

## **Oral History Usage Guidelines**

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account. It reflects personal opinion offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

### **Acknowledgement**

Development of this oral history was supported through the Mary E. Switzer Research Fellowship program, under a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant number HF133F070013. Contents do not represent the policy of the Department of Education or endorsement by the Federal Government.

### **Permission to Quote Requests**

All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved by the interviewer and interviewee. Quotation from this oral history interview transcript is allowed without explicit permission if it falls within standards established for fair use of copyright materials. Permission to quote must be applied for in writing.

Requests for permission to publish should be addressed in writing to:

Joe Caldwell  
Adjunct Research Assistant Professor  
Department of Disability and Human Development (MC 626)  
University of Illinois at Chicago  
[Jcaldw3@uic.edu](mailto:Jcaldw3@uic.edu)  
[selfadvocacyhistory@gmail.com](mailto:selfadvocacyhistory@gmail.com)

List material to be published and how the material is to be used, including:

- a. Type of publication
- b. Proposed title
- c. Publisher's name
- d. Expected date of publication
- e. Nature of publication, e.g., scholarly, commercial

**Liz Weintraub**

**1/11/2008**

**10:00 AM – 4:00PM**

**Rockville, MD**

Caldwell: The first set of questions are really going back to your childhood and thinking about your childhood. The first thing is can you say how old you are or when you were born?

Weintraub: I am 41. I just turned 41 in November.

Caldwell: And where were you born?

Weintraub: Long Branch, New Jersey. We lived there until I was about four and a half and then we moved to northern Virginia. I lived there and my parents still live there. They live in the same house. The house has changed obviously. They are getting older. They have adapted some things. The rooms are a little bit different, but everything is basically the same. So, it is really cool.

Caldwell: So, you grew up in Virginia?

Weintraub: Yes.

Caldwell: For most your life?

Weintraub: Yes. Since I was about... Well, I celebrated my fifth birthday in Arlington, Virginia. I went to private schools.

Caldwell: You always went to private schools.

Weintraub: No, until I was about in second to third grade. My parents always wanted me to be in public schools. They never liked private schools for me because my sisters didn't go to private school. There was a public school in Arlington, called Page Elementary that had a class for kids with language issues. So I was in that school. From third to eleventh grade I want to regular Arlington public school. My elementary years were wonderful. I had the best time in my life there. Maybe I shouldn't say the best time, but I really had a great time playing and being invited over to spend the night with people and just things that kids would do. Then in middle school it got a little bit harder socially, but it wasn't something unbearable. I figured kids in middle school were mean anyway. It is part of the nature of being a kid. It is outrageously hard whether you are a genius or whether you are a person with a disability. Then in high school it got really hard. People kept on picking on me. People kept on saying horrible word like the "R" word, like the "H" word –handicapped. Just really mean things like, "You are stupid!" I remember one time when I was at the bus stop waiting for the bus to go to school –I don't remember if it was 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade –somebody threw a firecracker near my eye. That was horrible!

But my parents kept on wanting me to go to public schools. My father grew going to public schools so it was really important for him. When I

was in tenth grade, nobody would talk to me. At lunch, I sat by myself. The second semester in tenth grade I did find a boy with a disability and we talked about the Redskins the entire semester. But can you imagine? I would never be invited to parties. I know school is for education and not for social, but I saw my sisters going to parties. They would invite people. They would have parties at the house. So I thought great, I would have that. But that didn't happen for me.

I remember asking my parents if I could go to a boarding school and they said, "No, no, no." My sister even helped me talk to parents about the fact that I was so miserable. My father even admitted that it was too hard for him to let me go and not see me for nine months out of the year or whatever. When it got really unbearable in eleventh grade they took me to a specialist, a lady who would help me find a boarding school. There were two boarding schools that I had the chance to go to. One I did not like. I hated that school. It is kind of ironic because that is the school that my husband went to for a couple years. I went to the other school because I really liked that school. That was in Cape Cod, in Riverview. I had the best time of my life there.

Caldwell: Was that an all girls' school?

Weintraub: No. It was mixed.

Caldwell: Was it just for people with disabilities?

Weintraub: Yes. It was a segregated school, and I admit that it was a segregated school. I am pro-inclusion. I talk about inclusion all the time and I think that everyone should be included, but at that time in my life I realize it was the best thing for me.

Caldwell: And that was when you were in eleventh grade?

Weintraub: I went to Riverview in twelfth and then I went back for another year for post-grad. So I went from 1985 to 1987.

Caldwell: Can you talk more about what it was like going to that school, because you seemed to really like it there?

Weintraub: I really liked it. It was a wonderful school. I lived in the dorm. The first year wasn't the greatest year because I got sick during Halloween and I didn't really get better until after the holidays. I had some neurological problems. Well, it wasn't really more psychological. I remember one time, because of my disability, vacuuming is really hard. Ask my husband: he does the vacuuming so that there won't be any accidents. Also, he enjoys doing that. One time when my roommate was going to driver's ed, I said I would vacuum. When she got back she could not find her earring. They blamed it on me—that I vacuumed it up. I don't really remember, maybe I

did and maybe I didn't, but I got in big trouble. I had to do her chores as well as my chores for the rest of the year. And nobody would talk to me for the rest of the year. That really hurt me, big time. This happened when I got back from my illness, so it was for the second semester. Nobody talked to me. They finally talked to me a week before the graduation. So I was pretty upset, pretty scared, and pretty alone. But the second year I had a really good year. Even though I had that experience, I can say that it was better than staying home and having people saying horrible words to me. Did that answer your question?

Caldwell: Yeah.

Weintraub: I wish I went to the reunion last year. They had their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the school. They do an all school reunion, but we happened to be going to Ireland at the time and I really wanted to go to Ireland.

Caldwell: So, how big was it? How many people were in your class?

Weintraub: I think it was about 26 the first year and probably 35-40 the next year.

Caldwell: It sounds like you made a lot of friends, at least the second year. They were all kids with disabilities? Could you talk a little more about that?

Weintraub: Yes. One of my friends was a girl's name Ann Hale. We would go to Hyannis every Saturday, which was like an outdoor place –like Rockville I guess –where you could go to stores during the year to shop for your toiletries or have lunch. We were just really good friends. We would hang out and we would talk in our rooms. Sometimes we would watch TV. Sometimes the dorm parent would tease us. The one year the dorm parent would call me Oscar Myer because my name was Obermeyer. I had a good year.

Caldwell: It sounds almost like going to college –you going away, living in a dorm and making friends?

Weintraub: Yeah. On Saturday was Hyannis and then on Saturday night the seniors all took turns and did what was called senior privileges. They would go to the mall or whatever out on the town. Then on Sunday there were trips. We were never allowed to be in the dorms by ourselves, which is probably institutionalized thinking.

Caldwell: You were still young.

Weintraub: Yeah. And if you think about it, it was an institution. But, like I said, at that time I needed that. I had the best time of my life.

Caldwell: When you were back in the schools in Virginia were you in a separate classroom or were you more integrated?

Weintraub: I remember one time in tenth grade –and this was probably the time my parents said we need to do something about this –I could do some of the work but not all the work. I was in a class that was age appropriate, but there were kids that didn't care to be there: kids that cut up; kids that swore; kids that said bad words and took time away from my learning with the teachers because they needed to adjust. That got me real frustrated. One time I remember I was in ninth grade. It was hard for me to write and keep up in taking notes. My parents wanted me to use a typewriter. Can you imagine? We are just talking typewriters in the 1980s.

Caldwell: Right, no laptops.

Weintraub: The teacher refused for me to use a typewriter because they made too much noise. They didn't make noise. I think they just didn't want me to use a typewriter.

