Interviewee: Judy Weiser

Interviewer: Norie Guthrie

Date of Interview: 2018-11-07

Identifier: wrc15499

Interview Transcript

Norie Guthrie: My name is Norie Guthrie from the Woodson Research Center at Fondren Library at Rice University. I am interviewing Judy Weiser. Today is Wednesday, November 7th, 2018. This is part of the Houston Folk Music Archive Oral History Project. Can you tell me about your early life?

Judy Weiser: I certainly can, but I don't think you have enough hours. Um, I was born in Houston, uh, to parents who were Jewish and, um, uh, immigrants from, uh, Romania and Russia. Um, I grew up in a, a family that was very conservative. I'm an only child. Um, I didn't know much about the world out there until I got older and was in school and started meeting other people. Um, we lived close to the Jewish synagogue and the Jewish Community Center, which I know is going to come up later in our conversation, and when I was 10, we moved to, um, Braes Heights, which is the southwest part of Houston, and I started attending junior high school at Pershing and then high school at Bellaire. Um, I had a pretty ordinary life at that point. I consider I was sheltered. I didn't know there was much else out there, and as I got into high school and started meeting other people, um, you know, fellow students, uh, some of whom I think are in your archives. Um, I'm still in touch with some of the people I went to junior high school with: Thorne Dreyer, Dennis Fitzgerald who, uh, um, worked on and in, around newspapers. Thorne, of course, was *Space City!*, but, you know, I knew them as people, and I just sort of went to school every day and came home. I then started to know more and more people in high school, uh, the nerdy kids. Um, being Jewish in Houston in those days was not far from being Black. The Ku Klux Klan made sure that the Jewish people were hassled a lot, and I grew up knowing I wasn't white and the, the consequences of that, I think, informed a lot of my interest in later politics and protests and, uh, anti-discrimination stuff and all of that, and because I was one of the, the smart kids, the nerds, um, on the debate team and all of that through high school, I started being, um, in a, a group of people that were sort of self-selected, um, um, we were different, and we knew it and it was okay, but other people weren't too sure they liked us, and that was all right. So, I, I entered, uh, high school. I graduated in '63. I started, um, after, uh, a side trip, uh, with the wrong university, I started into Rice. I graduated Rice in '67. Um, at Rice, um, it's hard to believe, but in those years it was free and it was not integrated, and in my third year of university, the first Black students, African American students, came in and, um, I thought it was great. I worked with the Foreign Students Associations, so to me it was, like, more interesting people, and then I watched what they went through, and I got very quickly sensitized to, uh, a bit more awareness of injustice and all of that. So, through going to Rice, um, I was majoring in psychology and anthropology. Um, I was still being Jewish, going to synagogue with my parents, doing things in the community, and the Jewish Community Center which was near Hermann Park, um, had a bunch of activities. I had gone to summer camp there as a kid, and they

started having folk music. Uh, I don't know if it was every Sunday night or every, yeah, I don't know, but they used to have folk music concerts, and I, I sing. I was in my own kind of uh, or a, a different kind of, uh, folk music group and dance group for the, you know, Jewish folk music, uh, and so when they started doing folk music things at the, at the, Ja, Jewish Community Center, I went most of those evenings. I met very interesting people, um, some of whom appear in, in my later life when the events are going on that we're gonna be talking about that I photographed. Um, I met a whole lot of people who sang or liked to listen to people singing and play guitars and, um, gee, wow, it was a new world for me, and I think that's where some of my interest in folk music started. Um, you're interviewing me about the fact that I'm not a folk musician. Uh, I'm a groupie. I, I went to a lot of the things, and I photographed what caught my eye. I photographed the moments I wanted to hold onto from what I was seeing people do and hearing them sing, and so in the early part of my life, I was not a photographer. I was just like anyone else. I had a camera. You know, we went on trips. I took pictures of things I wanted to keep memories of. Uh, in my field it's called “me at.” You know, me at the zoo, me at the Grand Canyon, whatever, but I had no interest in, in art photography in those early years. So, that's sort of my early life. I don't know when you want to interrupt me with your next question, so you, it's your turn now.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. So, um, you said that you started to do, um, you were in, like, a little folk music group. What first, actually, drew you to folk music? Why did you like it?

Judy Weiser: I have no idea.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Judy Weiser: Why did you like it? Yeah, I, I go about my daily life. The things that interest me, are fun, I go do more of.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Judy Weiser: I know that, um, when I went to high school, I did have a car, and so I would go out to events that were happening. I'm trying to remember when I started going over to Hermann Park on Sundays to listen to people jamming in the park. There, there was a whole period of time where on Sundays people who played folk music, um, would go over to Hermann Park and, and gather in certain locations there, um, often more than one gathering per day. Um, and I used to go and listen and sit there and think oh, this is cool, I'm meeting those interesting people I wouldn't meet any other way and listening to them play, and there was a lot of, um – I guess it was the early hippie years or people were, were be, becoming aware that there's a bigger world out there, and Hermann Park's sort of a melting pot, and if you go there on Sundays you meet really interesting people. Um, there were a lot of white folks, um, primarily guys. There were also the occasional group of, you know, two or three or four, um – the word I use is Black because that's how I grew up – African American, um, really good musicians doing a bit more jazzy things than folk music, and everybody sort of had their own little territory on the hill there and you'd just sort of go and sit down and listen for a while and wander off, listen to someone else. Um, I don't know that I knew why I was becoming interested in it. I think it was just something that I liked to do and then so I did it.

Norie Guthrie: Okay. Um, you had talked about going to, um, folk concerts at the JCC.

Judy Weiser: Yes.

Norie Guthrie: Do you remember who you saw there? Can you, maybe, describe what the room was like when you would hear them?

