

Loren Webb interviewing Helene Ainbinder
Interview on September 29, 2022
Participants: Loren Webb, Jesse Stocking, Helene Ainbinder

Webb: Welcome. My name is Loren Webb. I am with the Washington County Historical Society. To my right is Jesse Stocking; he is also with the Washington County Historical Society. We have our guest, Rabbi Helene Ainbinder of the Reformed Movement of the Jewish faith. She is representing the Beit Chaverim Jewish Community of Greater Zion here in St. George, Utah. This is our third oral history interview, so we're really excited to be able to meet with you today, and to start off, we would like to have you just tell us your name and tell us the day, the month, and the year that you are being interviewed here today.

Ainbinder: Oh, Rabbi Helene Ainbinder of Beit Chaverim Jewish Community of Greater Zion, and I'm the Past President of the St. George Interfaith Council, and today is September 29, 2022.

Webb: Thank you. So where and when were you born?

Ainbinder: Well, I was born in New York City in 1952.

Webb: Okay. Tell us any highlights of your growing-up years.

Ainbinder: I was brought up in a traditional Orthodox Jewish home. That means the family (women and men) were separated. We kept strictly to kosher, which is how to eat properly, separating meat from dairy, and then when I was about eleven, we moved to Long Beach, Long Island, New York. And I did all my schooling from, let's say, seventh grade to high school there. And then I went on to college.

Webb: Okay. So what experiences did you have in public or private school that would help shape your character or make you the kind of person that you would become.

Ainbinder: Hmm. Well, I started out as being a fashion designer and then a merchandise buyer in New York City. I was then, then I got married and had two children, a son and a daughter. We still lived in Long Beach. Then we moved to what's known as the North Shore of Long Island in Centerport between Cold Spring Harbor, the fishing whale village, and Northport Harbor, henceforth Centerport. We're like five miles north, we're right across the Sound to Stamford, Connecticut. So after raising my children, there was a shortage of Jewish educators. What happens with demographics and people of Jewish faith and other faiths, we migrate and move to different communities. Well, the parents decided they didn't want their children going later at night, after public school, to go to religious school. They wanted them to go from the secular learning right into their religious learning. Well, men can't get out of work before 5:00, so they had to train Jewish educators. And that's how I got started. It was called a Morasha program (M-o-r-a-s-h-a), and they were teaching us

every aspect of Judaism from the Hebrew language to the Torah, or what we would call Tanakh, which is the Torah, the five books of Moses, the Nevi'im, which are the Prophets, and the Ketuvim, which is the Writings. And then we learned a little of the history of the Jewish people, the history of Israel, the Holocaust, and other Judaic subjects from Talmud, which is Jewish law.

Webb: Okay. Just to clarify, did you go to, did you attend college or just this private school?

Ainbinder: Yes. I did attend schools of higher learning. I went to Fashion Institute, I went to Hofstra University, got a bachelor's in Judaic Studies and a minor in Fine Arts. Then I went to Touro College, and it was a religious master as an educator in working with families. So if large congregations needed another rabbi but couldn't afford a rabbi, they would hire an educational director to handle the family aspects, the family services, and holidays.

Webb: Okay. So occupation-wise, were there any, some of the, what were some of the full-time jobs or locations that you did before coming, becoming rabbi here in St. George?

Ainbinder: Well, I taught in various religious schools, like Solomon Schechter, which is a part religious school, part secular school, and then I did a various religious school on Monday, Wednesday, for one congregation; Tuesday, Thursday for another; and depending upon which Shabbat, which is Friday and Saturday, I would do family services on Friday night and Saturday; and then work on Sunday morning--if there was any religious holidays, and some schools were open three days a week, whether it was Monday, Wednesday, and Sunday, or Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

Webb: Okay. So when did you become rabbi here of the Reform Movement of the Jewish faith?

Ainbinder: Not for the Reform Movement. I was ordained by the Esoteric Seminary.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Ainbinder: And I was primarily, from the Orthodox Movement I became Conservative when I married my husband, which are still traditionalists, but they are more egalitarian and inviting of women, obviously they could be women rabbis, but it was the Reform movement who were the first to ordain women as rabbis. It took another ten to fifteen years approximately for women to become cantors or hazan. These are the people who chant the prayers and the melodies that people worship with. I don't sing, but I can chant. And it was hard for women to break through the barriers and challenges of being in an all male, kind of, position, though I've been a rabbi twelve years.

