

HELEN GRUENBERG
Interviewed by Frances Lomas Feldman
In the home of Frances Feldman
August 29, 1988

ABSTRACT

Helen Gruenberg was a pioneer in the field of social work. Divorced, with two young children to support, she early found that she needed more income than a social worker's salary provided in the Depression years. With considerable experience and training in psychiatric aspects of social work, she entered the field of private practice—the first social worker to do so—working at first in offices of psychiatrists, then at home. Although then criticized by others in the profession for this move, some years later she was given an award by the Los Angeles Society of Clinical Social Workers for her earlier professional efforts. Later she established the Employee Personnel Counseling program in the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, which grew from one part-time worker's services to a professional staff of nearly twenty. Following her retirement at age 85, she increased her volunteer activities in a variety of agencies.

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This is an interview with Helen Gruenberg on August 3, 1998--a re-interview because the one done in August of 1988 was a defective tape.

FELDMAN: Helen, we'll start all over again. Let me ask you about your own family life, how you started. Where were you born?

GRUENBERG: I was born in Chicago in 1910, the older of two girls. I had an indulgent father and a rather strict mother. Life was very orderly as I remember it. I had a lot of fun because there wasn't anything that I wanted that I didn't have. I do remember something special. I had no temper in those days, and I really had to work hard to get one. The help we had from grandmother, who always used to say to my sister, who had a little fire in her at that time and used to slam doors and stamp her feet, "Why can't you be sweet like Helen?" This was a terrible thing to say to me and to her. We are now elderly ladies of 84 and 88, and we've gotten over that troubled time. She has calmed down a little bit, and I have become a little more aggressive, so we're almost equal in that way.

FELDMAN: Before we go on, tell us what Ruth, your sister, Ruth, does--or did.

GRUENBERG: My sister, Ruth, was a very, very bright young woman, one of the 12 brightest in her freshman class at the University of Chicago. She went through the high school at the University of Chicago as I did too. Then she went on to get her Ph.D. in neurology, and an M.D. and then she was an intern and a resident. I understand that for her, being an intern in those days was extremely difficult. They put all the onerous tasks on her.

FELDMAN: Where was that?

GRUENBERG: The University of Chicago. They put all the onerous tasks on her, which I'm

sure she did with her good disposition, by that time. But, it was difficult for her. My father often said that he owned at least one brick at the University of Chicago because he paid all those tuitions. (Laughter)

Interestingly enough, when Ruth came out here in 1940 or 1941--in the Forties--she started in the practice of neurology, but she got no neurological patients; only psychiatric patients. So she told to one of the few psychiatrists in the city at that time how strange it seemed to her. She wanted to practice neurology, and she was only getting psychiatric patients. His remark was, "Oh, why don't you just practice psychiatry, anyway, if that's what you're getting? That's what I do." Ruth packed up in a week and went to the Menninger Clinic, where she stayed for 11 years, getting a very, very good training in psychiatry. That's Ruth.

FELDMAN: So, she was in psychiatric practice until her retirement?

GRUENBERG: Until she was 65.

FELDMAN: And now she lives.....

GRUENBERG: She lives up in Northern California in a rather isolated place (Guerneville) and she reads a lot and plays bridge and has done some volunteer work that meant a lot to the community, but she isn't able to now.

FELDMAN: And listens to operas.

GRUENBERG: Oh, yes. She teaches opera. She has a group on Thursday, and she plays all the operas, and she is very well acquainted with all of them and with all of the singers, and they discuss them. That's part of her.....

FELDMAN: Now that we have Ruth to one side, let's back up to talk about you. You went to the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago and to the high school.

GRUENBERG: Yes, I went to the high school and graduated there in 1927.

FELDMAN: And then?

