course, they couldn't return them.

They were not permitted to use the elevator in Burdines. The only one permitted to use the elevator, in Burdines, was the first black millionaire, whose name for the moment eludes me. Although, I knew his daughter very well. It'll come to me, and I will feed it to you at some point. He was the only one who was permitted to use the elevator, try on shoes, because other blacks were not permitted to try on shoes.

The story that's alleged, and I don't know that it's true, but if you want to hear it I will tell you. The reason he was so popular, or so accepted, was that he lent Ronnie Burdine money when they were going into

bankruptcy. You shake your head as if you've heard that story.

Interviewer: I have.

Turkel: OK, so then it's public information, so I'm not speaking out of school. I cannot think of the guy's name, and I know it so well. Oh.

Interviewer: I can't think of it either.

Turkel: I can even picture his daughter, who we were very close to.

Interviewer: He had a two-story house, in Overtown.

Turkel: Yeah, I can't think of his name. Oh, this is bothering me.

Interviewer: You said that Leonard, and John O. Brown, were close.

Turkel: Yes.

Interviewer: You had black friends then, that you socialized with?

Turkel: Well, yes. We socialized with John and Marie, and their children. We socialized mostly by going to events with them. You know, they would have fraternity reunions. They would have college reunions. They would have a wedding. They would have a funeral, and so, we would be there with them.

John and Marie were guests in our house, but as far as socializing, you know it's interesting when you ask that question, because later Leonard became a chairperson of the Overtown Advisory Board. Again, he was the only white person on the board, and that's another whole story with [phonetic] [46:17] AnnMarie Adger.

And the president...Was he the president? I don't remember. I think he was a chairperson, whatever. So, we would be involved with the blacks at the time, and sometimes, yes, they came to our house. In fact, I'm thinking of one situation. I'm a psychotherapist, and so, one them asked if I would see his daughter, because of some incident. I don't remember now who it was. In that sense, professionally, I did get involved. But, I don't know.

Well, we had big parties, yes. Yes, there were blacks. We'd have a big dinner party, Marilyn Bloom's house, my house, then there would be blacks, but one on one it was only with John and Marie. Later on we did get friendly with someone that Lenny worked with. She was...If you could stop the cameras a minute, can you stop the camera, so I can look up the names?

Tech: It's OK. I'll edit it.

Turkel: No?

Interviewer: He'll edit it out, don't worry.

Turkel: OK.

Tech: Yeah, don't worry.

Turkel: All right. In fact, I just spoke to her recently. They're all in my phone book.

Interviewer: John Dew, Patricia Dew.

Turkel: Well, they were there, and their parents, of course, were up in north Florida, but they came down here. No, it will all come to me and we can do it later.

Interviewer: Sure, that's fine.

Turkel: OK, but AnnMarie Adger, and Leonard, were a vital force in Overtown. AnnMarie Adger lived in the projects. She was really a thorn in the side of the Miami city commission, because she was outspoken, she told them what she wanted, and she used to say to Lenny, "You know there's a conspiracy against the blacks in Miami." He'd say, "AnnMarie, what are you talking about?"

By the way, that picture...Oh, which is...Oh, that picture over there is a picture of Leonard and AnnMarie Adger. Can you see it?

Interviewer: Oh, yes. That one in the corner.

Turkel: OK, over in the corner. He would say, "What do you mean, there's a conspiracy?" Ann would say, "Listen Lenny, you know they built that expressway through. They bifurcated Overtown. They destroyed the community. That's what they did. It was intentional. Don't think it would have happened because the Florida engineers decided that's what they needed. It was because they wanted to do it." She was adamant, and she got him so committed to this whole idea that he would go with her to commission meetings.

So, they decided that they would start an Overtown medical center. A medical clinic for Overtown residents, and Leonard said, "How are we going to do that?" She said, "Well, there's a methadone clinic right off 3rd Avenue. We're going to go ask the commission to give it to us." He said, "Are we?" She said, "Yes, we're going to go ask them to give us that, and we can open a clinic, because most of the people who live in Overtown don't have medical care."

Well, he went with her and they convinced the commission, or whoever it was, the building department, to give over that clinic, the methadone clinic, to them for a clinic. So, with $1,000.00 that Leonard

had as a CD in a bank, they threatened every time that they needed something that they had money. So, they opened a clinic. Lenny insisted on naming it, [phonetic] [50:39] The AnnMarie Adger Clinic, where they provided health care.

The way they did it was they got a very lovely doctor from The University of Miami to provide, they needed a license, to provide the license. They got students from the school of nursing, University of Miami, to be there. They got George Simpson, who I just spoke to the other day, who was the first black surgeon at Jackson Hospital, to provide medical services. He used to have a great way of doing hearing tests. He would say to a kid who came in, because Leonard used to do this in the schools with George, he'd say to the kid, "Move over there." And, he's say, "Now, walk slowly toward me." And, he'd say, "Do you hear me now? Do you hear me now?" As they came close, he'd say, "Yeah, I can hear you." He'd say, "You can hear." That's how he would test them. He said, "We had none of those newfangled stuff." So, that's how he would test.