Caldwell: So you were mostly in regular classes?

Weintraub: Yes.

Caldwell: Do you think you got a good education?

Weintraub: Yes. If you leave social out of it, I think I probably got a better education in Arlington schools than in boarding schools.

Caldwell: What was it like in boarding schools, the actual academic education?

Weintraub: It was good. I got A's and B's, a few C's. It was kind of easy.

Caldwell: Let's go back and talk a little bit about your family. You mentioned you have brothers and sisters. What is your family like?

Weintraub: I have three sisters. I am the only person with a disability in the family. We have a very close family. I am always included. The only family trip that I didn't get to go on was when I was three or four they went to Venezuela. I stayed home with the housekeeper and my grandparents, so in some ways I had a better time probably hanging out with my grandparents. My parents always included me in things, except for the Thanksgiving story; and I will share that in a few minutes. I always had chores to do. My chore was to set the table and clean the table. To this day, I probably enjoy that the most. The reason why they did that was probably that my parents wanted me to know that I was part of the family. Even though I am a person with a disability, I could not get away with things.

My favorite story about Thanksgiving was when I was probably about 20 years old. My parents called a family meeting and this happened at Thanksgiving time. At Thanksgiving time my entire family gets together –

my cousins, aunts and uncles, mostly on my father's side. So my parents called a family meeting and guess who wasn't included in that family meeting? To make my cousins –who just happened to be there because it was Thanksgiving –my parents said to my cousins, "Could you babysit Liz?" I didn't know what to say. Throughout the whole entire day I kind of had this really horrible feeling in my stomach. I was sad and I was angry but I really didn't know what to say. I was invited to out to dinner with everyone because my parents always included me in things. While we were getting dressed I said to Ronnie and Adel –who were my two favorite sisters at that time, "Do you know what happened at that meeting? I really would like to know." They noticed that I was so sad and grumpy. They said they could not tell me. That was really hard for me. I found out by a therapist who helped me in New Jersey when I was living there. It took him and me to sit down with my parents and tell them what was bothering me. It took a whole year for me to tell my parents what was bothering me. To this day, I am now included in things and I know what is going on in my family life.

Caldwell: So eventually you did tell them you were upset about not being included?

Weintraub: Yeah.

Caldwell: What did they say?

Weintraub: I think they really understand because obviously, like I told you, I am included. I now understand a lot about my financial issues. They even came to me about a year later and said we need to figure some things out financial wise and put some things in place. They did share that with me. That was good.

Caldwell: So what was your relationship like with your sisters? Are they all older than you? You have three sisters?

Weintraub: Yes. I have three sisters. They are seven, six, and four years older. The three older ones are less than 32 months apart. I think all of them were very nice to me. Sometimes I like Ronnie the best because she was the easiest one I could talk to. To this day, she is probably the easiest one I could talk to. I remember sleeping in her room at night for no reason but that I wanted to sleep there. She had two beds. I was the only person who didn't have two beds in my room. Right now as I am talking, that is probably discriminatory that I would not have friends. I was a pest. I think Adel and Ronnie would see me as a little pest because I would follow them a lot. I wanted to go to the mall. As I said, I am quite younger than they are and I wanted to follow them along. I remember there were many, many times when they went to the mall and I would be just hanging out. I would be like, "I want to go! I want to go! I want to go! I want to go!" I would even run out into the street and try to follow the car, like a two year

old. Something a two year old would do, except at that time I was probably ten or eleven. I guess I did that –and I probably haven't told anybody this –because I didn't have any friends, and I wanted something to do. My sisters didn't want me to hang out with their friends or boyfriends. Who would? Would you?

Caldwell: Well, they were older.

Weintraub: Yeah. But today if you are asking me what the relationships are like, I really have a good relationship. We don't talk a lot. Well, Adel and I don't talk a lot just because she is busy and that is who she is. I think Adel sometimes doesn't understand my life –that I am involved in self advocacy, that I am involved with disability issues. It is nothing on purpose. She actually called me on Monday because we hadn't had a time to catch up. She is busy, I guess. There was a period of probably four or five years in my twenties –maybe a little longer than that but not more than ten years –that people saw me as a brat. Every time we would get together during family thing either Passover or Thanksgiving or big family events I would cry or I would yell. This is when I was twenty. People thought it was strange. My sisters, who had kids of their own, got embarrassed because they didn't want their kids to know that it is okay to cry unless something happened. It wasn't clear. I would just cry because I was tired or you were talking to someone and I couldn't get your attention or I wanted to do something with you. Instead of saying, "I want to do something with you," I would just fall apart. And I think I did that because I was so lonely. I didn't have anyone to be around. Now that I have Phil, my husband, I think that it has gotten better because I don't need to. If no one talks to me I can go and talk to Phil. The last few times it happened when Phil and I were engaged or about to get engaged, I think it was because I was so anxious to get married.

Caldwell: So after boarding school you moved back to Virginia?

Weintraub: Well, Riverview recommended that I go to a place in New Jersey where I could learn about living on my own. For the first six months I had the most horrible time. I lived in a semi-circle where there were about ten houses. We all lived together. There were about two or three people in a house, but they were all people with disabilities. So in some ways it was an institution, but they called it a community. You would go down a long driveway to get to this community.

Caldwell: So it was a long way from anybody else?

Weintraub: Yeah. I lived there for six months. Then I moved to a community and I got promptly sick. The same kind of sickness I got at Riverview, but this time I was in and out of hospitals for about a year. I was on medication, some heavy duty neurological medication. Then my parents and doctors

realized it was a psychological issue. They thought it was like seizures. If I had it now, you would probably say, "Oh my God, Liz is having a seizure." It probably began when I was back at Riverview, the two episodes I was sent home for. And it was probably because I was lonely. I am realizing that I was very lonely. Until I learned how to be a self advocate, I was, as I said, lonely, and I didn't know how to say I was lonely. My parents probably didn't know how it made me sad about things.

Caldwell: So you only lived there for six months at that place?

Weintraub: Yeah. I moved, but I still got services from this agency for about nine years. Then I moved to another town but all this was South Jersey. I got involved with self advocacy through the Philadelphia group, Speaking for Ourselves. I met Pat Gurke. She worked for this agency. She told me that the reason she left this agency was because she wanted a friendship with me. She wasted a pure friendship with me. She called me up one day and said, "Would you like to go to the move?" And I said, "You are off!" She said, "So. I know I am off." I said, "Why are you calling me?" She said, "Because I want to go out for a movie." That was the first time anyone without a disability, who wasn't a relative, ever asked me to go out and do something with them. That meant a lot to me.

We have been friends for 20 years. In some ways, she was my guardian angel. She helped me find the job at the library. I worked as a page. She got me out of that workshop, that horrible workshop, stuffing papers. She got me the job at the library as a page, which is putting away books on the shelves. I stayed there until I decided I wanted to work full time doing advocacy. I had a great time in the library. I often think, now that I am not doing as much travel, whether it is time for me to do part-time work in a library. I go back and forth about that. Because sometimes I have so much to do, doing work with the Council on Quality and Leadership, and there are some days I sit on mu bum and do nothing.

But getting back to Pat, Pat is just a wonderful, wonderful friend. Sometimes I would bug her because I wanted to be with her all the time. Sometimes she would say, "No. No." I did that because I was lonely. I didn't want to know that all my friends had a disability. I got frustrated. I yelled. There was one time when I was living in Boston she called me up asked if I would like to do a presentation at AAIDD –at that time it was AAMR. It was about religion. At that time I really didn't really feel comfortable about my religion. Since then I have felt comfortable and today I take a religious course at temple. But getting back to Pat, I said, "No." This was the first time I ever said no to her because we always had a staff and client or person served relationship. I said no and I don't think she heard me because she put my name on the program. When she saw

me at the conference, after another presentation, she was like, "What is going on?" She freaked out. She yelled at me. I yelled at her. For two years we didn't talk to each other.