Webb: So when was that, when you came here? Twelve years ago?

Ainbinder: Ten years ago.

Webb: Oh, ten years ago.

Ainbinder: Ten years ago.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: So I was already a rabbi—

Webb: Okay. So, um.

Ainbinder: Ordained.

Webb: Where, where does the church hold its meetings?

Ainbinder: We now have it in the educational building of the Presbyterian Church. They are kind enough to rent us some space, and then for the bigger holidays we've been at various larger places. Our community went from its instart in the late part of the 1990s of just a few people who were worshipping together to maybe twenty families. We now tripled in size or more; we're eighty families approximately.

Webb: Okay. So, and that's the Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church.

Ainbinder: Yes.

Webb: Okay. And where is the nearest synagogue to your location?

Ainbinder: There isn't one.

Webb: Well, would there be one in Las Vegas, right?

Ainbinder: We're hoping, the nearest to us would be Salt Lake.

Webb: Salt Lake.

Ainbinder: Or Las Vegas.

Webb: Or Las Vegas. Okay. I was going to say, Las Vegas is only two hours away, and I know from teaching in Las Vegas that there are several synagogues in Las Vegas. So, and you talked about the number of members of your church that attend your services. So when and where was the Jewish faith organized?

Ainbinder: The original concept of Judaism?

Webb: Yes.

Ainbinder: Okay. From Moses?

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: Well, really, if you go even further back, in 1900 BCE, it was Avram, or now we know him as Abraham, and he left the Chaldees, which was part of the Mesopotamia area, and traveled to a place called Canaan, and then it became Judea, and later it became Palestine, and then later it became known as Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel. So from him believing in one god, noncorporeal, all-encompassing, the creator of everything—in a nutshell. I can't take, it's like standing on one foot teaching Judaism, but I'm not. And the other thing was, Moses, when he left, if you read the five books of Moses, it would be the story of Exodus, the book of Exodus. And that developed us our freedom, and we became a nation—

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: Of people.

Webb: Okay. So tell me a little bit about the, you've already mentioned the sacred writings. Can you go back and tell us a little bit more about the sacred writings of the Jewish faith again.

Ainbinder: Well, the Torah is our five books of Moses. We go from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And then we also have a siddur for our weekly prayers. We have a siddur for the Shabbat, which is from Friday night to Saturday. And now we're in the high holidays—we just celebrated Rosh Hashanah, and this coming Tuesday evening will be Yom Kippur. We have what's known as a Mahzor. It's special prayers for those particular holidays, our highest of holidays. It's all in Hebrew. We do have transliteration, and we do have English. If I was living in France, it would be transliteration in French—

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: In French. But the majority of our holy books are in Hebrew.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: We have a Torah scroll, which is huge, and it has the same, that's all in Hebrew, whether you're Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform.

Webb: So what are your basic beliefs or tenets of the church?

Stocking: I might add a comment to clarify--

Ainbinder: Uh-huh.

Stocking: Your scriptures.

Webb: Sure.

Stocking: We talk about it commonly at Solomon's Porch.

Ainbinder: Okay.

Stocking: Pastor Jimmy just mentioned the other day that the five books of Moses and the Old Testament as Christians use and see it these days is exactly the same in the Old Testament, the 39 books of the Old Testament is the same for Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Would that be—

Ainbinder: And Reform.

Stocking: Accurate?

Ainbinder: Uh, the Christian Bible is not the same—

Stocking: Not including the New Testament, I mean.

Ainbinder: We don't do the New Testament. We didn't think there should be a new one. But—

Stocking: Right. But the 39 books as a Christian would see of the Old Testament would be—

Ainbinder: Well, we have—

Stocking: The same.

Ainbinder: The five books. So—

Stocking: So you guys just use the first five, Genesis and Exodus, that's your—

Ainbinder: Genesis, Exodus—

Stocking: Deuteronomy. Pardon me.

Ainbinder: No.

Stocking: No?

