

Dalia Handelman [00:00:08] I'm just going to start with this is Dalia Handelman interviewing Norman and Phyllis Aerenon on Tuesday, August six, 2019, at one p.m. So please state your name, date of birth, and location of birth.

Phyllis Aerenon [00:00:23] Phyllis Aerenon. And the date I was born, it is May thirty-first nineteen thirty-eight. And actually in Philadelphia.

Norman Aerenon [00:00:34] Norman Aerenon. Everyone calls me Buddy. And I was born July 12th, 1930, in Wilmington, Delaware.

Dalia Handelman [00:00:45] So what do you remember about the place you were born?

Phyllis Aerenon [00:00:53] Do you wanna go first?

Norman Aerenon [00:00:57] I'll go first. is that okay? Well, I was born in Wilmington and I'm originally. Lived here for a couple of years. And I'm not sure of the address I resided at that time and move to Nanticoke, Pennsylvania for three years. It was a coal-mining region and my parents. My parents had a grocery store in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. And then be my. Mother's family was in Wilmington and they decided to move back to Wilmington and I moved back when I was about. I guess four years old. I lived at 611 West Fifth Street. From age 4 to about. To about the fifth grade. How would I be in the fifth grade? Ten, eleven years old. Early recollections. Walking to school all the time. At that time, the YMHA was the pre runner of the JCC. And was located at Sixth and French, and that was my second home. I... Played every on every team growing up from Midge's to varsitey in basketball in the summer. I never, ever went to camp. That was my camp. I used to have friends and we'd walk to the JCC. Swim, play basketball. Never had to worry about sun poisoning because indoor pool. Um, we met when I was about. Yes, 14. So we move to 37 street. Twenty seven was thirty seven street. Also Wilmington and I attended. P.S., Dupont Junior High and P.S. Dupont Senior High.

Dalia Handelman [00:03:21] When you talk about your friends growing up were they Jewish friends?

Norman Aerenon [00:03:25] Yes, ma'am. When I lived at six in fifth, sixth, fifth and sixth to Madison. They were mostly Jewish friends. No, no, I take that back, it was mixed, but when I went to the JCC or the YMHA. it was all Jewish friends. So I always had a mixture of friends because I was fairly athletic. I used to play on ball teams. And they were both non Jewish and Jewish.

Dalia Handelman [00:03:56] Did you come up at all like..?

Norman Aerenon [00:03:59] No. I never I never really thought about anti-Semitism as a kid. Just playing with kids, and having fun going to school. You know, when I went to high school. The I was in a Jewish fraternity, a high school fraternity sigma alpha row was called. That was a Jewish fraternity of course. And in high school, the Jew Jewish girls and boys did seem to congregate together, especially at

school. We had a certain spot when you walked out of the entrance to the school. You're on the left side and on all the girls and guys used to meet after school there. And I had a great youth.

Dalia Handelman [00:04:48] Where were your parents from?

[00:04:50]

Norman Aerenon [00:04:51] My mother was born in Romania live the way she came here, which is a couple of years old. My father was born in Russia and he came to United States when he was 13 years old. Neither spoke with an accent.

Dalia Handelman [00:05:15] Did you have any siblings?

Norman Aerenon [00:05:17] Yes, I have two sisters, two older sisters. Jean was the oldest. She... Both sisters have passed away. And Frances was the next. I was the baby of the family.

Dalia Handelman [00:05:33] Growing up, were you. Was your relationship with your siblings and parents good?.

Norman Aerenon [00:05:39] Um, my relationship with my parents were great a relationship because they were girls and I was kind of a macho kid, you never thought I was anyway. Yeah, they were we got along OK.

Dalia Handelman [00:05:53] Yeah.

Norman Aerenon [00:05:54] We didn't fight or anything like that, but I had my social life and they had their social life.

Dalia Handelman [00:06:02] So do you wanna...

Phyllis Aerenon [00:06:03] OK. Where where do we start, Just look at basically 20th and Washington Street about from when I was two years old. That was it, plane to Washington Street is two blocks from beth Shalom Synagogue. At that time it was 18th and Bluvard But again, like buddy I grew up with. OK. Early memory when I knew this was happening when I was literally I can picture the boy. And he called me a dirty Jew. And I can remember I'm six years old, maybe five. And I went home and said, what what's what's that mean? No clue. That's the only time. And he probably. That was. You know he might not of known it either. But anyway, uh, so I walked to number 30 school, eight blocks to school, eight blocks home for lunch, eight blocks to school, eight blocks home, which makes me a little bit athletic I think. we did not have a cafeteria, but we did have Girl Scouts. I was girl scout troop number 7 I believe. Sharly Schuman was the girl scout leader. And we would meet, which gave us it was Jewish. probably through the Y I can't remember exactly. When i think back i started Hebrew school and went all through beth shalom till i was 15 with a good group i still stay in touch with some of the people, it was number 30 warner junior high and then past upon which i was in a sorority, tkes , which was a Jewish sorority at the