Judy Weiser: You're asking me – I am 73 years old – you're asking me about something that started when I was about 17 or 16. Um, the building, as I remember it, was, I think, a two-story rectangular building. You went in the door at one end and then you turned left, and there were all these rooms down the hall and there was two floors. There was a swimming pool in the back. I remember going to summer camp there. I believe they had a little restaurant, but the concerts that I remember going to in the evenings, were at the far end of the hall down on the left and either upstairs in that location or on the main floor, and I don't remember. Um, I do remember the room was fairly big, and anybody was welcome. Um, I would go and just whoever was gonna be there – I don't remember even if it was formal concerts or just people getting together and playing. I mean, I really have a very vague memory of that. I did meet people there, um, one of whom comes to mind as Rita Shelton, um, who was, ba, basically, um, very brave young woman. She was a Black woman from southeast Houston. Her house, her, her family lived near the University of Houston, and she played and sang, and she was really good and we became friends and, you know, in those days, um, I could go to her house and her mother loved me, but I wasn't allowed to bring someone Black to my house, which I thought, for, considering my family was Jewish and immigrated to escape oppression, uh, was rather odd, but that's how things were in Houston in those days. Uh, Rita went on to become Rita Shelton Deverell, and she lives in Toronto, and she works in public television, and, actually, until recently, I haven't been in touch with her in a while, but we stayed in touch for years. Um, I met, um, I can't remember if that's where I met, uh, Amy Goodenough, who later sang as Crow Johnson, because we were also at the same school, and we became really good friends when we were about 13. So, I think she just started going there with me occasionally. Um, I don't remember who I saw there, specifically, possibly Leadbelly, I don't know because that began to blend in my university years with going over to a home in the Montrose where Peter Gardner and his partner Mary Helen Kuhne – and her nickname was Mache for her, MH, Mary Helen. Uh, they had a home in the Montrose, and it was a place that everyone went. I think on Wednesday evenings where they just opened their living room up to whoever wanted to come and jam, and I believe Lomax, Alan Lomax, John [A. Lomax, Jr.], uh, was there recording most of those for future archives which I never even understood. I just went and sat on the floor in the living room and listened. Um, I don't remember who I met at the JCC versus who I met at Peter's, but I think Peter arranged the concerts at the JCC, so it, it, a little bit confusing.

Norie Guthrie: You are correct. He was the director of adult activities at the Jewish Community Center.

Judy Weiser: Huh, okay.

Norie Guthrie: And then he was also, um, having those kind of, uh, uh, pickin' parties at his house and then –

Judy Weiser: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: – recording “The Sampler” which was his radio show.

Judy Weiser: Yes. I remember that name now. Thank you.

Norie Guthrie: Uh, we just got in, um, his reels. His son had sent them off, and we had them digitized, and now we have those recordings. So those pic –

Judy Weiser: Wow!

Norie Guthrie: – those things, those recordings that you're talking about, we might actually have those where you were sitting listening.

Judy Weiser: Hopefully I didn't make loud noises.

Norie Guthrie: Well, I don't know. I haven't listened to everything yet.

Judy Weiser: I was rather well-behaved in those days. I didn't become a radical until much later.

Norie Guthrie: Um, well then, can you, um, you've talked a little bit about them going to, um, Hermann Park. Can you talk a little bit more specifically, if you remember, about going to Peter Gardner’s house, what it –

Judy Weiser: Okay.

Norie Guthrie: – was like?

Judy Weiser: Okay.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Judy Weiser: Well you, you walk in, um, old Montrose house, um, living room main floor, kitchen in the back, um, it's just a Montrose house.

Norie Guthrie: Would everybody kinda just gather in the living room?

Judy Weiser: Yeah. The couches got filled first, and then the chairs and then the floor, and it went on for hours, and then people eventually left. I don't know; I had heard that they went on afterwards into later-night more serious jamming, but I had to get home.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Judy Weiser: I had a curfew.

Norie Guthrie: Do you remember any of the people that you met there? Or is it kinda just a little hazy.

Judy Weiser: Va, vague.

Norie Guthrie: Vague, okay.

Judy Weiser: There are people I know I saw them on Sundays at the park. I saw them later at concert. I don't know the names, um, I know, when people came through to perform, they would end up there, like, if some – I, I know, I remember Leadbelly, you know, was, had been in town and was there one evening, um, no, no, can't –

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Judy Weiser: – mem, memory's not workin' there, sorry.

Norie Guthrie: That's okay. That's all right. Um, so I assume, then, at the same time you were doing this, uh, about the time that you were going to Rice, correct, that you were attending Rice?

Judy Weiser: Yeah. Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Um, did you see kind of a connection between this, like folk life and your Rice life, or were they very kinda distinct and different?

Judy Weiser: Boy, that's a good question. Um, sometimes you don't think of things until you're asked later in retrospect. Um, I was simply living my life and going to school and going to folk music events 'cause they were fun. Um, I think that the whole time I was at Rice, I was waking up intellectually, um, becoming more aware of, you know, the nice little comfortable suburban life I was living was not the life everyone had. Um, this was the 60's and I, I was not originally a hippy political activist. It just, over the 4 years I was at Rice, more and more things were happening. I mean this is, like I said, it was the 60's. Politics were starting. Protests were starting. Uh, injustices were starting. Um, I didn't really radicalize until the last year of Rice and after I moved away, which is the next part of my little bio, uh, but I do remember when I was at Rice that the people I hung out with, uh, my psychology student colleagues and all that, we were not an ordinary bunch of people. We, we would end up in Ri, at Rice in the, in the cafeteria, eating room, whatever you call it, um, for hours of political discussions and debates and, you know, intellectual chat. You know, we, we got into, to long conversations 'cause enjoyed them, um, and I think the last year I was there, I think that's when Ken Kesey's Magic Bus came through Rice.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: And I hadn't even no idea who it was or what it was, and I, I sorta went over to see what it was. It was all these weird people called hippies. Um, I wasn't one yet, so, you know, when I graduated Rice in 1967 in June, um, I was still a pretty conservative person. Um, I was

engaged to marry the young man that I had been dating all through university, David Weiser, which is why my last name is Weiser. Um, I graduated one week; we got married the following week. He enlisted in the Air Force. I thought it was the right thing to do, so like, I was still pretty conservative, um, and you know, 6 weeks later he went off to basic training in San Antonio, and I'm living sort of by myself in our apartment in Houston, having never lived alone, haver, having left my parents when I was to, to marry and go live in, with him, uh, still very sheltered. So my, my, my years at Rice were not terribly connected with the later, like I said, radical hippy that I became.