Ainbinder: We have Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

Stocking: Right. You also, you also have the School of the Prophets?

Ainbinder: We have the Prophets. See, when we couldn't teach Torah, we took Prophets that their writings and what they did corresponded to what would be related to our Torah portion so we wouldn't get killed. So, and therefore, we use The Prophets, and it's called the Haftarah, meaning when we do the Torah reading we go right into the Prophets that would relate to that Torah reading.

Webb: Which would be, we're talking Isaiah, Jeremiah?

Ainbinder: Yes.

Webb: Ezekial?

Ainbinder: All of those, the major and the minor.

Webb: The major and the minor, right.

Ainbinder: Then we have what's the Haftarah is the concluding portion of the Torah service.

Webb: And you also have, I believe you also have the Psalms, the Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

Ainbinder: Uh-huh. Psalms, Proverbs, yes.

Webb: Which you, and I'm not sure if they, if they're, if they have a—

Ainbinder: Okay, there's also—

Webb: A category there.

Ainbinder: There's also Five Megillot, the, we, I know everybody knows the Book of Esther, which is our Purim, and we dress up in costume, and that's interesting. We celebrate that she helped save 127 provinces of Jews under the Persian Empire. So you, if you can figure in modern times from Turkey all the way up to Judea, that's a lot of Jews that this woman saved. Then we have the Book of Ruth, which was the first convert to Judaism. So because she converted, Ruth, she was a Moabite, one of our strongest enemies, she gets married to Boaz, and [from] Boaz, we get King David.

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: So Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David.

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: So, well, there's religious history, historical history, if you're of any faith, you believe in your religious history. But if, like I teach at the University, so I teach historical history because I don't teach religion.

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: [Unclear word]

Webb: So tell us a little bit about the persecutions of the Jews where or how that came about.

Ainbinder: I'll start, there's so many, but I'll start with one of the ones that people always get confused as a holiday is Hanukkah. We don't consider Hanukkah a religious holiday because it was way after the Torah was codified. And we were fighting to be, fighting against being Hellenized by the Greek and the Assyrian's Empire. And we obtained our freedom. We minted coins, and we took 25 years to win that war for religious freedom. Other than that, we'd all be Greeks and studying polytheistic gods and deities. After that, there, we had the first destruction of our temple, and then we had the second destruction of our temple in Jerusalem, which now stands a mosque. We had, of course, one of the major ones—

Webb: Can I—

Ainbinder: Sure.

Webb: How did that happen, that—

Ainbinder: From conquerors.

Webb: You said that, okay, from conquerors.

Ainbinder: We had, first, the Greeks, then the Romans, and they destroyed whatever they could. The Romans took back a lot of things from our Holy Temple, and desecrated it, and we had to re-clean it up and build it again. We were exiled into Babylonia, so if you ever hear about the Babylonia Talmud, and then you have the Palestinian Talmud. Both are, both we use, which are Jewish laws and writings and all, but the Talmud of the Babylonians is bigger and more major in its contents than the, not to belittle the Palestinian, but these are sacred writings, as well. But the biggest persecution was the Holocaust. We start hearing little by little about what was going on in Germany when the Jewish people tried to help our people that were suffering in Germany. We didn't have a bigger voice like we have today, and we lost five million innocent men and women and over one million children just because of their Jewish faith. They were tortured and killed in concentration camps. It bothers me today, as many Jews, that people could just flippantly use terminology unbeknownst to their, they have no knowledge, whether you're calling somebody a Hitler or you're saying Fascism or you're saying Communism, just know that Nazism and Fascism, it didn't come

overnight, it did it in little stages, and it killed six million Jewish people. The World War II killed over twelve million.

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: Christians died protecting Jews or, or their faith. The Romanys or the Gypsies died, people of disabilities died. Fascism, Nazism, it's horrific.

Webb: It is, and I've just been watching the Ken Burns special--

Ainbinder: Yes, a lot of people. Yes.

Webb: On the U.S. and the Holocaust, and I just, you know, it's, it's, it's enlightening, and it's also frustrating to see the United States and its policies towards immigration which, apparently, had they opened up their immigration there would have been a lot more Jewish immigrants that would have been saved during that time period.