time You know, I had mixed friends. Yeah, definitely mixed friends, but the core of us were Jewish and i was kind of privileged. I had great parents, there was one story when I knew you were coming i thought Oh, my gosh. Like the boy who is probably a wonderful citizen today who called me the dirty jew anyway but this one, how do i stay jewish , what is the jewishness and I think a lot of it is respect so i mentioned it, the last confirmation class at Beth Shalom at the 20th, 18th and Washington Street location. and i guess right after that they had high holiday service, there was a movie theater on the strand There was, of course, fundraising as part of the service. Harlod lesher i think was the person who's leading it and He is trying to raise money and auctioning off or bidding off or whatever they call it Different parts of the future synagogue, including a chair, a chair that would sit on a pulpit. And my mother used to tell this story. Yes, we're getting off the chairs, they're bidding off this,off that but we know that. And suddenly she hears a voice from the balcony and that's where the teenager is. That's. Sitting up there and she hears this voice bidding Pretty much money at that point for a chair. And, of course, she recognizes the voice. And she looks up and of course, it is me. And what I love about this as I reflect back. They respected my bid and they paid my bid I was so wrapped up in the needs. I never thought that maybe I didn't have that kind of money I'm 15 years old. that must have had an impact on me because They respected it, never questioned except appreciated the story. Yeah. Years. So. I didn't have any traumas, always felt comfortable and good

Dalia Handelman [00:10:30] Yeah. So where are your parents from?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:10:39] My parents were both born in America. they were both first generation. I have pictures but i don't really know where theyd be.

Dalia Handelman [00:10:50] Yeah. And did you have siblings?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:10:52] Ya I had one brother. Who just passed away last year he was older, we got along fine

Dalia Handelman [00:11:00] So you talked about your Jewish education. So you went to public school and you went to Hebrew school your entire life?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:11:26] Ya went to Hebrew school.

Dalia Handelman [00:11:26] You said you were confirmed as well?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:11:26] yes I was confirmed i had wonderful experience with the teachers and I had to go to Saturday service and there was woman there Mrs. Finger. And we used to if we got a little rowdy or didn't do anything Mrs.Finger would point her finger and we would be scared. So we would be respectful. Yeah. Well, we would try to get away and whisper and do all that stuff Yeah, we would listen to the rabbi's sermon, rabbi craft at that time and he would ve very very interesting We used to play a game to make sure we were listening the alphabet game, A B did you hear the D . It was nice very respectful.

Dalia Handelman [00:12:10] Did you did you growing up like. Feel very connected to. Is that where you're Jewish connection comes from?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:12:17] Yeah, we my parents didn't keep kosher, we kept holidays. They kept kosher maybe early on, but basically did not keep kosher but always respected the holidays and because we lived two blocks from the synagogue. It was like a neighborhood. on Saturday even people would wave on the porch, you know it was definitely an easy community

Dalia Handelman [00:12:49] At the time we were bar and bat mitzvahs happening?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:12:54] No. No Big parties, no big gala's. No. Do you remember that you were bar mitzvahed did you have a big party afterwards

Norman Aerenson [00:13:09] I was bar mitzvahed at Beth Shalom. Also we went to the same synagogue. Our backgrounds are very, very similar. Meaning that values. Delawareans, sorority fraternity, we went to the same high school. We went to the same Synagogue.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:13:27] But We didn't know each other.

Dalia Handelman [00:13:29] I was gonna say so you went to the same high school?

Norman Aerenson [00:13:29] But at different times.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:13:33] if you look at the dates one is 1931 and one is 1938. I had to mature.

Dalia Handelman [00:13:42] So did you. You said you went to the same synagogue, did you have the same Jewish education like Hebrew school?

Norman Aerenson [00:13:51] Ya ya i went to hebrew school And got bar mitzvahed after i got bar mitzvahed I didn't attend any i would go on high holidays We are the family is very culturally Jew, religious. We are moderate.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:14:11] Well, religious, but we've seen one thing that I think we're both proud of for about 35 years, was it 35 years, we used to have kind of an open house on the Thursday of Rosh Hashana it started well it doesn't matter how it started but we did it. Thirty-five years to this house just wasn't capable of. We had probably a hundred people. Family, close friends. It wasn't just open to the world, right? But it grew and grew. and finally, it outgrew the house at certain point friends were drifting away different reasons. anyway You know, that made us feel so proud. and our grandchildren they always come and we have it kosher style.

Dalia Handelman [00:15:08] So growing up, how what denomination do you think?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:15:13] Conservative.

Dalia Handelman [00:15:13] Oh, definitely. Conservative. All right. Your family growing up was very conservative?

Norman Aerenson [00:15:23] Conservative.