GRUENBERG: Most of my family, including my sister and some aunts and my father had gone to the University of Chicago. I was a romantic at that time at 17, and I wanted to go the University of Wisconsin, which had a reputation of being a romantic place to go. So, I went. The first day I was there, I met the man who was to become my husband in three years. It was a good choice for me. I graduated in three years instead of four because I had some good grades from the University of Chicago High School, and I went to summer school. I guess I was in a hurry then as I am now. I went to the University of Wisconsin, graduated in '27--let's go back a little bit--I graduated in 1930, and my husband and I went to the University of Vienna. We stayed there--we expected to stay there for three years while I got a Ph.D. and he got his medical degree. It didn't work out that way. Towards the end of our first year, the dean decided that he would not give any American medical school student any credit for any work...

FELDMAN: He'd already had work in the United States.

GRUENBERG: Yes. They wouldn't give him any credit for the two years that he had done at the University of Wisconsin. So that was quite a trouble for us because it was difficult in 1930 for our parents, who were supporting us, to keep on doing that. I was studying to get a Ph.D. in Child Psychology. We packed up. It just so happened that the University of California in Berkeley school year was starting in August. That was the first university that accepted him. He went back to Berkeley, and I did. They weren't interested in the work that he had been doing in Vienna.

FELDMAN: He went back for an M.D.?

GRUENBERG: Yes. He went back, but they weren't interested in the work he had done in Vienna. So he started the third year all over again, and I started my graduate work. In the

middle of that year, Herbert came down with Tuberculosis. That was a terrible time for us. I should have stayed there and done the work I had to do, but I panicked. We were 21 years old. He was 23 or 24. He panicked. He went to Sarenack Lake to recuperate, and I went home to the University of Chicago and took some courses. After a year or so, we returned to the University of California in Berkeley, and again, he had to repeat the third year because he hadn't finished it.

By this time, I was pretty discouraged with going again for a Ph.D., and I stopped in the middle. As I remember it, I got a job working with a pediatrician and helping his new parents with their parenting. It's connected somewhat with the work I had done in Vienna, where Dr. Buehler and I were interested in developing a series of tests for the babies in a facility from birth to one year. It was really a very interesting project. The only thing I can remember about it is that at the age of three months a baby is able to pull a diaper off his face, and at the age of nine months he's able to pick up a little tiny pellet with his thumb and forefinger instead of with his whole hand. I enjoyed doing that work.

FELDMAN: Who was this with?

GRUENBERG: Dr. William Palmer Lucas. He was a pediatrician in San Francisco.

FELDMAN: Back up a little. In Vienna, who were you working with?

GRUENBERG: Dr. Charlotta Buehler, who was a very famous child psychologist. Her husband was equally famous in the school of philosophy. They were a very romantic couple. It was interesting working with them. Eventually, Charlotte came here to California, and I saw her many times. It was a nice relationship. In those days you danced with your professors at the end of the day. It was very nice.

We eventually left Berkeley and went back East where Herbert was a resident, as I remember it, in tuberculosis.

FELDMAN: Where was that? Where did you go?

GRUENBERG: I really don't remember. I know that by 1935, he was a resident, not in New York City, itself. Maybe the name will come to me. That's when Peter was born, in 1935. I was working, at that time, with the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Asylum. That was a very psychoanalytically....

FELDMAN: As a social worker.

GRUENBERG: As a social worker. That was a very psychoanalytically-oriented facility where we found a match between a foster family and the child's needs. I enjoyed it very, very much. My supervisor, as I remember, was Dr. Delafontaine.

FELDMAN: Elisa Delafontaine.

GRUENBERG: Elisa. That's right. She was one of the early psychoanalysts, and she was our supervisor. We learned an awful lot. It was a wonderful experience to have her.

That particular year or year-and-a-half or two that I was there served me in very good stead because I had a good background. When we came out here to Los Angeles, it didn't take me too long to find another job. I have been working without stopping for 65 years, and I must say I've enjoyed every day.