Ainbinder: But you have to look, I, I always say I look, when I teach history at the University and the students will know, I teach the whole world history of what was going on at the time. So you have to understand from World War I, Germany loses. Jewish meant what for Germany? They were part of the German army. So they never could realize or fathom that when we're fighting another war, that we wouldn't be part and parcel of the German people, but we weren't, as we learned. The other thing with that, we also had October 29, 1929, the Crash, where everybody, the whole world, was thrown into a—

Webb: Great Depression.

Ainbinder: A depression. So you're having people struggling in each country that, would you take on so many thousands of people? No. The boat to nowhere.

Webb: The St. Louis.

Ainbinder: Right.

Webb: The St. Louis ship. Yes.

Ainbinder: One of my relatives did get off in Cuba.

Webb: Oh, they were one of the lucky ones.

Ainbinder: One of the, one of the—

Webb: There was like twenty some-odd that were allowed off.

Ainbinder: Right. And that included the half brother of my grandfather. The other eleven brothers and sisters were slaughtered. All our family were slaughtered in Bergen-Belsen. My father was one of General Patton's medical team. He had nine bronze stars, a silver star, five purple hearts, liberating the last camp, he never practiced medicine again. Through his traumatic experience, Patton, General Patton at the time and his colonel sent him to what was known as Palestine and wanted him to glean information for, I guess, General Eisenhower. I only got bits and pieces of information when he was fluent enough to speak, I mean a shout out to Steven Spielberg, I'm sorry he wouldn't speak to you. Even his secretary kept calling because he was developing the picture, the liberators of the concentration camps, and he wouldn't talk. We would get snippets of his information. But it wasn't until 1987, so I was a lot older, and he said it, the Coptic Christians were being killed in Beirut, and he says, what a beautiful city, just like Havana was in the '50s. I said, "How would you know?" And that's how I found out information. "Well, I was supposed to find out what was going on between the Jewish people, the British, and the Arab's community." He didn't call them Muslims, he called them Arabs back then. And then I was to bring back the information." And he did. I don't know the rest, but he went back on the Queen Mary back to the, to America, and then started working for his father. If you ever look at archives, which you do, and you're in historical, if you look at Hester Street and you see that kosher butcher shop with the little—

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: With the man with the cart with vegetables, that was my great grandfather. That was his butcher shop, and the pushcart with the vegetables, that was my great-uncle who was married to one of my grandmother's sisters.

Webb: Okay. So what are, what are some—

Ainbinder: That gives you some background.

Webb: What are some lessons that we can learn from the Holocaust and relate that to, and not just the Jewish, but all religions.

Ainbinder: No, to everybody. And there's Elie, I've met Elie Wiesel. He told me I should keep doing my work on behalf of the Jewish people, and he thanked me for that. And to never be silent and never forget. But what does it mean to be silent? You could still do things, even though you're going to risk your life, and many people did. And today when I find people are telling me, well, I shouldn't say this, or I shouldn't say that, or I shouldn't write this, or I shouldn't publish this—yes, I do speak out. I don't like when people on the House floor of Congress say anything about the Holocaust—there's no comparison.

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: It's, it's, it was when the world was silent and humanity was lost. It should never get to that point.

Webb: Right. I want to talk—

Ainbinder: Okay.

Webb: Just a little bit about the structure of the church.

Ainbinder: Sure.

Webb: As a world denomination—

Ainbinder: We call it a house of worship. We're not a church.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: And when you meet with the Muslim, they don't call it a church, either. He has—

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: We call it a synagogue. The Orthodox Traditionalists call it a Shul (S-h-u-l). The Reform Movement call it a Temple.

Webb: Okay. So you said—

Ainbinder: So there's all these—

Webb: House of faith, right?

Ainbinder: It's a house of worship.

Webb: House of worship. Okay. So as a world denomination, where is your house of worship headquartered?

Ainbinder: Well, the headquarters!

Webb: Yes, is there a headquarters?

Ainbinder: No.

Webb: Okay. Okay.

Ainbinder: I mean there is different—

Webb: So—

Ainbinder: You, you'll have the Conservative movement, the Jewish Theological Seminary is in New York City. The Reform movement, the Hebrew Union, is located, I believe, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: The Orthodox community is in Israel and all over, you know.