Norie Guthrie: Okay.

Judy Weiser: It started after that.

Norie Guthrie: So that's cool. There's, there's not always, there's never been a lot of radicals at Rice, so –

Judy Weiser: They would have been –

Norie Guthrie: – it's pretty tame.

Judy Weiser: – very well-hidden.

Norie Guthrie: Yeah.

Judy Weiser: It was just a phase.

Norie Guthrie: Um, so you had just moved on to talking about, um, your husband enlisting, and then you both, um, you moved on to New York with him.

Judy Weiser: Yeah.

Norie Guthrie: Can you explain the events that caused the move in your life there?

Judy Weiser: Yeah. Yeah, um, he was in the Air Force. He would not have been drafted. He really, you know, we, like I said, I campaigned for Barry Goldwater for God sakes. You know, we were conservative Jewish young adults, um, and so he, uh, enlisted in the Air Force. Because he was an architect, architecture student, um, they put him in the engineering, so it wasn't, he was in active duty, and they stationed him in Plattsburgh, New York, which we had never heard of. Um, it's almost in Canada. It's north of New York City, north of Albany, 30 miles from Canada, which becomes very relevant later, um, because we learned about politics from the Canadian news as well, and it sure didn't match the U.S. reports. Um, so we moved to Plattsburgh, New York, um, late summer, early autumn of '67. Um, uh, he was my husband; that was my job. I was his wife, you know, I mean, uh, you just do, you do what you're supposed to do. Um, we ended up living on an Air Force base. Um, we had a house. Um, he went to work every day and I was so bored, I finally thought well, I'll see what the graduate program is like at the State University of New York in the other side of town, and I was accepted into the Masters

of Counseling program there so I could get my Master's degree while he was in Plattsburgh Air Force Base, and I started in the graduate program, which is where I met a whole lot of very interesting people, um, a lot of people who already very radicalized and couldn't believe that I was as naïve as I was and, uh, started reading about the Vietnam War and the, all the news stories we were hearing about the good guys and how good the American soldiers were doing actually didn't match the facts that were being reported in Europe and in the Canadian newspapers, and we moved into a house on the Air Force base that had become vacant so we got have it. Um, I gotta tell you a little true story that, that wasn't in the, the written bio I sent you in the past. We were in, we, we were in housing, and then a house became available and we moved into this house where the previous owners weren't there anymore, and what they didn't tell us was that the man who had been living in this house earlier, Air Force officer, um, had been killed in the crash of a B-52 bomber in Greenland. Now you can, you can go into history, you can find this story. It did happen, um, in '67, I think, um, and the American public was told that it was a B-52 bomber; it crashed in Greenland, but there was no problem because, you know, in order to set off a bomb, it took, like four people in different places in the plane, all pushing a button at the same time and blah, blah, blah, and when we started reading the Canadian reports of this, we found out that that wasn't true, and that actually Greenland was one step away from having a nuclear bomb or a bomb of some sort, uh, explode in that crash, and this is the kinda thing started getting us to go hey, wait, um, we're being sort of not given the straight stories here. Um, that was when, um, we were there from '67 to '70, and Kent State was 1970; protests were all over the place in those years, and although, of course, there weren't protests on the Air Force base, I was going to graduate school in counseling, and I had to do practicums where I was going to counsel students in the university about their life problems, and everybody was complaining about the draft, and I'm getting ahead of myself, I just realized, because you asked me if it was hard to leave Houston at that time. No, it wasn't. I, it wasn't. You just, you, you did what you're supposed to do. I, I forgot to answer that question, so let me stop here and find out where you want me to go next.

Norie Guthrie: No, you're, you're goin' just fine. Keep, keep, forge ahead.

Judy Weiser: Okay. So, um, we're living in a house on an Air Force base, and we had friends from the Air Force, but we also had friends that were my friends in the graduate program in counseling, and they were increasingly long-haired marijuana-smoking, um, hippies that we found very interesting. They were intellectually stimulating. I got into great conversations with most of these people. Um, there would be, um, you know, radical film makers would come to campus and bring films and we'd all go. Then we'd go out and talk for hours over beer later, and we just, uh, my social network in Plattsburgh were left-leaning hippy-looking intellectual people who were very, very interesting. At that point, there wasn't any folk music going on there. It wasn't part of my life, but because I had always had a camera as a kid on trips, and taking pictures all these years of things that, you know, and basically you take pictures of things you wanna keep memories of, and I got very interested in photography, and when I was living on the Air Force base with my first husband, um, there wasn't a whole lot to do, and they had a, um, like a little community center with hobby shops and stuff. So I started learning how to use a darkroom and, and taking photos, uh, taking film and developing it, printing my photos and, um, it was great fun. It was magic to watch this piece of paper turn into a photograph right in front of your eyes in some liquid in front of you. Um, and I still, you know, I was taking photos, and I