I went from New York to Pacoima, now divorced. I had a kind of live-in help at that time. It was wonderful, and you can't duplicate it today, but I was miserable. I began to work there for the State Relief Administration. The climate, at that time, was a difficult one. One of the things I wanted to accomplish was to get a five cent allowance for teenage children so they could go to the drugstore with each other once a week and get a coke. That was disallowed. I begged for that. I wrote reports, and I wrote letters, and I did everything I could. I had a sympathetic supervisor, whose name was Miss Hudson, and we served only the unemployed.

The job I had out here—along with two children—was with the Council of Jewish Women. The director was a fierce, elderly lady with snapping blue eyes and white hair. She screamed and yelled a lot, but she was a good person, and her staff was very good. My particular job was in handling the Jewish mothers, usually very young, who were pregnant and going through the process with them.

FELDMAN: Unmarried mothers.

GRUENBERG: Unmarried mothers. I remember one of our jobs was to tell the young fathers that he was to become a father. I remember the girls, some of them fifteen years old, some much older, would scream and yell, “Don’t tell him and don’t tell my mother, and don’t tell his father.” Everybody was scared to death, but we never lost a young father, and we didn’t lose a parent. Most of them gave up their babies for adoption but not all. Some of the parents of the young girls did a lot of screaming and yelling, but in the final analysis, they took care of their young parents and the babies. On the whole, it worked out very well.

After that job, as I remember it, I went to the Jewish Committee for Personal Service. That was a very interesting job. I think I was there about maybe four years.

FELDMAN: Is that when Lou Ziskind was there?

GRUENBERG: He was there as the director. The first job I did was to go out to Camarillo and interview the Jewish patients there who were ready to come out, to see where they were going and what they were capable of doing. I came back to the office fired with enthusiasm. I wanted to make some changes. It wasn’t good enough for me. He said, “Helen, I love your enthusiasm, but you have to modify it.” Eventually I did. But, in a few months I also went to the prison system (where inmates were served by this agency), and again, I came back just fired with enthusiasm.

FELDMAN: This was still with the Jewish Committee for Personal Service?

GRUENBERG: Yes. They were interested in doing both. "I've got to fix the system," I said, "It just isn't working right; it's not fair. And he said, "Again, I love your enthusiasm, but you won't be a good social worker if that's all you have. So let's calm down a little bit." Which I did. I remember my grandmother saying to me, "Helen, how can you go into the prison? They might hurt you there." I remember saying, "Grandma, I am surrounded with people who have guns in case anybody wanted to hurt me. But I'm only there to help them get out, so nobody wants to hurt me." (Laughter) So I appeased her. I was there, maybe, four or five years. Then I got the idea that I needed to have more money. I was by this time a single parent of two young boys. I remembered the work I had done with Dr. William Palmer Lucas and his office, and I thought that maybe I could work on Saturdays or something and go into somebody's office and offer the same kind of service. I contacted the head of Cedars Sinai, in those days, Dr. Arthur Hoffman, and I asked him how he handled his upset patients. He said he tore his hair out because he didn't know what to do with them. There were six psychiatrists all told in the L.A. area. The others were off to war or getting re-settled. So he said, "Why don't you come in my office on Saturday morning and let's see how it works out." He was willing to pay me five dollars an hour, which sounded very good to me in those days. I remember the uneasiness with which I left my children on Saturday morning to work there from 9:00 to 1:00.

FELDMAN: You had somebody to take care of them?

GRUENBERG: My parents lived at the corner, but it was uncomfortable to leave them. Eventually I broke out in a terrible rash because I wanted to do that and earn the extra money, and I hated to leave my kids. I was in conflict, but anyway, I went ahead and did it. Eventually the rash cleared up. From Dr. Arthur Hoffman's office, I could go anywhere. I remember working

for a long time, also on Saturdays, sometimes in the afternoons, with Dr. Frederick Pobeer and Dr. Justin Frank. One day--I think it was Dr. Pobeer-- who said to me that his accountant thought that they shouldn't pay me. I should bill my patients, myself, still five dollars an hour. I was overwhelmed. I was a do-gooder social worker and you don't bill a patient. I gave it a lot of thought, and eventually I sent out my bills for five dollars an hour. The patients paid them. I was so surprised. I eventually felt that I was worth it.