George is still alive. His wife was a gynecologist. No, she was a pediatrician, and she's still alive. They live in Coconut Grove.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you about the mayor, Robert King High?

Turkel: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell me, did you have any dealings with him?

Turkel: I think Leonard did. I think we met with him once in a while, but the only thing I remember about Robert King High, it had nothing to do with integration, but it was a funny story. He was asked to speak someplace. I'm sure he spoke a lot. And, he got up and in good speech style he said, "Today, my subject will be sex. It has been very..." I'm not doing it well, "Today, my theme will be sex." He said, "It has been my pleasure," and he walked off.

Interviewer: That's it?

Turkel: That was it.

Interviewer: Why did do that?

Turkel: I don't know. I don't know the circumstances.

Interviewer: [inaudible] [52:58]

Turkel: I don't know the circumstances. He might have gone on and given a better speech, but all I know is that's what I had heard, and that it was true.

Interviewer: There are some people who say that one of the reasons--

Turkel: But, don't print this. Do not do that.

Interviewer: That one of the reasons that there wasn't trouble, here in Miami like in other places in the south, was because of Robert King High being the mayor.

Turkel: Absolutely.

Interviewer: And, Leroy Collins being the governor.

Turkel: Yes, both of those are true. Absolutely.

Interviewer: Did you ever meet Leroy Collins?

Turkel: I did not, but of course we knew of him. We were impressed with him. He was opposed to, in fact I think I have it here someplace, he spoke about gradual integration, but he was very strongly for that, no question. Robert King High was a very moderate, smart man, whose sole objective in all of this was not to have violence in Miami. It was clear. They were very appreciative and open to making changes that were doable. Yes, Robert King High was an important person at that time.

Interviewer: There was another person who, I'm blanking on his name, had laid a lot of groundwork in Miami. A black minister.

Turkel: Not Ted? Not Theodore Gibson?

Interviewer: No, he predated--

Turkel: OK.

Interviewer: He predated the community relations board.

Turkel: Oh, OK.

Interviewer: In fact, he had sort of ran a forerunner of that, and he did a lot of work in Overtown, and I'm blanking on his name, but I've read that the work that he did sort of laid the groundwork for there to be discussion, community relations, sharing of information, dispelling rumors, things like that.

Turkel: You know, I might have it in some of my newspaper articles I have, but I cannot...I'm sure it's right. I'm sure there were others who came before. However...It's not "however," that's the wrong word. The group that finally coalesced was at a moment in history when it was ready for it.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to listen to jazz, to any of the places in Overtown?

Turkel: We did go once in a while, yeah, but it was notorious for that. In fact, you know, no blacks who performed in Miami Beach could stay overnight. I think the one exception to that was--

Interviewer: Sammy Davis Jr.

Turkel: Sammy Davis Jr., thank you. But, at that time we were involved with Leon Bibb, who was a black singer, a fabulous singer, who did work, who performed on Miami Beach, had stayed with us, and then would go over to Overtown and play jazz late at night, or sing jazz. So, yeah, there were times we would do it. Not as often as we would have liked, we had young children and we were really not in a position to do all of that. We had other things, building a business, other things. But, yes, we were fully aware of it. It was pretty exciting times.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to The Hampton House?

Turkel: Yes. I went there.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Turkel: Well, we went to The Hampton House only to meet with a group of people. At least, Leonard and I have gone there more often. I went to meet with a group of people to have some discussion about next steps.

Interviewer: So, more about the organizing of the movement?

Turkel: Yes. Yes, right. I did not go--

Interviewer: It was the jazz nightclub?

Turkel: No, and if we did I don't remember it. We may very well have, but I don't remember.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you about someone there. Were you there when Martin Luther King gave that speech?

Turkel: No.

Interviewer: OK.

Turkel: I was not. Dana Dorsey.

Interviewer: Dorsey.

Turkel: Dorsey. Ah, it's been bothering me.

Interviewer: I knew it started with a D.

Turkel: He was Dana Dorsey, and his daughter was Dana Dorsey, whatever her last new name was. She died only recently, and she was dynamite. We spent a lot of time with Dana Dorsey, outspoken, smart, she worked for the city of Miami, and would tell us how often someone would jump over her for positions. That's how it was then. She was outspoken enough that I'm sure she did as well as one could do, given her circumstances, but Dana Dorsey, I never met him. He had died by the time we knew Dana.

And, then Leonard got involved in rebuilding a library over on 61st Street. I have pictures of it. It was owned by the city of Miami, and it had been a black library, and he wanted to renovate it and build it over again. Dana and he were very involved in doing that. Then it, somehow, I don't know what happened, Leonard died or whatever else, but it was never realized. It was a very sad time.