was starting to print them, and I had them in, in the home I lived in, and having a camera with me, knowing that I can make pictures later, I started taking pictures of the events I went to, which were increasingly protest marches, um, gatherings where people got together in the park and just talked or played music or whatever. Uh, I still wasn't a photographic artist, but I began to realize that my camera was able to record moments that, that might be important later. Um, there were protest marches and I, I, I took photographs of people who were gathering, and couple of times I was able to identify the people the people that were, uh, police plants, uh, because everybody in the photograph knew who everyone else was except for that guy, who went away as soon as he started a fight going and then he walked away, that kinda thing. So I became aware that my, my camera could document, but also help tell stories that were interested in just, wherever I went I took pictures. I took pictures at parties. I took pictures of, you know, protest marches, whatever. Um, I was in a Master's degree for counseling, and I had to have supervised, uh, clinical practicum, learning how to do counseling while somebody's supervising me, and most of the people I was counseling, the unknown, were all dealing with, you know, they were trying to plan for a future and the Army wants them to get stolen away and sent to Vietnam to kill other peoples' kids, um, which is my version of, the version of the Vietnam War. I didn't find out for decades later it was all about oil and we were all lied to. At the time, we knew something was wrong, and I'm, I'm not a religious Jew, but I have some basic ethics, and some of those have to do with, uh, a similar concept that, the Quaker concept of bearing witness, that when you're around something where you know it's wrong, what's happening, you at least don't let it pass in silence. You at least make sure that the people doing the injustice know that it's been noticed and witnessed, and, and it, it can't be done in secret 'cause you're there and you're witnessing. The camera's a great tool for that. So over the 2 years that we were in Plattsburgh, um, and I was doing my counseling, uh, of students, uh, became increasingly aware that there was not a lot of information for these people about the guys, uh, about what are the legal ways to not get drafted, what is conscientious objection, how do I go to a draft board and say I honestly do not believe that I have the right to kill someone else, and I don't mind serving my country, but I'm not going to carry a gun and I'm not going to shoot someone. Um, and there was a training in New York City at a university, possibly Harvard – I don't know; I don't remember where – where whole bunch of radical draft protestors were setting up counseling to teach people how the draft board made its decisions from its own rules and how to learn those rules sufficiently to help people avoid, um, going to Vietnam, and I went to this training. I came back highly trained as a draft counselor, how to keep people from being drafted. Um, we didn't talk at that point about people who were deserting, uh, deserters from the Army or the military, but I came back to a graduate counseling program, counseling students who wanted to know about draft information, so a bunch of us set up Plattsburgh University's first draft counseling center. It was open every afternoon, and it was approved as my counseling practicum, and so being that I was a Air Force officer's wife, he was in the Air Force, not me. I was very clear about that. His supervisors and his people who later got upset with me were, were saying this is your wife, you know, reign her in, and he's like, I don't own her. She's a person. Um, I didn't know I was a feminist at that point, but I was learning quick, and I never did anything that was completely exactly illegal. I just pushed the boundaries a lot, and for example, I ran the draft counseling center with the help of other volunteers, and at that point, if I had been caught and charged with aiding and abetting a felony, which is avoiding the draft or helping a deserter get to Canada, that would have been 5 years in prison and a $10,000.00 fine, which in those days $10,000.00 about 50 or 60 thou now. I knew I was at risk, and just like any young radical hothead, it was like, this is fun and I'm

just going to be very careful, but it's not going to make me stop, and so what I did with the draft counseling center is I invited the recruiters, the, the Army recruiters to come in two afternoons a week so that the people who wanted to join the Army could get correct information, and the other three days a week, we helped people who didn't want to get drafted learn the legal ways to, to avoid that, and because I had the recruiters there two days a week, they couldn't touch me. They couldn't bust me. I'm an Air Force officer's wife providing information on both sides of the question, duh, so it was, it was, those were heady days. They were dangerous. Um, I participated in peace marches, and then there was a day where we were gonna have a peace march and no one would organize it and I did, and I led that peace march to the gate of the Air Force base. Now, I'm an Air Force officer's wife. I'm leading a peace march of hippies through town to the gate of the Air Force, uh, enclave, so things like that. At, at the time they were fun, they felt right, I felt very ethical. I felt very proud of what I was doing as a citizen with the right to protest in a country that permitted it, um, and I had them do some things that hadn't been done. That peace march, which was covered in the newspapers, we didn't shout protest. We marched 2 miles in utter silence, just holding signs, and the fact that we were silent and well-behaved, uh, totally shocked the community, and it got us speaking engagements in churches and places that we would never have been invited into any other way. Um, if I was asked if I was an Air Force officer's wife, I would say yes, and then I would go onto other conversations. I never involved him or endangered him, but I learned very quickly through all of those years that if you don't bear witness to the wrongs that you are thinking, like uh, the United States just had – I'm gonna date our interview – the U.S. big midterm elections was yesterday, um, you know, people, people are yelling and screaming, but if they don't follow through with their actions, that's just yelling and screaming, so I began to get very sensitized as the hippy leftist politics fairly radical person. Um, those years I hung out with the people everyone else thought were radical dangerous leftists, you know, pot-smoking, uh, Bolshevik-quoting, really interesting neat people. They were my friends. They were our friends, and because they were our friends, they were often at our house on the Air Force base, which they had to get through the gates and we would go bring them in, and we would have a party, and people would visit, and it was a just really weird surrealistic reality. I started doing a lot of draft counseling, and I then got involved with what is, the shorthand word for it is Underground Railroad. There were people who were deserting the military who'd been to Vietnam and just couldn't stomach it and were not, just refusing to go back to, to have to do what they did. Um, it is illegal to aid and abet a desertion from the military. Um, they were trying to get to Canada, and the reason they were trying to get to Canada, and, and also people who were trying to avoid being drafted, is that Canada, although it has an Army, it does not draft. It does not grab people unwillingly; never did, and so if they could get to Canada, they would not be criminals because avoiding the draft or deserting the military under conscious purposes was not illegal once they were in Canada physically, and my town was 30 miles from the Canadian border. I'm an Air Force officer's wife. My car has an Air Force officer's sticker on the bumper. I go through that border to go shopping in Montreal every few weeks anyway. Montreal was culture, restaurants, um, music, uh, symphonies. My husband and I went to Montreal often for social events. We were tracked at the border. We go there all the time. That car went over the border all the time. Those were the years when people hitchhiked, and I often picked up hitchhikers; never mind what their reasons were. Everybody was hitchhiking in those days, um, you know, tho, those were the years where, I mean, um, major folk festivals, the, the, the, the music gatherings, um, Woodstock, I mean, everybody was hitchhiking. Everybody, everybody was friendly. Hippies were everywhere, and often when I