Dalia Handelman [00:15:30] And you guys stayed conservative as Adults?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:15:30] Yeah.

Dalia Handelman [00:15:32] So. During the war, did you guys feel any? Big differences in just general lifestyle or less specifically. Were there any like I mean, I know you said there wasn't you really didn't experience anti-Semitism as a child, but like anything, once the war broke out?

Norman Aerenson [00:15:50] You know, it really you know, I remember gas rationing, but I mean, it really didn't affect me very much.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:16:06] I do remember We used to take Dimes to Hebrew school to buy a tree for Israel

Norman Aerenson [00:16:13] It is about war bonds with the war bonds there is there is war bonds sales.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:16:18] But that was school. There was something when I grew up here to take. You be saving money to buy ivory in Israel. . It wasn't the Hidatsa bluebox. This was this was a seprate little thing somebody must have encouraged. Yeah. If You had a dime. I'll have to ask my friend about that

Dalia Handelman [00:16:43] So speaking of Israel, when Israel was established and what was it like a big Time for you, what was it like, something that was, you know, you were thinking about or not really?

Norman Aerenson [00:16:56] No. That was with 48. Yes, 1948. ya I was 18, just graduated high school I really didn't know a lot about. Yeah. We weren't zionists or anything like that So I didn't really pay much attention to it.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:17:16] And the same thing for me In 1948 i was 10 years old i was spoiled.

Dalia Handelman [00:17:24] So you mentioned you guys kept high holidays did you do Shabbat? Were there any special traditions you remember from holidays growing up?

Norman Aerenson [00:17:38] Oh, no, no, no, we we didn't we didn't do Shabbat.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:17:43] my grandmother did. My little grandmother who would live at each she would live with different parts of the family. I do recall she would cover fer face and say a prayer and we had special candlesticks that were brass that our daughter has now [00:18:11]

Dalia Handelman [00:18:25] So you graduated high school in like nineteen forty nine after high school, where were you?

Norman Aerenson [00:18:32] I went to Dickinson College for four years.

Dalia Handelman [00:18:38] When you were at Dickinson, was there. Did you like. Feel had Jewish identity. Was it kind of on the back burner because you were in college and your parents weren't, you know, making you go to high holiday services?

Norman Aerenson[00:18:50] Well I was in a Jewish fraternity [00:18:58] And I still I still only went to synagogue on high holidays and I would still observe Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah. But never. It was not really a oh and passover. That's one of the things, you know, I didn't eat bread for a week Yeah, I've done that all my life. Yeah. Yeah. I'm not really Sure Why it was one of those things like this is my sacrifice .

Dalia Handelman [00:19:33] So in college at dickinson was would you say like the fraternity. Was that like your main connection to anything Jewish

Norman Aerenson [00:19:46] probably. cause all the guys were jewish.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:19:46] Did you date any Jewish girls or genital girls did it make a difference

Norman Aerenson [00:19:56] I leaned to Jewish girls but every once in a while I'd date a non-jewish girl

Dalia Handelman [00:20:05] And what would your parents say about that?

Norman Aerenson [00:20:18] They didn't know who i was dating i didn't come home and talk about it.

Dalia Handelman [00:20:18] So what did you do after you graduated high school?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:20:21] You probably know about it went to American University in Washington My parents said I could go to any college of my choice within two hours. I had a super great life at American. You know, but I did not graduate. I had 3 years and then mister came along and decided that the MRS was important so we decided to get married

Dalia Handelman [00:20:49] So how do you meet if you are at different schools?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:20:52] Well, weren't in school at the same time.

Dalia Handelman [00:20:54] Oh right. I keep forgetting that there's actually a pretty big age differenece .

Phyllis Aerenson [00:20:58] Exactly. Exactly. how did we meet, a cousin of mine worked with buddy in the law office and buddy asked pretty nice cousin and buddy outa call so he called and i was Not

interested at all in getting serious, except one day. And I called my girlfriend the next day and I said I met the person I'm going to marry And it took me a few more...

Norman Aerenon [00:21:28] What Chance did I have.

Phyllis Aerenon [00:21:32] and its been a super time. Completely. So I'll tell you how he proposed this is the Jewish side of us. Dating a few months, actually. And we wanted to take me to Florida for pass over to meet his parents, and of course i was still in still in college. I had to ask my mother or father. And they said, you don't go to meet somebody's parents unless theres something more definite. Does that make sense?

Dalia Handelman [00:22:03] Yeah.

Phyllis Aerenon [00:22:04] And so, like, we went out that night and I said my parents said i can't go unless something is more definite So we had a choice. Go on, buddy. The story's yours.