It was interesting how I was the only social worker doing that. Because he had said, "I want you to bill your own patients," it gave me the idea that maybe I should just quit my job and go into private practice. It was just an idea. I didn't know of anybody else who ever did that. So I took a deep breath one day and sent out some notices, and told Lou Ziskind that I was leaving in a couple of weeks; I made an office in my home, and I started to practice. This was 1946, and I have been doing it ever since; enjoying it very much. Anyway, the price went up very slowly: it was five dollars, then ten dollars for a long time, and then fifteen dollars for a long time, twenty-five dollars for a long time, and it went up very gradually. My colleagues were very much against what I was doing. They never invited me to workshops, I wasn't welcome anyplace including USC. The dean thought it was a terrible thing to do, but it was working well for me. I was very careful to take only clients who were referred by their M.D.s because of the musician who died of a brain tumor; this was still fresh in my mind.

FELDMAN: The musician? Oh, Gershwin.

GRUENBERG: Gershwin had been treated psychiatrically, but he had a brain tumor, and he died at a very young age. I remembered that, and so it took me years before I ever took a patient who was not referred by his or her M.D.

Anyway, the practice grew very slowly, but I was the only one in private practice, and

pretty soon I was working all day, and sometimes in the evening, until one of my children knocked on the door one day and said, "I want to make an appointment with you." Here I thought I was doing so well because I was home with them—well, home with the door closed was not really home. I started to cut down on my hours, and that part worked out. I've been doing that ever since. I retired at the age of 85, and I'm still seeing clients one day a week.

In the meantime, about 20 years ago, I heard there was an opportunity to work at the Department of Water and Power. A friend of mine from the East had come and was there for a few days. She didn't like it at all. I thought it would be fun to get out of my office, where I had been sitting since 1946, and mingle with other people. In the meantime, however, my colleagues did forgive me. They gave me a big party, and they gave me a plaque which said *Member of the Year: A Pioneer and a Model*. I think by now there must be 50,000 social workers, at least in California, in private practice. But anyway, I went to the Department of Water and Power and was told by Dr. Auerbach (who was providing medical services in the Department) that the Commission of Water and Power had always said no to any mental health worker, but he felt that maybe they would change their minds. The person who had been there before didn't like it; they didn't her, and she'd only been there a few weeks. He called me and gave me an idea of what they would pay. It was something that I really couldn't entertain because it was so little that I wouldn't be able to do what I was doing. He called me about six months later, and he said the Commission was eager to have me. By now they would pay a reasonable fee. I went there in November of 1976. I worked part time, starting at about 5:00 in the morning.

FELDMAN: This was the Department of Water and Power in Los Angeles?

GRUENBERG: Yes. I started at 5:00 in the morning and worked until 3:00 or 3:30, then I came home and saw patients.

FELDMAN: Why did you start so early?

GRUENBERG: Well I'm an early bird, and the crews start out very early, and I loved getting up early. I started at 5:00, I was there about 20 minutes to 5:00.

FELDMAN: It was to serve the ones who worked early.

GRUENBERG: It was a service to them but also to me because I loved getting up early. The world looked beautiful early in the morning, and I didn't have any traffic problems, and I was able to get home in time to see clients here if I wanted to or to read or to have fun or whatever I was doing. I was in the Department for twenty years, and I retired from there about two years ago. I enjoyed that very much. It was a challenge because they had never had a mental health worker, and I found myself in between the needs of the client and the demands of the supervisor and management. That took a lot of thoughtfulness on my part, to work that out, because in some ways I had to please both and feel that I was being honest and fair to both and satisfied within myself that I was doing a good job. So there was a lot of education of the management that went along with it. It was a wonderful place to work.