drove to Montreal, I picked up hitchhikers who wanted just to go to Montreal. I never asked each of them, you know, like, oh why are you going to Montreal. I'm going shopping; if you wanna ride along, you're welcome; that's fine. There was a very carefully tuned, very carefully structured Underground Railroad that got military deserters from the South and the East Coast through New York, through Albany, through Plattsburgh, and into Canada. There were safe houses along the way, very much like the Underground Railroad for escaped slaves long ago, and those of us who were involved in it knew that we were at great risk of being arrested and charged with a serious felony, and so we were, most of us were very, very careful. It was not illegal for me to pick up a hitchhiker. Sure, I'm going to Montreal. You wanna ride along? As long as I don't know they're a deserter. And if the person who gets in my car says gee whiz, you know, thank you so much for what you're doing, it's like, I'm just going shopping. No, no; you know what I mean. No I don't know what you mean, although I did. Um, I had three instances where there was a guy that I picked up that was wearing a, uh, an, um, audio recording audiotape device, trying to, uh, bust, arrest, charge all the people who were aiding and abetting the transport of deserters to Canada, and three times I picked up innocent-looking young men who seemed really nice, and halfway there they start talking about well, you know, I really appreciate what you're doing. I'd say I have no idea what you're talking about. Well, you know I'm a deserter. You're a what? I'm an Air Force officer's wife. You gotta get out of my car right now. We're in the middle of nowhere, ma'am. I don't care. I don't take deserters over the border to Canada. I don't know who you are, but hitchhikers yeah. I literally had to go through that three times, and every single one of those times, I was the only person in the entire chain that was not arrested. That makes you question your country. It makes you question your, your, your whole life and your ethics and your values. I had my photography and my music; it had nothin' to do with this, but it made me a strong believer in bearing witness, doing what you think is right, making sure you do it legally enough to keep yourself protected, and so that is a side chapter of the me that you're gonna be interviewing in a few minutes about documenting music in Houston.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: Um, I had that part of my life firmly in mind when my husband then asked, you know, at some point, you know, conscientious objection, gee, you know, I wished I'd know about that; I wouldn't have been drafted long. You know, in those days, you would have been enlisting anyway. Well, do you think I can get out of the Air Force as a conscientious objector? Yes. Are you serious? Do you know what their rules are? I've got an envelope upstairs. It's been waiting a year for you to ask me. This is not something I should ask you. Will you, will you ask me about it of your own free will and volition? I'm ready to give you all the info you want. I've got it already for you to fill out the forms, but I would never bring it up. I, that's just my ethics, and he got to that point. He said bring me the envelope. We sat down that night. We went through it. He applied for conscientious objection discharge as an Air Force officer, and we made sure everything was complete because we knew that when he took it in to his commanding officer the next day that pardon the language, the shit was gonna hit the fan, and it did, and it spread like wildfire. I was at school. My first husband went in, turned in the application to his commanding officer at ten in the morning. I came home for lunch at the gate, and because it's an officer's car, when you drive in and the guy guarding the gate sees it, he salutes the car 'cause it's an officer's car. I drove in at noon and I got this as my salute, and I just looked at the time, and thought oh my God, it spread quickly. From that point on our mail was opened, we were followed, our

phones were tapped. We heard the stupid, the stupid people on the phone tap were having – you could, you could hear in the background the [makes clicking noise] of a, of, of a spoon in a coffee cup, and you can hear them talking. Uh, we would be on the phone, and we'd click the phone down to make another call, and we couldn't get a clear line, and you could hear someone sneeze and someone say bless you, and then would you bring me a coffee, Joe. Oh, oh, I think they're listening; click. You know, really terribly done. Military intelligence, well, the CID was really an intelligence division of the military. It's like the FBI. We were not playing small stakes, and I didn't care. I felt so strongly about if people want to enlist or people believe in something, I'll support it, but when they're being forced to do something that they don't wanna do; it's ethically against their, their, their entire morals, um, I'm, I'm on board to help. So my husband got out of the Air Force. I stayed on for 6 months to finish my Master's degree, and I went back to Houston in spring of 1970.

Norie Guthrie: And so then, –

Judy Weiser: Kent, Kent State was in 1970. That's what it –

Norie Guthrie: Right.

Judy Weiser: – was like right then.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: And for people who are watching this who are younger and don't know what Kent State is about, it's where the U.S. Army murdered a whole bunch o' students in cold blood because they didn't like the protesting. Um, that's another story for another time. I moved back to Houston from Plattsburgh, leaving behind a huge family of radical hippy friends, most of whom I'm still in touch with, um, and I missed them terribly, but I went back to Houston, not to live permanently, but so that my then-husband could do his 2-year residency as an architect, get licensed, and then we planned to move to Canada. We didn't wanna live in a country where people were literally grabbed out of their homes and sent off to do battles for old men who had oil interests, but were, were sent off to battle to kill people of their own age in another country who hadn't done anything wrong to them. We were very, very strong about that belief. We returned from New York, not the children our parents had sent off. There were several family discussions, but do you realize what you're doing? Um, when my first hus, when, when my husband first applied to get a conscientious objection discharge, his family actually sent up one of the uncles to talk him out of it, they were so worried about his future. Now, the reason is they're Jewish immigrants. They knew what happened when, when people raise up and get visible and protest. They were terrified for us. We went back to Houston. They thought we were gonna settle down and have babies and live in the Houston Jewish community, and we said nope; we're immigrating to Canada as soon as we can. It's like, we were both only children. I, uh, my parents never talk much about it. That generation of parents didn't talk much about feelings period, and you know, I look back now and think I wish my mother had asked me more. I would have been glad to tell her, but I didn't wanna, like, try to lecture her. So off we went in 1973 to Canada, but between '70, when we got back to Houston, and '73, we lived in Houston in their vicinities in Bellaire. I got a job. My, my husband was apprenticing as an architect. I got a job as