Webb: Okay. How is the leadership of the House of Worship structured?

Ainbinder: We have a chancellor.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: The Orthodox has Head Rabbi. Right now Israel, when it was founded in 1948, the Hardi (H-a-r-d-i) were the heads of the Jewish faith of that time and helped to organize. But now there's other diversities, and each sect, let's say the Orthodox community, they have about seventeen different divisions of people, how they worship, depending upon the rabbi. If you ever visit Israel, you will notice different yamakas. Some wear hats, some have the what we call payos (the little twirly sideburns), some have long beards, some have short beards, some don't have beards. And their leaders are different rabbis.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: And so on.

Webb: And I think we've, you've pretty well described the Jewish practices and festivals, I think.

Ainbinder: Briefly.

Webb: So, okay, unless you, would you like to go into more detail about the Jewish practices and festivals?

Ainbinder: I'd be here all day.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: But I did write, and I brought the book, it's *A Novice's Guide to the Jewish Holidays*.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: So what I did is I wrote this, like that, I wrote this for the people here because when I came here they didn't really have, they had a presidium of three people who led the

service. They had a rabbi for a short period of time who belonged to the Reform movement who gave them sort of a structure and then she moved. But it's, I guess, how do they say, God places people in places, it's *bereshet*, meant to be. Our builder noticed the mezuzah, the builder, which I put on my door, has in it the blessing of the Shema, the holiest blessing in our, the outer casing is the Mezuzah, and he says, "Well, there's another woman rabbi who lived in this little community." And I said "Where? And he said, "Here." I said, "There's only 12 houses." It was, this is what, 14 years ago when I started, we started building, and we didn't move until 10 years ago. And I told my husband, "Drive around." And he says, "You could see the mezuzah on the side of the door?" I said, "No, she put God's name on the gate," which we don't do.

Webb: Wow. Okay.

Ainbinder: And she's no longer here.

Stocking: Did you say you authored that book?

Ainbinder: Yes, I authored it.

Webb: That's really cool.

Ainbinder: So—

Webb: So, uh—

Ainbinder: What I did is I made it for diverse families because we have interfaith families, and we have Jewish people who are always afraid to ask the Rabbi questions. So it gives them a guide of the holidays. We have a Jewish calendar which is not the same as the Gregorian calendar or your secular calendar. So we start at night, our holiday, because the first thing in the beginning of the first book, "Let there be light." So obviously if God had to create light, it was dark. So we start our holidays at night.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: And we follow a 17- or a 19-year cycle, and we add an extra month to coincide our holidays at the particular season that they should be.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: So sometimes Hanukkah falls on Thanksgiving or Christmas, but they're not, like I said, one is a commemoration of a historical moment where Christmas is a very holy holiday for the Christian people, and Easter and Passover, well, Jesus sat at a table, that was his Passover seder way back in the day. And eventually Palm Sunday was designated, and then Easter Sunday was designated. But Passover falls when Passover is supposed to fall in the month of Nisan on our Jewish calendar.

Webb: Okay. Fascinating. That's so fascinating.

Stocking: So what year is it this year for you?

Ainbinder: Oh, 5783.

Webb: Okay. How is the Reform movement different from other branches of Judaism?

Ainbinder: Well, they don't keep kosher; they tend to not want to eat, separate meat from dairy. They don't wear all the garb like a tallit, a prayer shawl. Some of the rabbis won't even wear a Yalmukah. Some of the women aren't modestly dressed. They don't do a lot of Hebrew.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: Which here, even though we're stipulated as Reform because we're leading a diversity of people, I feel they should be comfortable, and we do a lot of Hebrew, which might, if you walk into another Reform movement, they might not have as much Hebrew.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: We have translations and all.

Webb: Okay. So what are your duties as rabbi of your faith, and is this a part-time or a full-time position?

Ainbinder: It's 24/7.

Webb: Okay. So it's a full-time position.

