

(Susan Hoffman) He was Atlanta's youngest mayor and the first Jewish mayor of the city. Sam Massell, Jr. was born in Atlanta in 1927. Sam Senior, a lawyer [pause]

(Susan Hoffman) of Lithuanian immigrants. Uncle Ben Massell made his name in real estate and was credited with changing Atlanta's skyline. Sam Massell was educated in Atlanta public schools and went on to earn a law degree in night school. We went into business with his father and worked in law and real estate for 20 years. In 1952, he married Doris, a Southern Baptist who converted to the Jewish faith. Encouraged by his family, he ran for vice-mayor in 1961 and changed the ceremonial role into a full-time active job. By 1970, Massell was ready to take the helm of the city. He won the difficult race with an outpouring support from Black voters. Maynard Jackson was elected as vice-mayor. Atlanta politics had changed forever. Four years later, Maynard Jackson defeated Massell in a racially divisive election. Massell left public office but not public life. He returned to business with a special interest in Atlanta's premier neighborhood, Buckhead. He also continued the family tradition of quiet philanthropy. Today, the unofficial "Mayor of Buckhead" is still working hard to improve Atlanta, the city he helped change from a sleepy southern town to a major metropolis. Sam Massell, it is a pleasure to have you. Thank you so much for your time. I've been looking forward to this conversation.

Good to be here.

(Susan Hoffman) You were born in 1927 in Atlanta and you first lived in the Massellton, it's still there. What were your earliest childhood memories of Atlanta?

(Sam Massell) Well, I was in the Massellton one month, but that was a building my parents built, uh, on the parcel of land there is still standing.

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm.

(Sam Massell) Now, a condominium building, but I lived in, uh, Druid Hills on Oakdale Road for first 11 years of my childhood and, uh, it was a wonderful life. I enjoyed it.

(Susan Hoffman) You were a young entrepreneur. You did what a lot of young boys did particularly during the Depression and that was sell Cokes in the front yard or felt, you actually started a store.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. Well, I had a, a Coke stand at the corner of Oakdale and North Decatur Road, uh, kept adding, uh, to it. Well, the police finally came by and said I'd have to get a building - business license...

[laugh]

(Sam Massell) if, uh, you know, I didn't, uh, cut back a little bit. Uh, and incidentally, the, uh, World Of Coke, uh, Museum, it's sad that they don't have one of the Coke stands. They used to have these yellow square boxes that they, uh, uh, provided children around the city, uh, where they would come by, uh, with a couple of cases of Coca-Colas that we'd buy for three cents each and sell for five cents each. I mean, I, I, I made my money all along the way.

(Susan Hoffman) You expanded your repertoire. You said you started selling flower seeds and, and.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. I sold a newspaper, a national newspaper called Grit, [laugh], uh, and, uh, and some of everything. I, I even sold fireworks which I don't think may have been legal at the time.

(Susan Hoffman) You also, uh, grew up in a time clearly of segregation. And, and you said you enjoyed your school.

(Sam Massell) Sure.

(Susan Hoffman) Um, but you yourself being Jewish, did feel a little bit of the prejudice, not to the extreme obviously that African-Americans did, but when you were in school, you couldn't join the traditional fraternities. You had to join the Jewish fraternities.

(Sam Massell) Yeah.

(Susan Hoffman) Did that bother you?

(Sam Massell) No. We, we had a pretty good group. We thought we were better than they. [laugh] It was called the Top Hat Club and, uh...

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm mm.

(Sam Massell) ... uh, it was not for one school because there weren't enough of the Jewish kids in one school to, to, uh, build a, a, a fraternity, uh, group. So, we, uh, had boys from, uh, Boys High and Tech High and Druid Hills and others so.

(Susan Hoffman) You said that you were very introverted and so that you were maybe 14, 15, 16 years old. Tell me what happened.

(Sam Massell) [laugh] Uh, yes. I was an introvert and, uh, maybe lacked self-confidence. Uh, I got a big ego today but back then, uh, I wasn't so sure of myself and, uh, uh, a student body, uh, friend, uh, who wanted to run for, uh, president of the student body, uh, Charlie Goldstein asked me to paint his signs. An introvert can do that. And I did, uh, you know, in my backyard, uh, in the turn around, uh, driveway. Paint signs that "Goldstein for President" and he got elected.

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm mm.

(Sam Massell) And he, uh, turned to me and said, I'm appointing, appointing you treasurer which the president did which I didn't even know it, and I absolutely refused and had no interest in that.

[laugh]

But he made me do it and so I blame him. Give him the credit or the blame...

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm mm.

(Sam Massell) ...to this day of getting me involved because, uh, I enjoyed it. I don't know if it was the power or just finding out I could do it but anyway, uh, I enjoyed it and, uh, there was no turning back. I never looked over my shoulder again. I've been running ever since.

(Susan Hoffman) I know you have. Uh, were you religious? Did you consider yourself religious as a young boy or teenager?