Norman Aerenon [00:22:15] Would a fraternity pin do? I'm not sure if that still exists. The guys used to pin the girls. So i asked that and nope it wasn't

Phyllis Aerenon [00:22:32] That was on a Friday night and Monday night we were on our way to Florida. After I told him that I couldn't get one. Yeah. Yeah. It's just logical thinking. Right. And so he proposed. That was a Friday night. and made all the arrangments his parents lived in Miami and had Passover and never let him go since

Dalia Handelman [00:22:57] Did you have a ring and everything

Phyllis Aerenon [00:23:10] Tell her the story.

Norman Aerenon [00:23:10] I had worked in high school for a jeweler And he just happened to have a about it. Yeah. Yeah. I'll see. What I can say is that. I was a delivery boy, did odds and ends things for me. [00:23:22] And, you know, I called him up and said, I'm getting engaged. You got a room. [00:23:27] And I we hear the kind of ring. This doesn't faze adamantly when I was just inside. And now we're sitting on the plane.

Phyllis Aerenon[00:23:35] got egaged Friday, Saturday, Sunday, not Monday. Wrapping up, getting ready.. And he's hanging his jacket up and gets something out of the jacket. It's like a jewelry box. And I said. [00:23:53] its coming right back Oh, no. Not a cigar band. [00:23:56] He opens it up. And it was a ring

Dalia Handelman So you got the ring on the plane?

Phyllis Aerenon Yeah. [00:24:03] And it didn't size it correctly but I would not dare get it sized with a strange jeweler down in Florida. [00:24:12] we put a little tape around it

Dalia Handelman[00:24:18] So American going back a little bit. When you went to American and your parents would go to any college as long as it's two hours away.

Phyllis Aerenson[00:24:28] Yes, it was New York. Yeah. Right. But American, you know. Campus life. Yeah it was fabulous .

Dalia Handelman[00:24:33] Was education ever like a question in your life was always a given that you were going to be an educated.

Phyllis Aerenson[00:24:43] No, I had a business side of me with my parents. My father was in business. But, you know, and in those days. I'm going to be an elementary education student. I was. First two years of liberal arts. I didn't finish my senior year. [00:25:06] We were going to be married. He was already an attorney Yeah. I've never regretted it. Like was going to go on

Dalia Handelman[00:25:16] So at school. You said you were a jewish sorority.

Phyllis Aerenson It was a start up sorority, really wasn't an international thing, but was all Jewish. Jewish girls . OK.

Dalia Handelman[00:25:25] So was that kind of like the question before what was your Jewish identity like in college?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:25:35] I don't think I at that point ever dated anybody who was not jewish and I can't say I was the most popular girl. Always was in a good crowd.

Dalia Handelman[00:25:48] What did your parents say to you ever, like, gotta date jews you can't marry a non jew you know?

Phyllis Aerenson[00:25:56] No, I think they always just trusted that i would never strict . Yeah

Dalia Handelman[00:26:10] Was it a known thing that, you know, you had to date Jews or was it just like an unspoken?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:26:23] I mean, one time in high school, I did go out with a football player his name was bob Johnson went to the movies and was scared to death that somebody would tell my parents, oh, my God. I thought that was just it was just one of those. Oh, my God. Or somebody would see me. [00:26:41] it wasn't even my parents it was just something

Dalia Handelman[00:26:52] So after college, what was your. What can you describe your first experience? My first work experience. Well, I guess you weren't. You weren't.

Norman Aerenson [00:27:00] I went to law school. after college. [00:27:06] Through Dickinson says. Right. And i had a cousin who was a lawyer.

Phone call interruption

Norman Aerenson [00:27:39] I was. A lawyer. [00:27:45] They started out with my cousin and a little over a year. I went in partnership with the Sid Beilock, a high school from. We ramined partners for Twenty five year. [00:28:04] Initially, I was. Trial lawyer, then [00:28:10] Criminal cases, action case. I was Scrap book i was really good [00:28:17] And then as my career progressed, I became attorney for the county. I rewrote the county building code zoning. And as a result of that, I met a lot of builders. And they started my practice changed at that time because they started coming to me because I knew all about. That's. These low. And then I and I like that little better trial work, which is always very stressful. You know, I talk to the jury, right? [00:28:55] Yeah. It was it was love that never felt more like a lawyer than you before a jury. [00:29:00] Right. And especially when you win its all about winning [00:29:05] So I changed And I became a real estate business practice. And then I became a developer. Then became [00:29:19] into Developing land and shopping centers. Entrepreneurs . [00:29:28] and i Decided that most people are [00:29:36] too busy making a living to make any money. . [00:29:43] People ask me, what's the secret, your success? I say Wednesdays. [00:29:49] And why, Wednesdays ? Because I work for my clients at a law office Monday and Tuesday and thursday and friday Wednesday, I had another. Office i had a Deal. day and that was buddy's day. and anybody want to make a deal when they have any type of venture to go into. They knew they called me on Wednesday. And we would meet on Wednesday. And i kept It going for awhile was very gratifying.

Dalia Handelman[00:30:21] So it was the secret to your success because Wednesday's like you did creative stuff?