FELDMAN: Management was not necessarily social work-oriented.

GRUENBERG: No, but it didn't take too long. It really didn't, because if they had a difficult client, and they sent the client to me, pretty soon he became less difficult, hopefully, or his wife was able to get the help she needed, or he had help with his adolescent son or daughter. Pretty soon the supervisor was aware that he was less difficult than he used to be. Then the supervisors would tell each other. Soon it wasn't so much the client who was applying: it was the management who was applying. It was management who was asking. By the time I left, there were eight mental health workers in the department, and a director and other workers who were helping us, and it was a regular employee assistance program. But I was by myself, I think, the

first maybe six or eight years.

FELDMAN: And you worked part time?

GRUENBERG: Yes, I worked three days a week there.

FELDMAN: What did you do with the other days? You're a person who has to be busy all the time.

GRUENBERG: Well I worked here in my office.

FELDMAN: You worked here in your office, but you were also volunteering in the community.

GRUENBERG: Not in those days. I am now, but I gave a lot of talks to people, facilities, or whatever, who were interested in what I was doing. I went to USC and worked on the Advisory Committee to establish the concentration in industrial social work. I was very busy. I also had a busy social life, and my parents were here at that time, and my sister was here, and my children were here. So I was very busy. I had a lot of energy, and those were good days.

In between all of this, I did something that was also unusual. I forget what the motive was. I'm sure one of my sons needed some special kind of education, and it was very expensive. I was thinking of how I could manage that. It occurred to me that I had this big house and that maybe, having been very close to the Meninger Clinic all the time my sister was there, that foster home care for an upset young person might be valuable, and nobody was doing that in the community. I started out to find special kinds of foster homes, particularly for young people, but also for some older people who were in a mental hospital under the care of a psychiatrist, but who really were not able to be in a dysfunctional family. This took a lot of work because I had to talk with the psychiatrist; I had to find a foster home, I had to see that it was the proper match; I had to supervise, I had to do a lot of things like that.

The first time it happened, it was one of those wonderful happenstances that have occurred in my life a lot. I went to a beauty parlor, and my operator said, "You don't look as happy as you usually do, Helen. What's the matter?" I said, "Well the Meninger Clinic asked me to find a special kind of home for a young man who is following his psychiatrist here. I have been working trying to find a foster home for him for about four months, morning, noon, and night, and I just can't find one that would be right for him. I have met him, and I know his needs. I'm just going crazy, trying to find one." There was a woman sitting next to me, getting a manicure, and she said, "Tell me about that. I'm interested." Well I interviewed her and talked with the psychiatrist. When the young man came, he was in her home for about eight years. It was the most perfect kind of foster home.

That gave me a new sort of a lease on life. Psychiatrists began to know that here was somebody that could give service to them. I used to put a certain kind of ad in the first pages of the L.A. Times. I couldn't do that now; it would be too expensive. It was an ad that caught your attention because it was on top and not included anywhere else, and it--I don't know what it used to say because I've forgotten--but it gave the reader the idea that if he or she had had some kind of contact with a mentally ill member of her family, or his family, maybe that's what I was looking for. I ran all over the city answering these ads, and I got referrals from many psychiatrists from USC and UCLA, and so on. I had wonderful luck in making a match, which was like I used to do at the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Asylum: making a match of a young person with a home, and then watching and discussing it with a psychiatrists and so on. And then I got a fee from the family. That was interesting to me. I decided one day I could do more of that--to take a person into my own home. I went to a party and there were a lot of psychiatrists there. One woman

who was very well known (I can't think of her name now; maybe it'll come to me) said, "What are you doing, Helen?" Then I told her, and she said, "I have just the patient for you. She'd be perfect. She needs somebody like you. She comes from a very uptight Republican type of home where she's guarded and watched, and she's unattractive, and her parents are disappointed in her, and she's selfish, and whatever." She came to see me. I had this one big room. I showed it to her and she looked and she said, "The closet is awfully small." And I said, "It really is." We had brunch together, and we talked, and I said, "Well, think about it." She eventually came, used the little closet, and was with me about four years. The first year at Christmas, my family and friends had all gathered together, and included her in their gift-giving. She was quite sullen. By the second year, she had an attendant, Delva Rhea. I shall never forget Delva, who was just marvelous. I found her by putting up an ad in--what was the name of that fancy drug store in Hollywood?