a counselor at the Inlet Drug Crisis Center that was just starting in those days. It was a place that people with drug problems, uh, questions about drugs, needing to get treatment, it was the sort of pass-through old hippy house in the Montrose. I'm trying desperately to remember the street. But Vicki Moreland, John Cleveland, Jack Kling and some of the people who later were connected with Anderson Fair crowd, uh, we were three blocks away from Anderson Fair Retail Restaurant, um, which I didn't know existed at that time. I just went in as somebody who moved down from New York. I'm a counselor. I'm a hippy. I like the feeling in here. Let's talk to the people who need our help. Inlet Drug Crisis Center was funded by the Mental Health Department, but we also got funding from the local drug dealers because we saved one of their lives. We, we don't talk about that when you do the history of that place, and one afternoon a week, I got to have a room to do draft counseling, very quietly; wasn't announced, and often the people were so paranoid that I would meet them three blocks away at Anderson Fair for coffee, and we'd sit there and do our talking. Now, I was living in Bellaire with my then- husband. He's being an architect, doing an ordinary life. I'm working as a counselor in the Montrose at a house helping people with drug problems. We sound like suburbia, except it was still radical hippy times. Now, Inlet was a place where even if you're working, you might hang around in the evenings 'cause people start jammin' music, and then I found out there's a place called Anderson Fair, so I went over there and, um, and I started hanging out there, like I said, doing some counseling there, and while I would be eating there or just hanging out there and visiting, there's all these musicians that started coming in, and Judy always has her camera. I mean, I wouldn't take pictures of the people I was counseling; that's unethical, but I'm goin' to this neat place called Anderson Fair. There's all these hippies playin' music while I'm eating lunch, and I'm gonna take pictures. So that's where I met Rebel, Reb Smith, um, Tony, who had the steel guitar, whose last name I don't know, um, I met, you know, Pat Pritchett and, and Marvin Anderson and Gray Fair, the people who did the restaurant. Pat Pritchett's then-husband and then ex-husband, who still helped out there, Joe Pritchett, uh, was an artist, and he saw some of my photos that I was showing, you know, in the restaurant, and he arranged for me to have an exhibition of my photos on the walls of Anderson Fair, and they were art photos, but there were also photos of Rebel and Tony and whoever, whatever caught my eye and landed in my camera that I thought was worth showing people were the prints that I put up on the wall there, and that was my first photo exhibition. The musicians, it was like, oh my God, that's a great picture of Rebel. Oh my God – can you do an album pic for us? Or can you do, we need promo photos – I started – because we were living in Houston, I had a darkroom in my garage, and I started taking paid gigs to photograph concerts or posters for bands, um, you know, go out to some place in the country and photograph a bunch of guys and they used it for publicity poster and album covers, and Anderson Fair had all these wonderful parties, uh, street parties, and I photographed those. I just kept showing my photos there, so I was known as a counselor and a photographer, primarily of musicians and protest marches and hippy events because at the same time, those 2 years, there were peace marches through Houston. There were anti-war marches. I have a whole bunch of photos, just part of what you and I've been talking about me donating my photos, not necessarily the music ones, but also peace marches down Main Street with, with, with protest signs in front of The Shamrock and, um, people who went to Vietnam dressed in their fatigues with toy guns, looking like they're armed soldiers, and in those days, the Black protest movement growing, um, there was, uh, a fellow named Carl Hampton who was a very, just lovely man in the Black community who was known to be a pacifist, was known to not go into a place if he knows there were guns, and the police shot him and killed him, saying he was armed, and everyone who knew him knew that

was a lie, and there was a huge protest march down Main Street. I have a lot of photos from that day. Um, some of them are gallery quality, um, and I was photographing a peace march and noticing the police on the roof of the stores across the street, and this guy didn't quite look hippy enough to be real, and I, I documented the, the undercover agents. I documented the police on the roof. I documented things that probably woulda gotten me in trouble, but I was too stupid to care, and so I was Judy with the camera. Everywhere I went, I took pictures. It happened that I went to a lot of places there was a lot of musicians, and Walter and Harry, um, Harry Oswald, Walter Spinks, um, you've already interviewed Walter, um, the people who played Anderson Fair in the evenings, I was there taking pictures. Um, I took pictures of the bands. I took pictures of the sound guys, um, I know there was just something on the folk music archive on Facebook about Shake Russell. I have a photo of his soundman. He was a friend of mine. I have photos of the early people, like Amy Goodenough, who became Crow Johnson in the – even before I went to New York. I have photos of all these people that are my friends. Uh, they were playing music, and if I didn't like their music or I didn't feel friendly, I didn't photograph them. So what I have by accident is an archive of the early years of folk music development in Houston between, you know, '70 and '73, when I moved to Canada, and when I came, when I moved to Canada, I came back every few months, and I would continue, so some of my photos are from later times, and you know, I am now, like I said, I'm 73 years old. I'm trying to downsize. I've got all these photos and all these negatives from Hermann Park and Peter Gardner's and the start of Anderson Fair, I mean, all of this stuff which I'm quite, like, you know, I've been talking about once I can find a way to get them scanned I can afford, um, I'm gonna give them, I'm gonna donate those as long as I can keep using them myself because they're part of Houston's history, but the folk music archive, for me, overlaps the protest hippy archive, and they can be separate collections, or I can donate one and not the other, but to me they're all involved because the people doing the folk music were doing things at protest gigs, and the Anderson Fair street parties where the music was happening and the dancing was happening, there were also people doing draft counseling very quietly in the background. But the parties, the street parties in Anderson Fair, I didn't just get the musicians, I got people there – for instance, I have a picture. You know, I'm sure you're familiar with Thorne Dreyer? Uh, you can grunt; are you there?