Norman Aerenson[00:30:27] it was just my day buddy's day.

Dalia Handelman [00:30:32] OK. Got it. So wait. [00:30:36] So when you were out of law school and you were the attorney, the trial stuff and then moving forward, were you doing that in Delaware?

Norman Aerenson [00:30:45] Oh, yeah. It was all in delaware.[00:30:49] Yeah. Right. I never left delaware. Born and raised. Love it.

Dalia Handelman [00:30:58] So after you guys got married. What was the next thing you did?

Phyllis Aerenson Well, then I call it the Pie Piper stage. [00:31:05] [00:31:06] our son bob was born in 1962 and Jaya was 66 So they were like Pied Piper stages. Loved Every second of it. Yeah. The kids went to nursery, kindergarten at JCC and theyve continued living and doing what theyre doing so the poe piper stage that was the typical thing you did.betty crocker stage. But then I did go into when bob was being Bar mitzvahed and i knew about invitations and things like that i was with a friend who owned a part time outlet store called sincerely yours the stationery boutique [00:32:06] And we so we were inside of another store in a shopping center. [00:32:11] that we happened

to own And they didn't know that, anyway, the customers didn't know, anyway [00:32:17] everything was personalized at the store. We carried lucide items anything we could have that would't go stock stale so that was kind of stepping from the pie piper stage, which i still loved but at least it got me into the world of the real people, and that was the stepping stone and while i was still doing that, gosh your making me thinking of things [00:32:46] I was doing that for four years. Yeah. And. Standing still is going backwards. That was a part time store Monday, Wednesday. Other days by appointment. We had fabulous customer We really did get a cigar box for our money. It was before fax machines and before things like that in the 70s. So at one point standing still is either we go into a full business And then somebody called would I do something or turned we, would we chair the kutz home gala and it just dawned on me its time to get back to the community. [00:34:00] . and buddy was always supportive to all of this and so it was time to give back to the community. So i gave time and contricubtions, so that was the stepping stone, it was a womnes lib from the 70s

Dalia Handelman[00:34:07] So did your kids you talked about your son having a bar mitzvah The. Do they go to Hebrew school?

Phyllis AerensonYes.

Dalia Handelman You said they went to.

Phyllis Aerenson Yup they went to beth Shalom all the hebvwrew school took place and you asked about parties, bar mitzvahs [00:34:18] [00:34:25] Yes, after eight, after bloviates was not the kind of elbrates that are doing now. But definitely had celebrations. Yeah. it was part of the community, bringing everyone together [00:34:38]

Dalia Handelman [00:34:42] So as adults in your adult life, as your children were growing up, you were, I'm assuming, you were very connected to Beth Shalom because your kids were there. Were there any other, like Jewish institutions that you were really connected with?

Phyllis Aerenson[00:34:56] JCC and the Kutz home My grandmother. Had lived at the Kutz home and we had family members at a certain point, something that was always part of our family

Dalia Handelman[00:35:11] Yes. Was the Jewish community like would you describe it as close, not close?

Phyllis AerensonIts hard to say

Norman Aerenson[00:35:19] I have to say, I think the Jewish community has always been close, you know,

Phyllis AerensonNo I think it spreads because of suburbs. [00:35:27] It wasn't like I grew up in, but he grew up with sidewalks and people waving on the way to synagogue but i think it became something more general and . [00:35:35] I think. Encouraged. [00:35:41] Yeah

Dalia Handelman [00:35:47] What would you say are the main shifts were in terms of your Jewish life, whether that's with the community or not personal? from how you grew up, your Jewish identity as adults?

Phyllis Aerenson[00:36:21] I think, i still strive, buddy can speak , to be acknowledged as Jewish because i use the statement if i can't respect myself who will respect me as a jewish person i kinda feel like its a respobsiltiy a nice responsibility We're a culture, right. I think its a nice tone to feel proud of our culture

Norman Aerenson[00:36:40] I think I'll maybe talk about pollyanna. This is really Phyllis's idea. She said that, you know, we're doing well and we are doing well financially. [00:36:51] And we should do something to establish something long term that we will continue and will continue even after we're gone. A charitable foundation. And we created a foundation we call it pollyanna . Well, she named Polly partly because her mother used to say-

Phyllis Aerenson You know pollyanna books , the glad girl

Dalia Handelman I don't

Norman Aerenson yeah, this is about someone who always looks at the sunshine when it's raining.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:37:21] she always finds something positive out of something. It's a whole series of books. That was when i was a little girl my age group

Norman Aerenson [00:37:30] So her mother used to say you're such a Pollyanna. In friendly nice terms anyway. [00:37:36] So we created a charitable foundation. [00:37:42] And still, in existence how many years it had been?