To this day, I don't know which one of us was right. We both probably thought we were right. Probably about seven or eight years ago I went to her house and both of us confided that we had so much history and so much love for each other that we needed to get this out and talk. It took my part to talk to her. I remember being scared in her living room. It wasn't a neutral place it was definitely her turf. I stayed over. So I was very vulnerable to her. We talked. To this day we are really good friends. Nobody brings it up. She was invited to my wedding. I was invited to hers but I didn't get to go. I probably didn't go because of this baggage. I am sorry that I didn't go to her wedding. It was before we talked. I think me not going to her wedding pushed me over the cliff to talk to her. I was like, "Let's get over this. Let's not forget who we are. Let's get over, forgive me for saying his, but bullshit." I am sorry I didn't get to go to her wedding, but glad she came. Did I get to talk to her at my wedding? No, but that is just because you never talk to anybody during your wedding. My husband was always eating, so I didn't get to talk to him either.

Caldwell: So, let's go back to when you first met Pat and you first got involved in self advocacy. Did she help you get involved? What happened there?

Weintraub: Yes, definitely. I remember people trying to help me figure out what I wanted to do. It was probably during and IEP or whatever those initial are.

Caldwell: Were you at the workshop?

Weintraub: I was in a residential program. Pat said, "Well, come to People First." I said, "What is People First?" She said, "It is sort of a group to stand up." I said, "A political group!" We didn't talk about this, but my family is very politically active. As you can gather by looking at the walls, we are very proud of being political. I didn't get to run for student government in high school or anything like that. So, I thought People First was a political group and it wasn't a political group. Now, when you get involved a little bit more it is definitely political and there are a lot of political things that we talk about like the government and elections, but it wasn't political and I learned that. It was the first time I said "no" to my mom and dad. I think that I was able to do that because I had the courage to say it with my friends behind me.

Caldwell: What did you say no to your parents about?

Weintraub: About moving.

Caldwell: Did you want to go back and say more about your family before the self advocacy?

Weintraub: My family was very political. They never held office but they always went to conventions. I was never expected to do that kind of stuff. I remember because of my illness in Riverview I missed the elections about student government. They never expected me to do that kind of stuff. So, when I found out about People First I thought, great, it was a political group. I found out it wasn't a political group, but I enjoyed it because I felt like people were behind me when I had to say no to my mom and dad. Do you want me to tell you why I said no to my mom and dad?

Caldwell: Yeah.

Weintraub: The second day I got to New Jersey I knew I didn't like it. I was real clear about why I didn't like it. I didn't like the semi-circle. Maybe at that time in my heart, I knew what an institution was. Fortunately, I was never sent away to like Fernald, Forest Haven, or Lincoln Developmental Center, but I knew I didn't like it. I called my parents and I said, "I hate it! I want to get out." They said, "We are working on something." Ironically, they were working on me getting into the program that my husband and I get services from now. At least I do and I think he does too. When they were ready for me to come back, about two to four years later, I had the job at the library and I was happy. I was getting involved with People First. They said to me, "Well, can you come in and get tested here." I said, "Sure. It would be good to live closer to you." I was changing my mind every couple months. There was one real clear time I remember, coming back from vacation, I said to one of my counselors, "You know, I told my parents that I want to go, but I really don't want to go. I want to stay here with you." He said, "If you are asking me to tell your parents, I am not going to. It is your life. You need to tell them." I remember that very clearly. I said something like, "You are my counselor. What good are you for not helping me?" I got angry. So they came up during the holidays that year. They said, "You know, I am tired of you going back and forth. We are making all these plans. We have a job for you at the Library of Congress and you back down." I paced back and forth for about 10-15 minutes going, "Yes. No. Yes. No." The final answer was that I wanted to stay in New Jersey. I probably stayed there for about six more years. That was before I got involved with the national organization.

Caldwell: And you said it was because of the self-advocacy group that you were able to say no. So what was it like when you first got involved in People First?

Weintraub: It was fun. It was a group. It was something to do –nothing special, except I think I learned how to stand up to people. There was one time, with the help of Pat, we wrote a letter to the president for not calling us clients anymore. I led that campaign. We wrote to letter to the president of the agency and he finally stopped using the word "client."

Caldwell: So what were some of the groups like or meetings like when you first got started?

Weintraub: We talked about our feelings. I am not really sure. I can't really remember that much. I am telling you what I can remember. I remember that I and someone else got asked to be on the board of trustees for the agency. That is not on my wall because I am not real proud of where that went.

Caldwell: Was that your first time on a board?

Weintraub: Yeah. Then I got involved on the consumer advisory committee in New Jersey with Deborah Spitalnik. Again, Pat did that. Pat helped me. In some ways, Pat has always been there for me.

Caldwell: Those things are important. Those were the first time you got on boards? You started building some of your skills in becoming a leader. What other things do you think helped build you skills in becoming a leader?

Weintraub: I think in some ways my family. Not treating me like a special person. I needed to be at the table. I needed to do chores. I needed to wait turns. One of my favorite sayings I made up is: "I learned how to wait in line." What I mean by that is when I got hit by a car... When my sister got married, I learned that some of the attention couldn't be on me because some of the attention had to be on her. Sometimes I get frustrated with other self advocates because it cannot always be about "Me. Me. Me. Me." It has to be about "You," the other person. Am I making sense?

Caldwell: Could you say some more about what you mean by that?

Weintraub: It is not all about what I want or what I need at that moment. Sometimes I need to wait. Like if there is a pie. My parents needed to take care of four of us. There is some time for Helen, some time for Adel, some time for Ronnie, and some time for me. Yes, I am a person with a disability, but that doesn't mean my mom should forget about helping Adel or helping Ronnie.

Caldwell: To go back when you first got involved in the self-advocacy group you got involved with, was that a state group or a local group?

Weintraub: A local group.

Caldwell: Were you a chair or a president of that group?

Weintraub: I was the president. I became the president after someone's time was over.

Caldwell: Keep going with the self-advocacy movement. Were you ever at the state level there?

Weintraub: No. I was never at the state level, except I was asked to be on the UAP advisory committee. Because New Jersey at that time didn't have a state group and I think to this day they do not have a state group. That is part of why I left New Jersey. I got frustrated every time I came back from the national organization. It was my responsibility to talk to New Jersey about what was going on at the national level, but they didn't want that.

Caldwell: So when did you first get involved at the national level.

Weintraub: I got involved in 1992 because someone I knew didn't like being on the board –got frustrated, or traveling was hard, or whatever. Once again, Pat asked me if I wanted to run for the board. I said, "Sure!" I ran and I won. I met Nancy and Tia at the first meeting. I remember –it was one of the first face-to-face meetings after I first got on –the last day of the meeting we all sat at round tables. I remember thinking to myself, "I cannot talk to Nancy and Tia. They are up here! And I am down here!" Nancy hates when I tell this story, but I said to her, "I Can't talk to you. You are up here!" They were so hurt and upset that I said that because they are just like me. I remember one time Bonnie Shoultz said, "Why don't you just be friends with Nancy. You and Nancy have a lot in common family wise and maybe you will learn that during your time talking together." I said, "Okay, but I feel funny." I did and we became really good friends.

Caldwell: Had you heard Nancy and Tia speak before? How did you even know who they were?