FELDMAN: Schwab's

GRUENBERG: Schwab's Drug Store. She was an angel and so wonderful with this client.

FELDMAN: Why did she need an attendant?

GRUENBERG: Because she was not motivated to do anything. She was bright, but she wouldn't focus on anything. The attendant was one of these lively people with a sense of humor. The attendant didn't live here, but she was here practically all the time. We had a very good time, and I had a wonderful helper in those days who made marvelous food. Dinner was kind of fun, and so on. Anyway, she was here about four years.

The second Christmas, the patient asked her attendant to get some presents for, I guess, my children or whoever. That was fine. The third year she went out and bought things appropriately, herself. That's how she went. I have been in touch with her through the years.

She got married, divorced, had a very, very bright little boy who is now a grown up son, I'm sure. I saw her at many meetings and lectures at UCLA. So she really developed and lived by herself.

During the time she was with me, I also had an elderly lady who had just been retired from Pacific University as head of a very remarkable lady who used to sigh so loud that I could hear her when I parked my car out in the front. (Laughter) She was depressed. She and this patient became friendly, and before my first client left, she had become a liberal Democrat under the egis of my friend who sighed. Pretty soon we just had a wonderful combination of people; all kinds. This one had been retired, and she had trouble walking. But rain or shine, she used to go to the Cancer Society and address envelopes. A full professor, and she never let the rain stop her or the wind. She was just a wonderful lady. She still had a mother living, but she and her sister who was a professor, also, are gone now. But they were wonderful, wonderful people.

I don't know how many people I had in my house but maybe twenty over twenty or twenty-five years.

FELDMAN: At times you had several at the same time.

GRUENBERG: Oh, yes, I had up to three. I could have had up to thirteen, I guess. But I only had room for three. All kinds. I remember during the early drug scene, the boys with the long hair. I decided that at first I didn't like the boys with long hair, but when they came here to see their girlfriends, or when they lived here, I decided I'd rather look to a boy with long hair for help than the short-haired ones. There was something very genuine and sweet about these boys. A lot of the girls had early drug problems. I still see three or four on a regular basis. They're all grown up, and they have grown children. It's just wonderful to keep in touch with all of them.

I think that's about the way it went all these years.

FELDMAN: All right. You did begin to do a lot of community volunteer work.

GRUENBERG: Yes I did. When I retired from the Department of Water and Power, I knew enough, having seen many, many clients, that life goes on, and that there's maybe a span of fifteen or twenty years that has to be filled in some productive way. So I thought about it. By this time I wasn't feeling quite as energetic as I used to. I started at the Museum for Tolerance. It's a wonderful place to volunteer. But it was too demanding. I had to stand up for hours at a time. I had to talk against other speakers who were talking in the same room at the same time. I tried it for about four months, but I was getting worse with emphysema; I couldn't do it. So I reluctantly left. Right now I work as a recorder for the blind and the dyslectic, which is also demanding, but at least you can sit down, and you get a different kind of book to record every time, and they're very interesting. I like that very much. I do that on Tuesdays. Thursdays, I go to MOCA, the Museum of Contemporary Art, about which I know nothing and care even less, but I'm in the information booth, and I see the world coming and going, and I love to see the kinds of people that go into this museum with their children, with their bags and baggage from all over the world. It's interesting to me. I'm there from 11:00 to 2:00, and I usually have a little "house mate." They're usually wonderful people. Volunteers, as a rule, are interesting and lovely people. Then on Wednesdays, I still see clients. The other times I'm busy with friends--those that I haven't lost--and family, children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and reading. It took me two years to be able to sit in my backyard and read a book without feeling guilty that I should be doing something more productive. But I can do that.