Ainbinder: It's a full-time position. I'm also a chaplain at the Regional Hospital. I have people that are on hospice. The rabbi, not all rabbis do all this. They might have an assistant rabbi, or they might have an educator director that might do some of it. A lot of rabbis, like I said, we do the prayers, we do everything that pertains to the Jewish people. We do from birth to bar bat mitzvah when the girls and boys become 12 or 13 and they take on the Jewish faith formally and they are counted in what we call a minyan of ten people. And then of course we hope they get married under the Chuppah, and they marry Jewish people, but sometimes that's not the case—in a lot of faiths people don't marry within the faith. And then we go on to other various cycles, of course death. We bury people.

Webb: What would be an average week, or what would, what would a week be like, and some, you know, of your duties, just, you know, on a daily basis, or a weekly basis.

Stocking: Maybe you could start with how many hours a week do you, do you put in, maybe?

Ainbinder: Oh, I put in a lot of hours. I wouldn't, it depends on the day, every, if I say, "Oh, thank goodness I have nothing to do," God hears me, and I get phone calls, and I'm running to the hospital, or I'm running to a rehab center or just counseling somebody who's totally bereaved because they lost a loved one.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: So each day is different, but the highlight of our week is the Sabbath. We start when sun goes down, we light our candles.

Webb: That would be Friday?

Ainbinder: Friday night.

Webb: Friday night.

Ainbinder: We light our candles, we have a kiddush cup we pray over the wine, and we have a halwa, which is a braided bread. But this week because of the rosh hashanah and yom kippur we have challah that's in the round because it's supposed to denote that it's the circle of life, the Torah never ends, and instead of dipping our halwa in salt during the week of this regular Sabbath, we now dip it in honey.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: Because it should be a sweet new year.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: And then it ends, we break our Sabbath on Saturday night when it's dark and we see three stars, but now of course we could calculate when sun goes down, and we have a braided candle and we say a prayer, so we separate the sacred from the secular, the regular work week.

Webb: Okay. What are the physical boundaries of your house of worship, if any?

Ainbinder: A boundary?

Webb: Yes, do you have any?

Stocking: A congregation.

Webb: A congregation, do you have any physical boundaries for your congregation? Like in the LDS church they have wards and stake, stake boundaries and, um.

Ainbinder: Well, in the Orthodox community they would have what's known as an eruv. They would have an imaginary string or they would actually put up, if you go to Borough Park or if you go to a very ultra orthodox community in Beer Sheva in Jerusalem area in Israel, you could even push a baby carriage, you can't drive a car. But you're not allowed to carry, you're not allowed to do a lot of things on the Sabbath. I don't have a boundary here.

Webb: Okay, okay. I just, I was just curious.

Ainbinder: That's okay, no, no, that's fine.

Webb: So what is it like ministering in a community that's, you know, consists mostly of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

Ainbinder: Well, they practice their faith, we practice ours. It's like any other city or state or country. We get along with everybody. We are, we have our services open to all. Now of course with what's going on in the world we do have a security system. Most houses of worship have, unfortunately, security systems put into place, and each one, we don't discuss the security. We want people to feel this is a holy space, they could feel at ease, and they could pray to God.

Webb: Okay. During this time, have you been asked by representatives of other organizations such as clubs, other faiths, or government bodies, to serve in any community capacities?

Ainbinder: Oh, yes. I met with the former Governor Herbert of Utah at the Interfaith Council luncheon and just recently Governor Cox asked me to deliver the opening prayer for the Interfaith Council up in Salt Lake. So I do that. I've met with Senator Mike Lee when he was concerned about what was going on in the faith community during Covid with the Interfaith Council. Not all members came because they felt it was political. I said, no, it's a, it's a leader. It doesn't matter Republican, Democrat, liberal, whatever, he's for our community, and he wants to know our challenges and our successes. I told Senator Lee I'm not closing my house of worship. If you could keep Costco and Walmart open, I think that was a big mistake. The houses of worship, many people needed that, that safety, that continuation of their religion, and it was detrimental to our communities. And I said, if I get arrested like the guy in Connecticut, in Canada, you're bailing me out. So he laughed.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: But I do deliver prayers, along with all the Interfaith Council members, for the Mayor's office here in St. George, for the Washington [County] Commissioners, Santa Clara is the latest, and I think the Washington [County] Commissioners also want us to deliver prayers. I was asked to deliver an opening prayer for Patriots Day before 9/11. I've delivered, I'm delivering a prayer again for the veterans at the cemetery in December.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: So we do get asked, the clergy, whether it's the rabbi sitting here or it's a minister, a reverend, a pastor, we're asked to participate in the communities, and we're glad to show the diversity—

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: Of faith.