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. I'm here. I'm here.

Judy Weiser: Thorne Dreyer, *Space City!*, now in Hou, in, in Austin, Rag Radio. I have some pictures of his mother dancing at the street party there. She was an amazing woman. Um, so I've got what people usually like to see, which is really nice warm photos of really kind, nice people who played music or went to music events, and those photos were just sort of what I did. That was my art. I can't draw a dog or a horse. Uh, you give you a piece of chalk and or a, a paintbrush and tell me to draw something; it's like what do you want me to draw? You ask me, you know, do you play music? I took piano lessons as a kid. Well, you know, here's a, here's a guitar again; why don't you play? I have no idea how to play it, and if I did, I wouldn't know. I don't have that thing that most musicians have of spontaneous playing. I'm just thinking through music. I can't do it. I use a camera. So those are the years that we were back in Houston. Um, that's where a lot of my photos come from that you and I've been discussing. Um, I then moved to Canada in '73. I became a Canadian citizen in '78. And true to my radical hippy beliefs, in 1978, when I became a Canadian citizen, the same day I walked into the U.S. Embassy in Vancouver where I live and renounced, formally renounced my U.S. citizenship, and I, I, I think

back now and think, my God, woman, you actually did that. Yeah, I did. I felt very good about it at the time, but it has kept me from being able to teach without a permit in the United States. It's caused some issues around taxes 'cause I'm a Canadian citizen, but I sometimes work in the states. There's been some complications. Do I regret it? Not at all. I walked into the U.S. Embassy saying I wanted to renounce my U.S., U.S. citizenship, and they said lady, do you know what you're doing? People will pay lots of money for this, and I said give it to one of them. I really don't wanna be a U.S. citizen anymore. I felt that strongly in those years. So backtracking a bit now, uh, the community that I left in New York to come to Houston, I left because I had to and felt really sad. The community I built up in Houston before we moved to Canada, uh, I missed them terribly. I came back to visit, as you can visit; you just can't work. I came back to visit and visit my parents as often as possible. They were still playing music. I would come back 6 months at a time and who's playin' what this weekend? I'm still takin' pictures. Now, the sidebar part of this that is irrelevant to my own career, and I'm gonna do a little segue for a moment –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: – is that when I started hanging my photos on the wall at Anderson Fair, and I mean, later I've had, I've had several exhibits now in major art galleries, but in those days it was not even imagined, I would go in and sit and have a coffee while people are lookin' at my photos, and I would hear them talking about things that just, so like, oh my God, what, what is that woman doing? I can't believe there's a photo of her showin' us her tattoo on her butt, and I'm like I'm listening. They don't know I'm the photographer. What's wrong with that, sir? And, and you hear them giving their responses to the images that you know very, very well, and you believe they are seeing the photograph that you put on the wall for them to see, and I learned very quickly that the image that they are seeing, the story of that picture isn't in the picture. It's in the viewer, and many times people will be standing in front of one of my photos and arguing about oh, that, that girl must be a hooker. No, she's not a hooker just 'cause she did-. Oh no, look at that, though. I can see in her face, and they would be projecting what they believe to be the story of the photo, and I got as a psychology, uh, grad and a future psychologist, I got very fascinated that I had photos that I selected, you know, out of these ten, I put up that one because I have my reasons, and I want people to see this picture of Walter looking like this, and when those people come in as strangers to the restaurant at Anderson Fair and they look at Walter's picture, they, they aren't seeing what I thought they were going to see. They were projecting. They were looking at the visual surface details and creating the story and the emotions that they believe make that come alive in their mind and, and in their heart, and I got absolutely fascinated. So when I moved to Canada, I started exploring those more and more, and started using photos as a way to better understand people when I'm counseling them, and by then I was a licensed psychologist, and I would have people come to see me who have problems that the way they were considering the problem is very different than the way that their partner or their parents were looking at it, and I started using photos in much the same way to get them to tell me the story of the photo through their filters, their unconscious ways of understanding things in the world and therefore in a photograph, and it evolved into something called phototherapy techniques, which I published my first article on in Canada in 1975, and I have been pioneering these techniques for 30, 40 years. Um, the field is huge. It's international, with several other people; we all thought we invented it because there was no Internet in the '70s and we didn't find

each other until a conference in 1979 when here I thought I was gonna be famous for inventing something that someone else had had the exact same feelings, and, and we became a family, but there is a huge field now called phototherapy and, and therapeutic photography –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: – that, that I started. At least I thought I did, and then so did everyone else I met at that conference in 1979, but we're all friends, and together we have brought the world the ability to improve counseling and mental health practices by getting people to show you the photos that they think are important by, by looking at the family photos where they tell you their own stories of them, by having them go out and take pictures to show you things they just can't tell you in words, and I feel very proud of all that, and had I not been a photographer showing photos that I thought were obvious and realizing that they weren't, uh, my whole career as a professional wouldn't have happened. So it all goes back to photographing musicians in Houston. Now it's your turn with more questions. When I got trained in draft and military counseling in New York while I was at Plattsburgh University graduate school, and I told you I went down to the university in New York City and had my basic training, um, one of the side stories, I think I didn't even put in this typed thing, that while I was living in Houston between '70 and '73, Pacifica Radio –