Interviewer: [phonetic] [58:39] Carl, do you have any questions?

Carl: I'd like to know something about the changes on the Beach that you have seen over time. In other words, you've been, lived, on Miami Beach, or peripherally to it, for 60-70 years, and I'd sort of like to have your perspective on those social, or political, changes and shifts that you might have seen on the Beach.

Turkel: I've lived on the Beach for 67 years.

Carl: If you came in '56, that's 60 years.

Turkel: Yeah, 60 years. Yeah.

Interviewer: Don't exaggerate Carl.

Carl: A slip in the mathematical term, sorry.

Turkel: No, I did. I came here in '56. You're right, 60 years. Changes on the Beach, it's really hard to explain that. When we moved here there were still some issues. Blacks did not live on the Beach, except for those who lived in households that employed them. Other blacks had to leave here by 10:00, or some such time. They needed permits. They had to be black fingerprinted.

Interviewer: Was there anybody, by the way, that worked on the Beach that didn't live on the Beach, whether they, regardless of color, had to have an ID to come on the Beach, and they had to be gone by a certain time. Where the discrimination came in was that if you were black, you were for sure escorted, or made to get on a bus.

Turkel: OK, I was not aware of that. I did not know that. All I knew, from the black perspective, they had to leave. They had to be fingerprinted, and of course, they needed to have identification. So, the changes on the

Beach. Well, it became very Jewish, both down here and as far north...The island they lived on, not Normandy Isle, but the next ones up. Biscayne Point, or something like that. Then, that lasted for some time. I'm not really very good at...

Interviewer: When you came, was there still anti-Semitism?

Turkel: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

Interviewer: You going to do the Gentile sign?

Carl: Yeah, we got it.

Turkel: OK, when Leonard built on the Beach, he tore down some old houses, which I'm sure were lovely of their day, but he built them, and they had signs. One of them that he tore down, this he found in the house, it was no longer on the signpost, that said, "Gentiles." We knew of signs that said, "No Jews, no dogs. Gentiles only." Or, respectful people, or some such name. I'm using the wrong word. Gentry, or some such word, so it was clear.

By the time we moved down here, it had become...Because South Beach had a lot of old Jewish people living there. In fact, my grandparents came and visited one year, I remember, and they stayed at a hotel, so it was pretty Jewish at the time. Although, Chuck Hall was the mayor, he wasn't Jewish. They weren't all only Jewish mayors.

Then they started building high-rises. The first one was right across from where we are now, and they tore down some of the...Leonard never built high-rises. The tallest building he ever built was right on the Beach, and it's a six story building. I wish we had kept one of the apartments. It's worth a fortune today. He was selling them, unbelievably inexpensively.

I think the change I've seen is the gentrification, number one, and then the landscape, the tall buildings now. We had shade. We had parks. We had little traffic. You could walk any place on the Beach. I like where I live here, because I can still walk. But, they started building the high-rises, so it's become much more generic. It's become Latino. It's become non-Jewish. Not that many blacks live on the Beach today, as far as I can see. It's become an urban oasis. It really is very urbanized today. I'm sorry I can't give you a better picture of it. The Beach was a very small town when we lived here.

I used to be able to park my car, there was a Burdines on the Beach, park my car in the open lot behind it. Yeah, thrown everything I bought into the car. Never locked the car. Never thought about locking the car, and then drove away. It was just a fabulous small town. Leonard built for us, an apartment building, right across the water from where we are now. A three story, two story, three story building, because we could not find a place on the Beach that would take

children. They would not rent apartments to children.

Interviewer: Really?

Turkel: So, he built a building, 20 units, two story. And, we took children. We had a three bedroom apartment. We had two children at the time. My daughter was born after we moved in there. We were one of the few places on the Beach that took children. We didn't take dogs, because we had a sandbox outside for the kids, or cats. It was just a very different environment. It was a small town. When we'd walk on Lincoln Road, if we didn't know everybody, we knew about them. You didn't have any tourists walking on Lincoln Road then. Although, for the winter it would change. The winter was many, many, more people.

People, like us, who owned apartments here. But, our life was very much on the Beach, with people that...This building was built by three builders who, initially, rented the apartments. When they turned it into a condo, they sold it at a very low price. I don't even want to think about it. Very low prices, and most of the people who lived here were Jewish. Many of the people who live here today are not. Most of them were couples. Now, we have many gay couples living here. It's all a whole different experience. It's really quite interesting. But, many of the people that I know who still here are Jewish.

All the buildings were accessible. Crime was not an issue. The first Publix that was built here, which is now the old Publix on Venetian Causeway, was stunning. Of course, it was so large. We couldn't believe it at the time, but we all had small markets. Epicure was still here, they've just closed. We had Chef's Market, which I used all the time. We walked everyplace, with our children with strollers. It was a lovely town.

I wouldn't use the word lovely today. It was just very different. It's more complicated today than it was then. It's a good place to live, because of where I live. It was very special.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]