Webb: Good. How and when did you become affiliated with the St. George Interfaith Council?

Ainbinder: About ten years ago. Nadine Barish, she was the representative, and she brought me to the Interfaith Council of St. George, and then eventually the congregation says we want one person, and you're our rabbi, so you're going to be our representative.

Webb: Okay. Can you tell us how the Reform movement of the Jewish faith first came to Washington County and who were the principal leaders or rabbis over the years?

Ainbinder: It was Rise Bausch, and she and Ellen Nathan started and Nadine Barish started to have a small group of Jewish people praying together. Then, oh, Rabbi Baum, I think her name was, was here for a year or two, uh, not, you know, and then moved back to San Diego.

Webb: Okay. So what goals do you see for your faith in Washington County?

Ainbinder: Well, that we could grow and help the community. I have, like, Ellen Nathan, helps with the veterans association. I have other members that help the Switchpoint people. We, the Jewish people, work in various places. We have people in the St. George Regional Hospital and other facilities of rehab centers and short- and long-term living facilities. We have ham operators who are helping, I think, this weekend, with the race that's going on. We walk for the CROP walk, which is part of Reverend Ralph Clingan's Presbyterian church where we raise funds for people in the Third World countries but hungry people here. We raise funds for Solomon's Porch. So when I said to Mike Lee, Senator Mike Lee, that you shut us down? We give out food in boxes from Grace Episcopal Church. But we can't, if you shut us down. A woman named Donna MacBean was so concerned with hunger for children that she developed a backpack program for the weekend. So when we shut down, I, Tim Martin, my secretary at the time of St. George Interfaith, and Carole Drake of the St. George Catholic church, how are you getting, you know, your whatever, the sanctuary, the what she does for communions and whatever for their Sabbaths. And they couldn't do it. I said that's horrible, but Donna MacBean said, we commandeered, people volunteered buses, and we go out Monday, Wednesday and Friday delivering food. And we gave whoever came to the buses, whether they had

children in the school or not, we were feeding the hungry. The same with Solomon's Porch and Grace Episcopal. We couldn't meet, and I said that was so sad.

Webb: It is sad. It's hard to—

Ainbinder: And we have to deal now with the mental and physical abuse that people, children, occurred for the two years they were locked away. Our state was blessed; they went back to school right away. Businesses opened. Yes, you had to wear a mask, yes, you had to stand in line. Just like what happened after 9/11, we had to adapt to the TSA—take your shoes off, let us search you. But we do do virtual, which was Zoom, and I think a lot of congregations throughout the world are understanding that we have to now reach whoever wants to pray and worship through multi-tasking.

Webb: Right.

Ainbinder: And you could be in person, you could do it on Zoom, and bring you, we are trying to bring people closer to God and people to help their community.

Webb: Okay. So as you look back over your life, what lessons have you learned, and what advice would you like to share with others?

Ainbinder: Well, growing up and being attacked at eight years old by anti-Semites and saving my brother's life and mine, learning how to protect myself, my son was being attacked at an early age, too, by neo-Nazis in our community. So I had to deal with that. My children are very well aware that you have to protect yourselves. You have to not be silent. And this goes for any faith. I shouldn't have to take off my yamaka, but I do. It's the safety not only for me, but whoever might be around me. And that's a sad statement because it is the United States of America. But the vitriol hate that's spewed, whether it's one side or the other, that has to stop. I don't care [whether] you're from this party or that party. I was once during a very hot-tempered moment in a specific incidence where somebody calls me a bigot, a racist, not including not all people, I said out of all the faiths, we're the smallest in the world. Out of the smallest communities, a woman rabbi is the smallest. And if I have to hate anybody, I have people who are various colors in my family, various faiths in my family, and now I have to say various gender preferences, so I would have to hate part of my family, and I don't. I accept everybody as they are, and that's how everybody should be.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: And they should—

Webb: Um, go ahead.