Weintraub: From the meetings. Nancy was friends with Pat and so Nancy came to New Jersey once or twice. I heard her and said to myself, "Oh my gosh! These are people like Martin Luther King. People you really look up to. Can I really be their friend? I guess I can." They both came to my wedding.

Caldwell: So they were role models or mentors to you?

Weintraub: Yes, they were definitely role models. I think about how my feelings and my thinking has changed about leadership has changed. My experiences at the Council on Quality and Leadership has taught me and challenged me and in some ways really kind of strained our relationship.

Caldwell: In what ways?

Weintraub: One of the ways is I am learning that self advocacy should not be a special thing. It should be for everyone. You may not be a person with a disability but you advocate everyday for your job. You advocate everyday to your wife about what you need or what you want. When you called me you advocated because you wanted something. I think it should be equal. If everyone is saying we want equal thing then we can't say there are

some rules for self advocates and some rules for people without disabilities. Everyone needs to play on the same playing field.

Caldwell: So, you are saying you kind of look at leadership different than the self-advocacy movement? Is that what you are saying? I am not sure what you are trying to say?

Weintraub: No. I look at the self-advocacy movement in a different way than everyone else. In my opinion self advocacy shouldn't be a word anymore, because everyone is a self advocate. Yes, we fight for different issues. We need to close institutions. But if you are an advocate and I am an advocate, why do we need to have a separate word? Why am I a self advocate and you are not a self advocate? Just because you don't have a disability?

After the Thanksgiving story, I think I have a wonderful relationship with my parents. They understand me and I understand them. There were two times when I think we had a real hard time dealing with each other when I would be whining for no good reason, maybe four or five years before I got married. I think I was lonely. Just like why I got sick in New Jersey.

Weintraub: What I got sick was because I was lonely. Now I have a wonderful husband I can talk to. I get lonely during the day but it is not his fault or my fault either.

Caldwell: Let's keep talking about the self-advocacy movement and then we will get into some questions about what you think about leadership. So you became involved at the national level. What position were you elected to? A regional rep?

Weintraub: Yeah, a regional rep. The person got sick and eventually died. I would love you to talk about Roland Johnson. He was a wonderful leader. He has passed away but I have his book.

Caldwell: I read his book just recently. Julie told me to read it. But you knew him. We could talk about him –whatever you want to talk about.

Weintraub: I have two stories. But anyway, when he got sick and had to resign they asked me to be the vice president, but I was the regional rep with him. There are two regional reps. I was part of the founding group of SABE – not totally founding group but I was there right at the beginning and I remember things. But about Roland, there are two stories I want to share with you. One story about how I knew that I wanted to no longer depend on people and do things as much as possible on my own. Shortly after I got on the board of SABE, we would travel together because we lived close. We would hang out with an advisor of Tia's, Leanne Ruche. One time at Leanne's house we were walking –Roland, me, and Tia, and I think Nancy was there too. Tia and Nancy always wanted Roland and I to get

together romantically. So they would pretend that we were walking and we were boyfriend and girlfriend, but it would never work. So, Roland would always invite me over to his house in Philadelphia because I lived in New Jersey at the time and I didn't really like people from New Jersey that much or have a lot in common with people. I never really wanted to and I was always afraid because it would mean that I would have to take buses and trains. I don't drive so what other way can you go. So, I said, "No. No. No." Then he died. That October they had a memorial where Speaking for Ourselves is. I said to Pat, "Can you pick me up?" She said, "No. I have to work." Because she was working with Speaking for Ourselves and was doing things for the memorial. I said, "I really want to go! It means a lot to me!" She said, "If you really want to go then go, but you need to go on your own." I said, "Who me? I can't do that." To this day, I really believe that that experience, forcing me to be on my own and to get to places on my own, really taught me how to be totally independent. To this day I go to places on my own. Obviously, I like a ride once in a while. If I have to go somewhere in Baltimore it is easier to get a ride than to have to go to the train station and get the Marc, but if I have to do that I will. The other story... It just popped out of my head. It will come back.

Caldwell: When did you first meet Roland?

Weintraub: 1992, I think

Caldwell: You said you were around when SABE was just forming?

Weintraub: Yeah. I wasn't at the first beginning. The reason was that it was on Yom Kippur weekend. I am Jewish. I just refuse to go places on Yom Kippur weekend. I respect people who are Catholic, Christmas and Easter. Why can't you respect me in Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah?

Caldwell: But you were kind of involved when it was forming?

Weintraub: Then the second conference, in between, that is when this person who I took the place for. She knew there was a lot of travel and she knew it was not right for her. I went to that conference in Nashville and Pat asked me to run for her position.

Caldwell: So how long were you involved with SABE?

Weintraub: That was in 1992 and it was until 1996 when I moved to Boston. I came back and I tried to run but I lost. Now I am an alternate but frankly –and this is hard for me to say and I am not sure whether I should say it and how I want to say it given this might be taped or publicly shown –but there are some things I disagree with about some leaders. So, I am not sure how I feel about SABE anymore. That is really sad for me to say because I am a self-advocacy leader and I would like to be considered one until a

day I die. But I think part of being a leader and part of leadership skills is that you can grow in your thinking as well as your emotional well-being.

Caldwell: So, how do you see yourself growing? What are some of the things you maybe don't agree with, with the self-advocacy movement now?

Weintraub: I told you about one, about the fact that things should not be special. Rules are rules for everyone. It cannot be because Liz Weintraub or Liz Obermeyer has a disability. Rules are rules. One of the clearest examples I know about is that somebody was invited to a conference that we were hosting, a CQL Conference. Yes, this person I kind of recommended, but I was not asked to go to the conference. It wasn't my turn to go. We all take turns going to conferences because they cost money for us and we don't get money back. This person thought just because she was my friend she would get to go. That wasn't the case. She got angry with me. Those are the kinds of things I think. Another thing is that just if we want to be all treated equally we need to be all treated equally. Whether you like if someone is yelling at your face, if that is your personality to yell at your face, and you yell at someone else's face. If that person yells at your face and other people's faces, are you so special that people need to say, "Okay, just because you happen to have a disability I will treat you differently."

Caldwell: So what you are saying, it is not the self-advocacy movement.

Weintraub: No.

Caldwell: You still think there should be a self-advocacy movement for people with disabilities?

Weintraub: Yeah. Yeah. I think that people need to stand up for closing institutions, and calling people bad names, and workshops, and that everyone needs to work in the community and play in the community. Everything that I think you and I agree with and our colleague. Put it this way, everyone at the Council on Quality and Leadership agrees with me on everything, so why should it just be a movement for people with disabilities? Am I making sense?

Caldwell: Yeah. That makes sense.

Weintraub: What can't it just be a movement for disability rights?

Caldwell: I don't know. Is that what you think it should be, more just a general movement?

Weintraub: Yeah. I wouldn't have said that in the 1980s or even the early 1990s, but in 2008, yes, I would say that because I can't even dream who would disagree with me on closing institutions. Well, VOR would, Polly Spears

would, and Mark Endberger in Maryland would, but people that I see and people I respect, even my mom and dad or in-laws.

Caldwell: Well maybe to go back to some of these questions, what does self advocacy mean to you? When you use the word self advocacy?

Weintraub: I am not sure.

Caldwell: Think about it. We can come back to that. When do you think you first became aware of discrimination against people with disabilities or when you experienced that discrimination?

Weintraub: I think the Thanksgiving story. That was definitely a key point. But those are two different questions. When did I first become aware of it? Probably at Thanksgiving of 1998 or 1999.

Caldwell: That was a key moment?