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: – um, had a program run by a fellow named David Lamble, L-A-M-B-L-E, who eventually moved to California; I stayed in touch with. David Lamble was on the air, um, I think he came out as gay on air, which in those days was just like, nobody did that, um, but he ran a program I think once a week, and I don't know if it was about draft counseling or about sorta leftist politics, but I would go on the air with him on a regular basis and take calls. You know, I, I'm this, I'm that, um, you know, what would be my draft status? What regulation, so and so says this, and if you have that, you need a doctor, uh I would answer questions legally from the military's own rules, and I'm very, was very clear to say this is my interpretation of the regulations; make sure you check it out with someone in the military, but I did a weekly broadcast. I believe that was during the time that Pacifica got bombed.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: Um, we, Pacifica Radio was fairly radical and not everybody liked it. This was Houston, Texas. Um, but what I do remember is me feeling like I needed to get more information. Um, it had been, you know, 5 or 6 years since I'd had that first training, and I found out that, um, um, there was gonna be a major conference of people within draft counseling in, of all places, San Francisco, of course, um, and I wanted to attend it, and I, um, did not have the money to go, and he started talking during one of my shows, saying this one's been coming in here every week giving free advice, helping lots of people. She doesn't charge for it. She wants to go to this, uh, conference in San Francisco in a couple of months where she's gonna get a whole lot more learning and training, um, and we're gonna try to fund her trip, and he raised money online – or not online – on air, and I got to go to the conference, and in traveling to the conference, I met a woman named Tonya, a Black woman, equally radical, really neat, pushy,

wonderful woman, and we hung out during the conference, and when we got back she said you know, you do all this, all this counseling about the draft and military, all these white boys. You doing anything in the Black community? I said I, uh, would love to go in. She said well, you just can't go in there. I mean, this is University of Houston area, and that would have been the '71, '72 uh, but I, I can't just, you know, white lady get in the car and drive to that part of town and try to do somethin'. I mean, it's like, it's just, well, wasn't possible, and she said I'm gonna bring you in. We're gonna, we're gonna meet on Saturday mornings for 4 weeks with the guys that do the draft counseling training, and you're gonna train 'em. I said fine. She picked me up every Saturday morning, drove me in. I didn't find out 'til later she was armed. She had a gun and she had a knife strapped to her leg because she was expecting danger.

Norie Guthrie: Mm.

Judy Weiser: Sometimes you're just too innocent and stupid to breathe, but Tonya, you have seen a photograph of because in one of the photos I sent you of the march protesting the killing of Carl, killing of Carl Hampton, there is a black woman with a protest sign that's, um, what was the quote on it? It was a beautiful quote about – I can't remember it exactly. It's on the picture. I'd have to look it up on my computer while you go on pause. It was something about you can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill the revolution.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: That woman got me into the Black community at University of Houston to train their draft counselors. That wasn't in my little printed story. Now, one side story that I forgot to mention that I think is important, way back talking about Anderson Fair and Pat Pritchett, who was one of the first people there and did a lot of the cooking, her then-husband and then ex-husband, Joe Pritchett, who was himself an artist, whose artwork I photographed, we traded photos for artwork. Um, um, Joe and Pat had a daughter named Holly, and Holly Pritchett, you've probably seen posting messages on the Facebook groups from the archives and stuff. Holly was 8 years old when I met her, um, and Joe and I became very close friends. Holly was just like a pretend niece. We hung out all the time. He lived in the Montrose point near where Peter Gardner was living, and Holly has stayed in my life, um, and I, I made contact with Holly. We reestablished our connection. It was quite a lovely, uh, reencounter, and we're talkin' away about Pat and about old days and my photos, and she said you know, do you know this guy Bruce Bryant? He runs this thing called Ghost Films. They're makin' a movie about Anderson Fair. I went oh, that's nice. She said I think they want some of your photos. They don't know it yet, and I said well, put me in touch, and so, uh, Bruce Bryant and I can't think of the other fellow – there are two partners in the company and I'm just spacing today.

Norie Guthrie: Um, Jim Barham.

Judy Weiser: They, they were making For the Sake of the, for the, you know, The Sake of the Song, Anderson Fair story; I don't know if you've seen the film.

Norie Guthrie: I have.

Judy Weiser: Okay. About 15 of the photos that you saw in it are mine.

Norie Guthrie: No, I've recognized some of the ones that you sent me as being ones that are in –

Judy Weiser: Yep.

Norie Guthrie: – the doc.

Judy Weiser: Yeah, and so what came of my connection with Holly, through Joe, through Anderson Fair, from the '70's, Bruce Bryant and – what's the other fellow's name? I'm a little –

Norie Guthrie: It's, it's –

Judy Weiser: – a little embarrassed.

Norie Guthrie: – it's Jim, um, Barnam, I think Barnam.

Judy Weiser: Barnam, Jim Barnam. Barham.

Norie Guthrie: Barham.

Judy Weiser: Anyway, yeah, and Jim and I had more of the contact than Bruce and I; that's why I was so embarrassed. But anyway, um, you know, I said, Holly said Judy, you gotta show them your pictures. Then she said Jim and Bruce, you gotta see Judy's pictures, and they said well, you know, send us some pictures, and I sent them up, like what I did you, a folder of, like 30 images, and they phoned me immediately, said oh my God, how do we, you know, and I said I don't need money; I just need credit, and I want to continue to be able to, you know, the same as I've been talkin' to you. You can have 'em, you can have the negative, you can have the film; I just want to be able to use the photos in the future 'til I die, you know.

Norie Guthrie: Mm hmm.

Judy Weiser: And so they used, they wanted to use about 30 of 'em. They couldn't. They used about, I don't know, 10 or 12, and I got to go down to the opening for the film at the, um, um, in the museum launch of the film where all of these people were, and I saw all these musicians I hadn't seen in like 30 years, and we've all gotten old and fat and wrinkled, um, but they're still them and it was just such a great reunion, and all of that came from Judy has her camera; she takes pictures wherever she goes of things she wants to remember, and it was just a, a very simple summary of my life. I loved doing it, and here we are talkin' about archives, and at Rice, where I went to.

Norie Guthrie: It all came full circle.