Ainbinder: So that's lesson learning.

Webb: Is there anything else that you would like to tell the interfaith community or anything that we haven't asked you that you would like to tell us?

Ainbinder: Well, I think the interfaith community knows me very well, but I know I deliver prayers on January first for Prayer Over the City. I know one clergy heard something, and I said, you know, if I have to stop praying in my faith in the way I want to pray because somebody doesn't like to hear from a Jewish person, that's sad for them, but I will not stop delivering prayers on behalf of the Jewish people. You have to stand up for your faith. And you'll be interested in one of the wards, I was speaking to teenagers and their parents, and there was a bishop there, I think it was ward, well, whatever the ward was. And one of the children came up, "Did you ever think of changing your faith?" And that's a very good question. I said, "If I'm happy being who I am, and I'm happy with my faith, why would I want to change? And just like you're happy with your faith and doing what you're doing within your faith, why would you ever want to change?" So I left it at that. So, and I did lecture at one of the other wards, I think that was in the stake at Bingham, Brigham Young, that area the stake there, on Passover. And I was invited to another ward to do an actual Passover Seder. They brought in kosher food from Salt Lake. They showed me the hechshers and the this and that. I said, "Oh, I haven't seen chicken schmaltz since my grandmother. I feel my arteries hardening." They were so, I mean, this is interfaith at its best. When like I was Jewish president of the congregation of the St. George Interfaith Council, now Carole Drake of the St. George Catholic Church is the president, and the new vice-president of the St. George Interfaith Council is Shadman Bashir of the Islamic faith. I said, you got the three monotheistic faiths living here in your town, and we're all working and friends and are living together in peace.

Webb: And that's awesome.

Ainbinder: That's how—

Webb: Jesse, do have any questions?

Ainbinder: If you have any more?

Stocking: Yes, I might ask if you could give us a few highlights, some of the things you've liked in your time in the St. George Interfaith Council over the years.

Ainbinder: Oh, the acceptance and the being just one of the people. I remember when I first came here I kept on saying, "You know, I'm a woman rabbi," and they kept on saying, "We see that you're a woman, and we know that you're the rabbi." So then I just stopped saying that. But you know, because it's so hard for a woman to be accepted as a clergy in a lot of faiths. And that I did have to go through a lot of school and education. I did work on a grant with the Israelis for close to eight years bringing better understanding with the synagogues and schools in New York area with the TALJ schools in Jerusalem, and then I also started environment

programming with the Israelis and the Jewish people in New York. But one of the programs which I'm glad they are still doing is Yad by Yad (Y-a-d), hand in hand, where Palestinian children, mothers, both the Palestinians and the Israelis, are meeting, trying to have better understanding of each other, and maybe will bring peace through that way.

Webb: Okay.

Ainbinder: So, um, it's things that, but for doing all that I do for the Interfaith Council, I find that it's a wonderful way to express Judaism because we believe in tikkun olam to repair the world. So if you're doing g'milut chasadim acts of loving kindness within the community, I don't ask somebody when they're hurt if you're Republican or Democrat, if you're Jewish or not Jewish. I just want to help you.

Webb: Great.

Ainbinder: And that's how it should be.

Webb: Thank you.

Ainbinder: Thank you.

Webb: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us.

Ainbinder: Thank you.

Webb: And this has been really an enlightening interview. I've learned a lot, and I'm sure Jesse has, even though he works with you on a regular basis.

Ainbinder: Oh, and I also teach at the Institute for Continued Learning right here at the Utah Tech. And I'm also an artist for the Southern Utah Artist Guild, and my art work was at the Eccles Center. It's been in the St. George Museum, and it's at the Red Cliffs Gallery here in St. George.

Webb: It sounds like you're involved with a lot of neat community—

Ainbinder: Yes, and I meet a lot of people, and it's very rewarding.

Webb: Yes.

Ainbinder: I think that would be a good thing.

Webb: All right.

Ainbinder: Thank you so much for asking.

Webb: Thank you for taking the time. We, again, we want to thank those of you who have joined with us, and we really appreciate that and this opportunity, and until we meet again. Thank you so much.

Ainbinder: Thank you.