Weintraub: Yeah. It is kind of weird to say that and now you are helping me realize it because I was treated differently at Riverview. Riverview was definitely a different school but I didn't feel that way. It was just a school that I needed to go to, but Thanksgiving was definitely a key moment. I guess, I didn't talk about Lupita, and I should go back. She was my best friend growing up. She lived across the street and we were inseparable. I guess when we were in seventh grade she was outside and she was playing basketball in her driveway. I said, "Hi." And she said, "Do you want to play?" I said, "Well, maybe" and I tried. I couldn't play. I couldn't throw the ball. To this day, I still have a hard time. She said, "Well, I don't want to be your friend." That really hurt because from almost five years old until thirteen or fourteen, whatever it was, we were inseparable. We did everything together. She came over to parties that my parents had. She was part of the family. I was part of her family. I said, "Well, I can't play. It is too hard for me." Then she never really called me back again. She said she was more interested in sports and boys. At that time I could care less about boys. The first time I ever thought about having a boyfriend was in SABE. That is pretty late in life.

Caldwell: So you experienced being discriminated against because you had a disability at school and as a kid?

Weintraub: Not a school. Well, at high school, but I didn't know the word until Thanksgiving. So you pushed me. I guess I have to say Lupita was definitely the first time that was discriminatory.

Caldwell: Let's go back and talk about some of the stuff you did when you were in the self-advocacy movement in New Jersey and then also a little bit with Speaking for Ourselves.

Weintraub: There are two clear things. Because of my political background at home I always wanted to get more involved on the national level and federal level. There was one meeting with Justin Dart. I don't know if you have heard of him. He came to a meeting. He was one of the few professional who believed in people with disabilities –not at first but he believed in us. He challenged us to be on the committee on employment he started. I really wanted to be on the committee and Roland wanted to. Like what I talked about with Tia, I thought to myself, "Oh my gosh! I can't run against Roland." Roland is this big guy, and when I say big, I don't necessarily mean tall, but big with ideas and someone I can reach up to. Tia just so happened to be next to me and she knew that I really wanted to be on this committee. I like to be in power and this is where my family lives, in DC. She said, "You do it! You raise your hand!" I said, "No, Tia. I can't. Roland is doing it. How can I win?" She physically grabbed my arm and she made me raise my hand. And I won. We had sort of an open contest and voting.

I was on the committee for maybe four or five years. I never felt like I truly understood what my role was. I got frustrated on the committee. They were all people with physical disabilities. I would say about 75% were people with physical disability and then some parents and self advocates. Maybe this is why Justin wanted us on the board or committee. But I never felt like they really listened to us so I never really understood what my purpose of going to those meetings was. I went because it is pretty cool to say I was on the President's Committee on Employment. I have Tia to thank for that.

Caldwell: Was that before the ADA?

Weintraub: I think it was right after ADA. I went to the ADA Ceremony; I think it was when Clinton was in power, Bill. I still have the invitation to the White House.

Caldwell: Did you get to meet President Clinton?

Weintraub: No. My husband has. He knows him really well.

Caldwell: To go back, you moved from New Jersey to Boston?

Weintraub: Yes. I wanted a new job. I wanted an advocacy job. I got frustrated and I talked to Nancy. They tried to help me. I was involved with the criminal justice system. I never got in trouble with the law that way, but SABE got a grant for helping the criminal justice system because of all the people with disabilities who often get falsely accused. Have you ever heard of Johnny Lee Wilson? That was the first issue I really felt a connection to in the self-advocacy movement. I wanted to get very involved and I felt very passionately about people getting falsely accused. I also knew a lot about

the legal system because in my family there are a lot of lawyers and legal people in my family. There was a committee that SABE formed under Nancy's leadership called the national advisory group for justice. We were working on that and they hired me in Philadelphia to work in their office in Philadelphia. I could get to Philadelphia on my own and I could work one day because I was off on Wednesday from the library. About a year later I really wanted a full-time job and no one would offer me one. Temple said they had another grant and said that I could work and make two part-time jobs. I didn't like that idea. I spoke with my parents about maybe getting a job in self advocacy and they said, "Why would you ever want to be in advocacy? It is low pay. You will never get benefits?" Probably the same kind of reasons maybe your parents have said to you. Nothing we have not already heard. In this field, you don't get rich from.

I really wanted to do this. So, when I went to AAIDD –Tia and Nancy went up to Boston to help with their advocacy group –at the conference I hung out with their friends and they said, "Oh, by the way, Liz is looking for a job." So they introduced me to a friend named Jean Tiller. That was in May and by July I was being hired in Massachusetts and by late September I was moving there. And I remember my parents saying, "There is no way you are moving there without support. Who can help you?" I formed a circle of friends. Some of the people in my circle are still really good friends. One of my friends doesn't return my phone calls and that is making me upset, but. Boston was in between. I don't know what to say about Boston.

Caldwell: How long were you there?

Weintraub: Three years. And the reason I am saying that is because there were some skills and things that I learned from Massachusetts that were wonderful and some things I did not like at all.

Caldwell: About your job? You were working for the state?

Weintraub: Yeah. And one of them was they were only willing to take me when they wanted me to work. They didn't want me to work all the time and I like to be busy. To this day I get frustrated about that. I get frustrated when I don't work 40 hours a week. To be truthfully honest I get frustrated with my job here at CQL with that. But my friends, I would not change them for the world.

Caldwell: The friends here or in Boston?

Weintraub: In Boston.

Caldwell: So you had a lot of supports there?

Weintraub: Yeah, informal.

Caldwell: So then what led you to come back to the DC area, or Baltimore?

Weintraub: Well, I got frustrated. When I first went to Boston they hired me as a Quality Enhancement Specialist because they had a tool called the Quality Enhancement Service Tool, similar to our tool at CQL without personal outcome measures. So, I worked there for about a year and then they transferred me to training. And do you know where their training department was? Fernald –using the old buildings at Fernald. In some ways the director heard me. In my interview I said that I wanted to be treated like everyone. This is sort of what I am talking about with the self-advocacy movement. I can't say I want to be treated like everyone else, but then say, "Oh, by the way, don't send me to Fernald because I don't like Fernald and I don't want to be where what Fernald stands for," because that is where the department was. I felt like they only took me out of the closet when they wanted me to work, when it made sense for me to work. I realize I can't have it both ways like I said, but I got frustrated with that job. About a year and a half into that I was really struggling with where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do.

When I finally figured out that I wanted a new advocacy job –and it took me a long time to figure that out and I can't even tell you how I figured it out –I went back to AAIDD and I passed out 200 resumes. A friend of mine Nancy Weiss, who is a wonderful person, she recommended the Council. I thought she was talking about the DD Council. I said, "No. I would like to be a member but I just don't want to be a staff." She said, "No, the Council on Quality and Leadership." So I gave them my resume and I met Jim Gardner at a workshop. Once again, Tia was right there holding my hand. I was scared because Jim is a big guy –not tall wise but you know what I mean. About a month later I had not heard anything from the Council. If you know anything about the Council, you know that we take our sweet time. We don't do anything quick, which is probably good in some ways. I said, "No, they are not interested in me. They are not interested in me." My friend Mary Cereto, she works in Boston, said, "Why don't you just call?" I said, "Okay." I got a job!

Caldwell: How long ago was that? How long have you been with the Council?

Weintraub: Eight years. It was eight years last week.

Caldwell: You said you first went to Philadelphia and then you moved to Rockville?

Weintraub: No, Baltimore.

Caldwell: Baltimore, yeah.

Weintraub: Their headquarters are in Baltimore. Their office is in Baltimore and I go, they would like me to go, once or twice a month. I know I will go on the second. I have a meeting with someone and then we have staff meeting.

Caldwell: And what do you do at the Council?