Phyllis Aerenson1994. No it was before 94, she died in 94, i'll have to think back

Norman Aerenson[00:37:52] But anyway and it's a family Foundation. [00:37:59] We don't accept solicitations and we don't accept donations from outside it's strictly our family. And as children get to be 13 years old, they become a member of the foundation. And each. And that's really nice because once a year we meet to distribute the funds. [00:38:24] And it's been growing and growing and growing. [00:38:26] It's pretty substantial now. And it gives each one of our children an idea or the wonderfulness of family giving. We were.

[00:38:42] They've called us a couple times for certain awards. the Federation. And we've always turned them down just because of the fact that we feel like we're really not workers in the organizations, but we're contributors and that's you know, we thought maybe. Not that we didn't deserve it but

Phyllis Aerenson [00:39:00] but we did get it i can show it to you

Norman Aerenson[00:39:05] So we got the award from JCC i think Irving Schapiro award. [00:39:12] but the only way we'll accept it, if it was for the family, for the Aaronson family, not just Norman and Phyllis. Yeah. And that was it was really a nice thing. And had the family there. And we have that family unity. And this is one of the things that solidifies our family because everybody recognizes what we do and how we do it and why we do it.

Phyllis Aerenson Explain what the mission is, this is a really major

Norman Aerenson [00:39:39] Well, the mission, the written mission is that. [00:39:49] It is to support. Charitable organizations, mainly in Delaware. With special emphasis on Jewish organizations. So Figure at least 50. And we do give to other than Jewish causes, but mainly we support Jewish causes in Delaware. And we. have our names on plaques all over the place [00:40:17]

Phyllis Aerenson[00:40:25] But the nice part the main fun part We have a meeting once a year and each of our families. Well, ndys family, Bob's family, our daughter who lives in oregon , we meet And. They have divided the money and they have time to discuss it within their own family. [00:40:41] So that. Everybody gets like two. Two families want to give to Jewish family service. That's just combined. It's not like one family will say, oh, will you do that? And we'll do that. Right. Everybody just picks them up. And then it brings a good conversation. And the important.

Norman Aerenson And, you know,

Phyllis Aerenson And we do it basically well, because of colleges and vacations and such. It was always supposed to be a one of the nights of hanukkah But then the kids going off to school, and such and such I think we all congregate the breakfast before Thanksgiving?

Dalia Handelman Oh wow okay

Phyllis AerensonOh, yes, I it because everybody's doing it here

Norman Aerenson [00:41:27] That's the whole point that we'd like to consider ourselves as a quiet family. We don't we don't advertise pollyanna [00:41:33] And we we give a donation. We say, please do not put this in your budget because of the fact that each year we give different organizations.

Phyllis Aerenson So it's kinda cool

Norman Aerenson And it says and it makes everybody feel good.

Dalia Handelman Yeah. definitely

Norman Aerenson Especially the younger generation they're getting. They they get it. Yeah. You know what we're doing and why we're doing it. And yeah. And it's just a happy time when we meet.

Dalia Handelman [00:42:06] Yeah. [00:42:07] it definitely teaches, you know, the younger generation

Norman Aerenon Tzdakah

Dalia Handelman So what do you guys say? You you really value and prioritize giving back to the community?

Norman Aerenon [00:42:17] oh Absolutely. We try to put things in our lives-

Phyllis Aerenon We repay the good things in our lives but repaying others and respecting other

Dalia Handelman [00:42:28] That's incredible. So how would you guys this kind of moving, [00:42:35] Describe your use of your connection to Israel as in your youth. Did it change at all growing up?[00:42:43] How can you describe that?

Phyllis Aerenon Well, I think one good example. When our daughter was 16 she went to Israel and lived on a kibbutz. [00:42:52] We do. We've done a lot of traveling and all that. But never thought about going to Israel. She went to Israel for the kibbutz, came back. And just raved and raved and raved so the following. Passover. I guess Bob and Andy were in college And the following and that Passover, we decide, cause I guess she had spring break. We went to Israel and we met a family. We had Sader in Israel. [00:43:30] This is what we always hear. Next year in Israel. Oh, my gosh. Yeah. And. That was like an awakening. Yeah. [00:43:43] and that was the following, Hanukkah. We always went to Christmas parties and stuff but that Hanukkah we gave a Hanukkah party, remember that? it[00:43:57] And it was just kind of like instead of having a Christmas party. And it was because we had been to Israel. We appreciated, yeah, the positive part of it. Yeah, we didn't always hear the positive Yeah. and then we went back a few years later

Dalia Handelman Was that your first time in Israel? Was that it was over Passover and then you went back another time?

Norman Aerenon [00:44:28] Yes.

Dalia Handelman Um, so how is this more modern day, um, how do you feel about the current political climate and its potential effects on Jews? [00:44:44] Or not. Or you could think there's no effect. Whatever.