FELDMAN: Now you didn't mention Children's Hospital.

GRUENBERG: Oh. I'm glad you reminded me. That's absolutely right. I was doing that for twelve years. You are right. I stopped that because I was getting the children's colds, and with my emphysema, it didn't work. I used to go there once a week from 6:00 A.M. to 10:00 or

11:00 A.M., and I loved it.

FELDMAN: Mondays.

GRUENBERG: Mondays. Rocking the babies, is what I did mostly. I could always quiet a screaming baby. I got to be known for that. Or I would feed them or diaper them, mostly rock them. I stopped about a year ago, and I really miss going there. I'm surprised that I forgot that one.

FELDMAN: Are there others that you might have forgotten?

GRUENBERG: I don't think so. My memory is not as good as it used to be.

FELDMAN: Sounds pretty sharp to me. (Laughter)

GRUENBERG: I call my forgetting, "Having a senior moment." I think it was you that gave me that one. I love it. I've been using it all the time.

FELDMAN: Yes, it's very descriptive.

GRUENBERG: It always gets a chuckle.

FELDMAN: Now just another few words. Tell us about your children, what they do.

GRUENBERG: My children.

FELDMAN: And their children.

GRUENBERG: Yes, and their children's children. I have two sons. One is a psycho-analyst/psychiatrist in Beverly Hills. He is in his 60s and also getting ready to sort of retire in a minor way. He still works, but he is the kind of man who is involved in all kinds of different activities. He is in and out of his office. My younger son has been a school teacher in the Valley, and is now dean of students. He lives about five minutes from me. My other son lives about fifteen minutes from me. All I have to do is peep, and they're here to do whatever. Luckily, I haven't needed them too much. I know that if I do, they will be there for me.

My grandchildren--I have five of them. Because I nourished them and took them on vacations and loved them from day one, they love me back. So I have five of them. One lives in San Diego. The others are here, and it's like having a young friend. I work with one of my granddaughters at MOCA. She's in charge of special events, so I see her. We have dinner together with the others. So that's fun. And now my oldest grandson, who lives in San Diego, has two children. One is three, and one is one. They keep me from having too many aches and pains. They call me GG for great-grandma, and it's a treat to see them.

My sister and I are close. I left home when I was seventeen and she was thirteen, so we really didn't get together until we were well into our adulthood. Even though she lives up North, we talk on the phone, maybe three or four times a week. I go to her birthday in April, and she comes to mine in April, or we work it out some way. It's nice to have her in my life. I just wish she felt better, but... My parents and I were close. They always lived either at the corner or around the corner. They were very helpful in bringing up my children. I still miss them. I have young friends that don't take the place of my old friends who are gone, but they are helpful, too. I have a wonderful neighbor, who if she sees me carrying a package, runs out and takes it from me and takes in the garbage and the mail. She's wonderful. So it's good to have people in your life.

FELDMAN: You had a very satisfying professional life and a continuing satisfying personal life.

GRUENBERG: I would say that puts it in perspective. No complaints.

FELDMAN: Well that's very good. You can complain if you want to.

GRUENBERG: I have none. At the moment, I have none.

FELDMAN: I think part of that is from being a natural optimist.

GRUENBERG: I understand I take after my father. I have truly forgotten the difficulties I might have had in my younger life. If somebody reminds me, I say, "Oh, yes, I guess so." But if you ask me about the incident, I only remember the fluffy top part, and I guess that's okay. That's who I am.

FELDMAN: I think that's very nice. Well thank you for letting me have you re-do this interview.

GRUENBERG: It was a pleasure.