Weintraub: Unlike Massachusetts, my job has never changed. My duties might have changed as it has grown and as we are growing. But my title is Quality Enhancement Specialist, which means I might do some training on self advocacy –not self advocacy, per se, because we are not an advocacy organization –but on how people should be treated and issues like self determination issues. I did a training in May which was about nine things I think people want in their lives –like respect, love, living in the community, jobs, those kinds of things. Along with training I also do some marketing – maybe telling my story as well as CQL’s story. Both of our stories are very similar. So I will try to get business that way. Sometimes I am on reviews. I am part of a review team when we go to organizations and review their services. Sometimes I am there, not as a token, not to say I am the only person with a disability there –just like a person who is African-American might feel like a token. I am not. I am there because I might bring some experiences that other people may or may not have. Part of my responsibility when I go on reviews is that I lead focus groups. That means there will be about ten or twelve people in the room and I will ask questions. They like me doing that because I do get services so I know what it feels like to be in their shoes.

Caldwell: That is great. It kind of leads into some questions on leadership skills and leadership experiences because it sounds like these jobs have really helped you build your skills, and your leadership. Looking back at your life what do you think are the things that have helped you build your skills and build your experience to be a leader? Is there anything else we haven’t talked about?

Weintraub: I think just my family really helped me in some ways. Whether I knew it or not and whether I liked it or not, they really helped me to grow. It can never be all about me.

Caldwell: You didn’t talk a lot about your parents. Did they encourage you?

Weintraub: The way I am today, I need to give them one hundred percent of the credit. Yes, I did the work, and I won’t say it is because I didn’t try, because I did. But from doing a chore at the dinner table, to taking family trips, to learning how to wait in line for their attention, to just giving me the courage to go and try. When I wanted to be a girl scout and no one would allow me to be in a troop, guess who went and said, “Well, I will be the leader?” My mom. So sometimes I forget that and that really hurts their feelings. I don’t give them a lot of credit, and I just remember the Thanksgiving story, but they did really help me and they were parents.

Caldwell: It seems like even though you stood up and told them what you wanted to do, they have supported you in what you want to do?

Weintraub: Yeah.

Caldwell: Let me ask you some more questions about leadership. Do you consider yourself a leader?

Weintraub: Yeah, I do.

Caldwell: What do you think leadership means? Because it means different things to different people, so what would you say leadership means to you?

Weintraub: I think leadership means to stand up for who I am. Stand my ground and don't give in –even though your friend, or your mom and dad, or even your husband, tells you not to do this or that. There are times that I will stand against my friends. A year ago I did that and that was really hard. But I need to do what I know is right in my heart. That is what leadership is all about. I think President Kennedy used the word *courage* –*Profiles in Courage*. I don't know what profiles means but I do know what courage means. Courage means standing up against other people if you think it is the right thing to do. Even if it is you best friend or your husband. Well, maybe not your husband. I know how I feel about standing up against Phil in public. I need to do what is in my heart and if that means I disagree with my friends, I disagree with my friends. It has nothing to do with our friendship.

Caldwell: What qualities or what skills do you think it is important for leaders to have?

Weintraub: Well, courage. Being strong. Believing in yourself. Someone who is friendly and kind and listens to people.

Caldwell: Who would you call a great leader? When you think of great leaders who comes to mind?

Weintraub: Rolland Johnson, Pat Gerke, Nancy Ward, Tia Nelis, Kennedy, Gunnar Dybwad.

Caldwell: Did you ever meet him?

Weintraub: Yeah, I met him many times. He was one of my best friends.

Caldwell: When you were in Boston?

Weintraub: Yes. I think he really helped me to stand up to DMR. He was one of the people when I was kind of on the fence about whether I wanted to move or whether I wanted to just shut up –pardon my language –and just be quiet about my job. I wasn't sure about what I wanted to do. I went over to his house –just him and I. Somehow I got over to his house because his house wasn't very easy to find. I said, "What should I do Gunnar?" He

said, "You know Liz darling, if I was you I would just get away." And I did about two weeks later. I said I wanted to move.

Caldwell: That is a great story. What is it about those people that you mentioned?

Weintraub: They don't have all the same qualities.

Caldwell: A lot of them are also people with disabilities, people you have looked up to in the self-advocacy movement.

Weintraub: Yeah, and I also think I would include Julie Petty in there. The reason I would include her in there is because she is one willing to stand up against friends. I think leadership and advocacy, whatever you want to call it, is not about friendship. You and I can disagree and I can change your mind, or I may never change your mind, but can we be friends, and can we both be leaders?

Caldwell: Let me ask you. This is a tough question. Do you think your experiences as a person with a disability has helped you be a leader?

Weintraub: What do you mean?

Caldwell: Well, some of the things you have experiences being a person with a disability throughout your life, do you think that has helped you become a leader or caused you to become a leader?

Weintraub: Yeah, I think so. When I think of the Obermeyer family, that is who I am. Now I am a Weintraub and will be a Weintraub until the day I die, but who I am is an Obermeyer. I was just talking to some friends recently about why people lose their names. My e-mail is Obermeyer. I often wonder if that is confusing. Why I am saying all of this is because I don't want to lose the identity. I think part of who I am is an Obermeyer and part of who I have become is my grandfather. I have not mentioned him. I don't know what kind of leader he was. Maybe I should also include Herman Obermeyer, my father, because the things my father has taught me –from going to school or being at the dinner table or taking locks when I was little or even today –is all leadership skills. So what was the question?

Caldwell: Do you think being a person with disabilities has helped you or caused you to become a leader?

Weintraub: Not really. It is who I have become, the Obermeyers. Does that make sense?

Caldwell: I think I follow that your family and your father were important. But what I was getting at were more your experiences with a disability, do you think that led you to become a leader?

Weintraub: I don't know how to answer that. That is hard. Can you give me an example?

Caldwell: Well, maybe the reason you got into the movement, the self-advocacy movement, some of the reasons of why you got into that and became a leader in that movement and got into advocacy really.

Weintraub: I guess the answer is yes, because of the discriminatory factor. I guess I will answer it like this. I wanted to be a leader because I wanted to show the world, and to my mom and dad, yes, even though I have a disability I can do good things.

Caldwell: You mentioned that your family always valued political leadership, so you are kind of following in your family's footsteps. You kind of answered this question already, but who were your role models or mentors?

Weintraub: Definitely Nancy and Tia. They were really important. Rolland. Pat Gerke. My mom and my dad.

Caldwell: Let me ask you about the self-advocacy movement and the future of the self-advocacy movement. We were getting into this a little before. When you look at the self-advocacy movement, what if your vision for the movement for the future? Where would you like to see the movement go?

Weintraub: I would like it to be a disability movement.

Caldwell: A broader disability movement?

Weintraub: Yeah, I would like it to be that we all fight for the same things, everyone. Because we all have different experiences that have nothing to do with our disability, that have to do with who we are, our makeup. I don't mean makeup that you put on your face, I mean makeup about who you are as a person –who is your father, who is your mother, who are the people that you look up to, that is your make up. I think as we all look together there is a lot in common. Even though I have only met you, and I don't think you have a disability, but just because you are interested in disability, I bet we share a lot in common. So, why are we having a separate movement, between the self-advocacy movement and the disability movement? If we are fighting against separation aren't we fighting against ourselves?

Caldwell: Are there things that the self-advocacy movement can do that the broader disability rights movement doesn't do?