Phyllis Aerenon [00:44:49] Go on buddy

Norman Aerenon[00:44:53] I think that, you know, we're very supportive, Israel, and I think. They have to do everything they can to survive. Every day is a survival in Israel. And I would you know, and whichever path they take, I'm on support because I know what stress they're under. Yeah. And they're a great country.

[00:45:14] And we we had an experience which was really interesting. We went to through the federation. We went up to the United Nations and We sort of interviewed or they talked us ambassadors to the United Nations from. It was Germany, Russia, Ethiopia and another country [00:45:41] And we sitting at a huge, great, huge table. [00:45:46] Everybody, had a microphone in front of them. I mean, it's like, yeah, it was the, UN Yeah. [00:45:50] It was a section of the UN. Yeah. And each one. [00:45:55] Said that they trade with Israel. Love Israel. But they don't advertise it. [00:46:04] But they they they all had very, very positive things to say from Israel. Interesting that [00:46:13] The president of the United, the United Nations or secretary general thats what they call him, hes from [00:46:20] Portugal. And he explained. He said that. People ask me, this is the representative talking. [00:46:30] People ask me why how Portugal at one time was one of the leading nations of the world and explores how they discovered certain countries in the Indies, and America. and it just went downhill. He said what happened was when Queen Isabella of Spain.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:46:54] She was from Spain. OK. Go on go on

Norman Aerenson and she married some of king from Portugal or something. [00:47:05] And they expelled the Jews from Portugal. And he said from my date on Portugal went downhill because the Jews were really the backbone of the country at that time. And they didn't realize it. [00:47:20] And then another interesting thing, the Russian guy was very cool and he like he and he was [00:47:28] very complimentary of Israel.

[00:47:33] And he was one really said, we don't advertise our dealings with Israel, but he also someone asked them, how can you support Assad in Syria where he's killed people and so forth? And his answer was really, I thought, excellent. He sat back and he said the United States of all countries. Should realize that when you overturn the regime. The result is usually worse than the regime. And that's exactly what happened to Libya, Egypt, you know afghainstion, Iraq, [00:48:09] Yeah, yeah. Unrest in all those countries.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:48:23] What I don't understand is anti semitism in college campuses now yeah, that would be for you, your age group , why, i don't understand it, it concerns me, where does that come from

Dalia Handelman Ya I have no idea [00:48:35] in terms of I was kind of the international um and Israel political climate in terms of like, well, you kind of like the American political climate nowadays.

[00:48:50] Do you think it has like the president and stuff like have any effect on. Anti-Semitism or Judaisum them or I guess you said like with the American political climate [00:49:02] The main thing that you think would be the BDS

Phyllis Aerenson [00:49:10] I think it fuels it. It fuels it.

Norman Aerenson I don't think. Well, they say he's fueling hatred and bigotry. [00:49:16] But. [00:49:17] He's very, very supportive of israel You know, that's one thing, that's a plus. [00:49:23] You know, maybe that's why, I'm not a fan of Trump. Nobody's really a fan of Trump's, but they don't want to. Do I say they? [00:49:32] CNN. and MSNBC [00:49:36] They don't want to recognize the good things he's done them, done a lot of bad things, but he has done some good things. Yeah. And no, but, you know,

we're so divided today that it doesn't matter. whether someone does good or bad. Yeah, it's just going to take one side. Yeah, I'm kind of I'm a centralist. Moderate Yeah. I don't believe in extreme in either side.. And today we're getting nothing but extremes on both sides of the fence.

Dalia Handelman[00:50:09] How would you like did you guys support Trump's move, like moving the capital?

Norman Aerenon[00:50:18] I did

Phyllis Aerenon I didn't know enough it , I have one friend who lives in Israel. The only thing I thought at the time was why irritate why did he have to do it you know we have the arab, Palestinian, there's so much there. Why did he have to do it.

Norman Aerenon[00:50:42] I was really noncommittal, I didn't understand it. But we went to a meeting. And the ambassador from Israel to the United States spoke and [00:50:53] He convinced me that it was right. What he said was there were basically three events Israel that were that were really important. You know one was recognizing as a state and the other was the first The Yom Kippur War. He said in the third one was moving the capital to Jerusalem, he said, because that gave respect and recognition. That the United States would have their embassy in Jerusalem, and he said that is a great event. He said that told the world Israel exists and isreal and that's why. So i got to go along with that.

Phyllis Aerenon [00:51:44] See We don't always agree on bsoulty Everything. But we don't talk about it because you can't do anything about it

Dalia Handelman That's okay!

Norman Aerenon [00:51:49] But that was the way he explained it very well.

Phyllis Aerenon [00:51:54] I didn't buy into that i was emotional about how others would feel who were living in israel [00:51:59] So there's no right or wrong. It's done.