Weintraub: Yeah, we can all support each other. Yeah, Nancy knows how I feel. Like when I say I want a computer. This is a true story. In the early 1990s, when computers were getting started, I was just getting involved in SABA and I thought it would be so neat to e-mail Nancy and Tia and my parents said, "No. No. You can't have a computer because of your coordination

problems.” Nancy just so happened to be at my house at that time and the first things she did was she raised her hand and said, “Excuse me. I have a disability and I have a computer.” Guess what happened within two weeks. I got the computer. She had the experience of that. She probably has the same kinds of experiences as I do. So yes, in some ways, the self-advocacy movement is a support group. Going back to my first self-advocacy group in New Jersey, when I wanted to leave New Jersey, guess where I got the courage to speak out from? Those people. I guess that is basically the difference.

Caldwell: So there still needs to be that, but you want to see in the broader disability rights movement that it not be separate and that self advocates be included and that everybody fights together? I think that is what I am understanding.

Weintraub: Yeah. What is the difference between Brian Cox, or Jim Gardner, or even you. Yeah, all of you do not have a disability, per se, you might have different kind of issues you are dealing with. But what is the difference between your disability and mine? Nothing, besides a label. If we all want the same goal –to close institutions, to live in the community, to be just like anyone else –I think that is your goals, I know that is Brian and Jim’s goals, then why are we separating ourselves? Besides the fact that we have different experiences and Nancy Ward can raise her hand and say, “I was discriminated against,” or Tia Nelis, but what else is the difference? You look like you are puzzled?

Caldwell: I am thinking about it. That is a tough issue. Why do you think it is separated then and not one movement?

Weintraub: Because I think we have wanted that separation. I think we have done that to ourselves. I think part of it is that we call ourselves self advocates. That is how it was 30 years ago. So, we are in a box. I don’t know how we can get out of that box.

Caldwell: Let me also ask you about the independent living movement. Do you see that as being separate too right now, the independent living movement and the self-advocacy movement?

Weintraub: Not really. I think we make it separate, but I don’t think it needs to. The Maryland DD Council has a council grant –I think we are going into our sixth year –People on the Go, which is part of SABE, and ADAPT we are working on mutual goals on the Medicaid bias. At first I thought we should be separate. People on the Go is here; we should close Rosewood and they should close nursing homes. Then I realized, “Hey, you know, we are the same.” We are all fighting for the same cause, closing institutions –whether you call institution. They are basically the same thing. Whether you are a person with a physical disability or with a mental disability, we

are the same people. Whether you are calling it “crippled” or “retarded,” and I am using those words on purpose, we are the same people. Am I making sense?

Caldwell: Yeah.

Weintraub: So, I am realizing that we are separating ourselves. There are great people in the independent living movement and there are great people in the self-advocacy movement. And I bet if you talked to Ed Roberts today and you are talking to Rolland Johnson or to me today, I would be saying the same thing that Ed Roberts was saying. Or if you are talking to Gunnar Dybwad, we are all saying the same thing –close institutions, close nursing homes, stop calling people “retarded,” stop calling people names.

Caldwell: I wanted to ask you a couple questions about being a person with a disability and disability identity –how you feel about yourself and how you feel about your disability. So, how do you feel being a person with a disability has influenced how you feel about yourself?

Weintraub: Oh, it has tremendously. I remember one time when I got off the bus –I think I was in eighth grade –and somebody called me “retarded” and up until then all I knew I was learning disabled. My parents always wanted me to be learning disabled and they are two different things, learning disability and “retarded.” And I came home that day crying and I said to my mom, “Someone called me retarded. Am I retarded?” She looked at me and said, “Well, I really don’t know. I really don’t know.” I said, “Well tell me!” And she said, “Yeah, you are retarded. But we look at you as you have learning issues.” I said, “Okay, then why didn’t you tell me?” I forget what she said. I tell that story because to me I am not a person with “MR.” I have a disability. To me, everyone has a disability. Whether you have glasses, or whether you can’t read very well, or whether you don’t know math very well, I am sure there is something that you can’t do as well and you would like to. So what is the difference between that and my disability? That is how I look at it. Am I answering your question?

Caldwell: Yes, I think so. But although we might all have some difference, some disabilities, society kind of treats different, like “MR” or that label.

Weintraub: But my family never treated me differently, so I don’t know what that is all about. I am very lucky. I was never treated differently, so I don’t really know what that feels like.

Caldwell: How do you think being in the self-advocacy movement has influenced who you are and how you feel about yourself?

Weintraub: I think it has changed me for the better. I think I am more confident. I think I am more assured about myself. I know what I want. I know what is possible.

Caldwell: Do you feel a connection or a bond with other people with disabilities?

Weintraub: Yes, definitely. Like marriage. I knew very clearly, when I was thinking about marriage, I knew the type of person who I wanted to marry. I knew that I wanted to marry someone with a disability. I knew that I could never marry someone with a physical disability because I don't identify with them. Maybe that sounds like I am a shallow leader or a "bitch," but I know I could never identify myself with people who cannot walk or who cannot talk. I have some friends of mine, a facilitator for Maryland and a leader in Maryland, they are about to get married and about to start a family. One has a physical disability and one doesn't have a physical disability and I think to myself, "How can you identify yourself with him?" When I sit down and talk with Phil about his experiences or I listen to his struggles and what is important to him, they are the same as mine.

Caldwell: How did you guys meet?

Weintraub: I met him at a self-advocacy picnic about six months into when I moved to Baltimore. I wanted to get involved with People on the Go. We talked for about ten minutes about his work. At that time he worked for President Clinton in his correspondent's office. I came away from that conversation and I said, "That is the guy I want to marry."

Caldwell: Really? The first time you met him?

Weintraub: Yeah, I was living in Baltimore. He was dating someone else and I was trying to date someone else. When we broke up with each other's significant others one thing led to another. I moved down to Rockville. He was the reason I moved. He is a good leader. I knew that I wanted to be married to someone who was involved in self advocacy. There were three things I wanted from someone. I wanted someone who was involved with self advocacy but wasn't every five minutes talking about self advocacy. I had a boyfriend who was all self advocacy and another person who wasn't involved with self advocacy. I tried to talk myself into it saying, "Well, maybe I don't need that," but I do need that. That is who I am! I am a self advocate. I am a self advocate! From those experiences I realized, yes I would like someone. Phil is not real involved. He doesn't have a job in the movement. I don't think he will ever have a job in the movement. He wanted to work in computer. He would love a computer job.

Caldwell: But he is a leader in People on the Go?

Weintraub: Yeah. Well not anymore because he is so busy. He is a former chair and he is on the Arc board. If you think of leaders in Maryland, you would definitely think of him.

Caldwell: Another area I don't think we got into is younger people, younger people with disabilities and younger self advocates. How would you go about helping young people become leaders or become self advocates? What are some things you think could be done or maybe things you are doing?

Weintraub: One of the things I talk about in leadership: guess how old I was when I said no to my mom and dad?

Caldwell: You were older. You were in your twenties?

Weintraub: Yeah. And I said no to my parents in the wrong way. If we teach our young people how to say no in the right way to their parents, then we don't need to have those struggles.

Caldwell: When do you think it should start? Start working with young kids?

Weintraub: Maybe ten or eleven. I am not talking about the issues that we are dealing with today. But saying, "Wear your blue shirt." "No I want the red shirt." Or, "I want to wear the blue shirt." Or, "I want macaroni and cheese. I don't want those fish sticks." Or, "I want to go to the roller skating rink. I don't want to go to the movies." Those kinds of issues.

Caldwell: Do you think there are any differences between your generation and the younger generation of people with disabilities?

Weintraub: Yeah, I think so. I think the attitudes. I think young people don't need to deal with the institutionalized or separation. They don't know it. Of course you should go to college; of course you should go to your local neighborhood school. Even you said you are talking about your son going to college. Can you imagine my generation? That was not even thought of. We had to struggle. I had to pound my fist. I had to say, "I want to go! I want to get married!" Of course if your son wants to he should get married. He needs to find the right girl but that is not the issue. Can he get married? Yes, of course. Can he go to college? Of course he can. Can he go to the skating rink with his friends at night? Of course he can. When I was young I had to pound. I had to have a chaperon. They had to make sure it was a "special needs" club.

Caldwell: Do you think young people are going to get involved in self advocacy now? Do you see young people getting involved?

Weintraub: Some and some not. I don't know if there is a need for it. There is Partners in Policymaking in Maryland. Everyone talks about inclusion and you never hear about Rosewood; then what is the need for self advocacy?

Having experiences? That can be a social group. Get together with a group of people; if you want to talk about experiences that is great talk about experiences, but do you need a separate group to do that? Get together and have a reunion?

Caldwell: What advice would you give to young leaders?

Weintraub: I guess the biggest advice would be to just be yourself. I never told you my special definition of self advocacy. Yes, there is a formal definition, but my special definition is to be myself, the special place where I can be myself. No one yelled at me when I mispronounced a word or walked funny or whatever. So, I can be my own self. That is my biggest advice I can give to people. Just be yourself. Talk about what you want to talk about. Whether you are mad at your mom and dad because they are on your case for moving out, or whether you want that job at CVS and they won't allow you, talk. That is what self advocacy is all about.

Caldwell: That is good. One other thing I thought of that we didn't talk about was some of the awards you were showing me. Do you want to talk about some of the awards and things you have got?

Weintraub: I guess the Elizabeth Boggs Award. It was the biggest award. I met her when I was living in New Jersey. I met her with Pat Gerke. We got in this heated discussion about closing institutions and she was obviously not for closing institutions. She was a parent. This was when I was just beginning, so it was probably the first meeting I went to at the Boggs Center. And I was kind of shy because I was new and I am always shy in the beginning. Elizabeth Boggs is someone I look up to. Looking back on that experience –and I never really thought about it until right now –that might be why I say that everybody needs to do what they believe in. Elizabeth Boggs was a great leader and whether or not you believed in what she believed in, even in the 1980s and when she died, she was still a great leader. That is what leadership means to me. As a leader, you need to stand up whether or not someone believes in you and you can't back down.

Caldwell: So, she was for keeping institutions open?

Weintraub: Yeah.

Caldwell: Did you say something to her at that meeting to her?

Weintraub: Yeah, I said, "I have never lived in an institution, but don't understand why people live in an institution."

Caldwell: That is interesting. Then later you got the Elizabeth Boggs Award. And you were honored because she was a great leader?

Weintraub: Yeah. The other award was helping AAIDD. To me truthfully honest –and I don't like to brag about myself –but I was the one who really helped them change their name. I was their presidential advisor and this was when David Coulter was there. I knew him from Boston. I knew his wife. He asked me to be his advisor. At their leadership meeting I stood up and I said, "I know why self advocates don't like this organization." And they said, "Why?" I said, "Because of the name." There is this story I share with everyone. I compare the "N" word with the "R" word. Can I share it?

Caldwell: Yeah.

Weintraub: When I was about nine years old we had this wonderful housekeeper. She is no longer a housekeeper but she is a really, really wonderful lady. She is a super lady. She is African-American. After speech therapy –if I was good I got to a store –we were shopping and buying a toy and when we got to the checkout I said the "N" word pretty loudly. She stared at me. In the car she yelled at me and yelled at me. When I got home, my sisters punished me and talked with me. Her name was Madge. My sisters explained why they were yelling at me. They punished me. I don't really remember what my parents did when they got home, but I imagine it was something horrible. I can never imagine my parents hitting me, but. You could gather what they did. I related that story back to the "R" word. African-Americans don't like the "N" word but I didn't know what I was saying. I could have said "nice" or "blue shirt." I didn't know what I was saying. People who use the "R" word constantly; I believe they don't understand what they are saying. They say that because that is what they have been taught. I told that story to the leaders and from then on they wanted to change the name.

Caldwell: That is a great story. A couple more questions and these are just general questions. What beliefs sort of guide your life?

Weintraub: That people are treated fairly. That everyone is good. I guess it comes from my life, my experience that I wasn't treated any different. I am just as good as anyone else. The first time I realized I was different was when I went to Riverview. I was having issues –because elementary school was wonderful.

Caldwell: When you look back on life, do you think there are any lessons you learned?

Weintraub: That I can't be any different than anyone else, that I can't be getting any special treatment. Waiting in line –I have four sisters and we all deserve equal time.

Caldwell: When you think about your future and where you want to go, what are some of your personal goals for the future?

Weintraub: I have always wanted to write a book.

Caldwell: About what?

Weintraub: Advocacy. I love to write stories. I just finished writing a story about parents that have one kid with a disability and two kids without a disability. They were discriminated against and finally got a job with an advocacy organization. So I like to write stories about that kind of stuff. I am not sure where I want to go. I often dream about being a disability policy person for the government. I have always wanted to do the Kennedy Fellowship. But right now... I knew that I wanted to get married. I knew that. I bugged people to get married; I knew that I bugged people. I don't have a passion like that now. Yeah, it would be neat to be the Kennedy Fellow. Yes, it would be neat to be a government person like a Judy Heumann or in disability policy like Bob Williams, but nothing like I did four or five or seven years ago when I wanted to get married.

Caldwell: You seem pretty happy where you are at right now in life.

Weintraub: Yeah.

Caldwell: Was there anything else? I know we skipped around a lot but I think we covered almost all the questions. Is there anything else that you can think of that we didn't get into and you want to talk about?

Weintraub: I never really talked about my friend Melissa. I talked a lot about Pat Gerke because I see Pat as someone who really helped me to be where I am today. I guess I didn't mention Melissa because I don't think she taught me a lot. The only thing she really taught me was that I can share things with other people.

Caldwell: Is she somebody here?

Weintraub: She is in Massachusetts. She helped me get my job in Massachusetts. She is someone that I can have fun with and pull down my hair. We can have deep conversations about the war. She helped me with 911 to see what was really going on. I come from a very sheltered family. What I mean by that is that their beliefs with the gays and lesbians are discriminatory. In some ways they discriminate more than other people do and that is kind of weird to say. Melissa has always been there to set me straight. I remember one time we were having brunch. My parents were in town. My parents came in and said to Melissa, "Oh, thank you for being Liz's friend." That really embarrassed me. I really believe that friendship has to come both ways. It is not Melissa's, or Pat Gerke's, or anybody's obligation to be my friend just because they don't happen to have a disability. They are my friends because we share something in common. That really embarrassed me and my parents always do that, say, "Thank you for being Liz's friend." Then the other thing is she was there when Pat

read this nasty e-mail, and she really helped me to see that I didn't have to be Pat's friend. I wanted to go back to Pat. I wanted to. Melissa was pushing me to say that if Pat can't see where the line is between staff and friendship then that is Pat's issue. But I really wanted to go back to Pat because I think friendship is really important. When friends got angry at me about TASH, that really hurt me. Because if you have that deep a friendship how can it break?

Caldwell: Is there anything else you can think of that we didn't get to cover about leadership or the self-advocacy movement?

Weintraub: We need to respect each others' differences and each others' beliefs; and if we can't, then why are we fighting, if we are fighting amongst ourselves? If we disagree on big issues like institutions, those are one thing, and I don't know if we will ever get beyond those issues. But if we are arguing about little issues, about who is doing the right thing or what kind of labels we are talking about –are we talking about handicapped, are we talking about clients –those are little, little issues. If we are fighting amongst ourselves then aren't we defeating our purpose? Not including everyone?