Dalia Handelman [00:52:07] Definitely, so You were saying, though, in terms of the political climate in America, your main concern would be on college campuses like the Rising antisemitism-

Phyllis Aerenon Well I have a lot of concerns, but as far as the Jewish part i don't undersntad it, white supremacy is part of the movement part of the system especially with these recent killings, i just don't understand it, i truly don't get it [00:52:45] I won't go into it. Nothing firm, but why is it your at the university of delaware im sure you have a strong background, i hope you never see it, people will throw a penny theres so much minor stuff

Dalia Handelman [00:53:08] Yes. Do you think it's anti-Semitism? Has been on the rise since when you guys were kids or I mean, I know when we were kids, like there was obviously the Holocaust happened and stuff like that. Do you think after that, like anti semitism-

Phyllis Aerenson [00:53:28] in the set that we travel in we haven't seen it, so I really could not but just statistically

Norman Aerenson [00:53:31] but it just appears as if it's on the rise.

Phyllis Aerenson Were getting more reports

Norman Aerenson I mean especially in Europe. [00:53:37] France. France is rampant with anti-Semitism. You know, people have moved from France to Israel because of it. .

Phyllis Aerenson But in our lifestyle

Norman Aerenson Ya we don't encounter it

Phyllis Aerenson [00:53:49] Were like a frog three up, one down. [00:53:55] But on a personal level. Brandywine country club was part of America part of Wilmington [00:54:03] And it was established in 1948. Because the people were doing well and there was society of wanting to do country club things and we couldn't belong to Greenville or Wilmington because we were Jewish [00:54:21]. This is important of history I relate with so therefore a group of people, made Brandywine country club a Jewish Country Club. They had Federation events. It was a gorgeous golf course. North Wilmington But anyway, so that was 1948 till it was about 4 years ago so quite awhile, but thankfully non-Jewish members became part of it so it wasn't exclusive, Brandywine country club closed for financial reasons and at this point Wilmington country club was absolutely no Jewish people for a long time and now there are quite a few and no one looks around and says are you Jewish this or that [00:55:18] So that's what I'm saying our age level said it's better but college campus that's the divide did I explain it well?

Norman Aerenson Definitely

Dalia Handelman [00:55:33] this is kind of on top of we've been talking, but more generally speaking. What do you think the biggest threat is today for?

Norman Aerenson [00:55:57] Well, I think the movement, the movements that ban. Israel banned products from I forget, using three letters where they advocate? [00:56:14] Boycotting

Dalia Handelman BDS

Norman Aerenson [00:56:17] Yeah, right.

Dalia Handelman That's what's on college campuses the BDS stuff

Norman Aerenson [00:56:21] Oh, yeah, that that to me is the biggest threat because it's youth. It's young kids growing up. [00:56:29] And what are their children going to say if they're spreading that around now

Norman Aerenson [00:56:34] And I think that we. And how to combat it. I'm really not sure I don't have a solution except. You know, we live, I think, such a good life. Morally. And uh [00:56:51] Every other way. [00:56:55] I think they were beyond criticism. If I were Jewish, people don't like us [00:57:00] That's too bad.. That's that's their loss. [00:57:03] Yeah. And I think that the I mean, as I say. We're we're kind of insulated. We don't really in this day. [00:57:12] If you asked me if I encounter any and I Semitism in the last five years, I have to say I have to say no.

Phyllis Aerenson In fact its gone the other way, like my example , it went the other way

[00:57:25] you want a good lawyer, hire a Jewish lawyer. [00:57:31] I hear that.

Dalia Handelman [00:57:35] Would you say the same thing or something different?

Phyllis Aerenson Same thing

Dalia Handelman And then the last question actually is based off of all of your life experiences um what advice would you give to jews of modern day.

Phyllis Aerenson [00:57:53] be strong. Be strong together. We are stronger together. And we fully respect each other.

Norman Aerenson[00:58:10] be proud of who you are. Be honest, be moral. Live in upright life. [00:58:23] And people will respect you

Dalia Handelman [00:58:28] In terms of being stronger together. Does that like do you did for your children? Did you have, did they marry jews?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:58:40] our children? Jaya is not married. But She always dated jewish guys. Andy is married to a very jewish, Very supportive. Bobs first wife was jewish, very supportive, theyre divorced and the second wife, Cissy, what a name, she has a great boutique store, She grew up jewish her father wasnt but her mother was, shes a line of judea, went to israel [00:59:08] OK. Yeah, I have very, very good grandchildren at this point married

Dalia Handelman [00:59:20] And is that something that, Because when you said be be strong together. A lot of the other interviews like something that they say, like these two last questions, have they been up intermarriage, and stuff like that? Do you think that that's like. Do you think it's necessary for jews to be together? Or like, you know, good care?

Phyllis Aerenson [00:59:40] This is my personal opinion. First we look at good character And then part of that good character. If it's an intermarriage has to be respect, for who We are and of course who the other person is. I mean, wed prefer making it it stronger together, but the character would be the important part

Norman Aerenson Yeah I agree

Dalia Handelman Perfect. Well, thank you so much.