(Sam Massell) Hmm. You'd have to define the word, right? Uh, I went to Sunday school on a regular basis. I was confirmed at the temple where my, uh, parents had been members, uh, from, uh, their marriage and, uh, uh, I'm still a member of that congregation. Uh.

(Susan Hoffman) You were considered a Reform Jew as opposed to Orthodox.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) And those communities were very separate.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) Explain.

(Sam Massell) There was a caste system. Uh, each, uh, stayed clear of the other. Uh, we had our own country club, the reform group had the Standard Club. The more orthodox had the, uh, Progressive Club. Then there was a Mayfair Club in between, but, uh, we had the Jewish clubs because again, uh, the Jews were not allowed then, uh, to, uh, join the, uh, other social clubs in Atlanta and, uh, but that too was a happy occasion. You know, swimming and tennis and, uh, spent, uh, many years there, uh, dining or dancing or whatever and so, uh, it was a, a good period of, of my childhood and, and growing up.

(Susan Hoffman) You have one brother and one sister.

(Sam Massell) Yeah.

(Susan Hoffman) And you said a sweet and very well mannered mother.

(Sam Massell) Indeed. She was. Uh, if I have manners, they, they came from her.

(Susan Hoffman) She's a strong influence over you?

(Sam Massell) And my sister. Yes. Very much so.

(Susan Hoffman) What about your dad?

(Sam Massell) Yes. He, uh, he really, uh, got me interested in politics whereas, uh, Charlie Goldstein, uh, convinced me I could do something. Uh, my dad was the one that, uh, loved politics. In fact, uh, after being in real estate after the Depression, he went into the law, uh, profession. And, uh, on the side as a hobby, he, uh, published a monthly newspaper called “The Atlanta Democrat”. He took me to rallies, to and to meet candidates and everything.

(Susan Hoffman) As a young boy?

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) So it got in your blood, early?

(Sam Massell) Very early. Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) Then you went to UGA. And.

(Sam Massell) Yes. I started there.

(Susan Hoffman) You said that you were, uh, president of your fraternity, your first semester of your freshman year which we know is virtually unheard of. What happened?

(Susan Hoffman) Right. Well, you might call that my first political coup, but it’s a, [laugh] you have to hear the other side of the story. Most of the able bodied men were off at war. So most of the fraternities had closed up entirely. The fraternity I pledged, uh, Phi Epsilon Pi, which has since merged into Zeta Beta Tau, uh, only had one active member. It was, he was living in an apartment over some stores in downtown Athens. Pledged three of us all from Druid Hills incidentally and, uh, then he left school. And the alumni had to rush up there and initiate the three of us and then hold an election. I already had my vote [laugh]. I just had to get one more vote which I did from the outside and, uh, won by a landslide. So, uh, yes, that was unheard of, being president of your college fraternity as a first quarter freshman.

(Susan Hoffman) It was your first political coup, I, I love that. Uh, you decided you were too busy though. And so you left UGA. And you went over to Emory and then.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. I was really too involved in Athens like I said.

(Susan Hoffman) Okay.

(Sam Massell) Uh, if you were a male gender, you could be in, uh do everything. You could be president of every organization on campus and, and I just about did that so it was too much. It was interfering with whatever academic studies I was pursuing. So, uh, I did transfer to Emory and went for year, uh, just going to school, going home, studying, going to school, going home, studying...

[laugh]

for one full year and then from that, I did go into service into the Air Force.

(Susan Hoffman) But, ultimately, you finished your business degree at, or at Georgia State.

(Sam Massell) Yes. Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) And the soon after, you met and married Doris.

(Sam Massell) Yeah.

(Susan Hoffman) Tell me how you met Doris, your wife.

(Sam Massell) Well, I got a law degree in between there. But, uh, uh, I met her on Valentine's night actually at, uh, a supper club on, uh, Pine Street. Uh, which is no longer there. Otherwise, I'm sure it'd be a shrine, you know? But, uh, how it turned out was, uh, 52 years of marriage and three children and three grandchildren.

(Susan Hoffman) All right. Well the version I heard was that she was actually engaged. And she said, I'm sorry. I can't dance with you because I'm engaged.

(Sam Massell) Well, I wasn't gonna share that with the audience.

[laugh]

But, that's true. That's true.

(Susan Hoffman) Aw, but, you wooed her and ultimately she became your wife.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) All right. Now, after you finished college, you started going to night school and you earned your law degree.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) All right. And then ultimately started working for your father.

(Sam Massell) Yeah, actually, my first job, uh, very quickly was, uh, uh, editing journals, uh, magazines, uh, women's fashion magazine in a trade journal for the National Association Of Women's And Children's Apparel Salesmen. Uh, I took that on and did it. And did it well and, uh, uh, every few months, I'd, I'd go in and ask for raise and get one. And, uh, one time, I went in, I'd been there about two years in and I'd asked for a raise, uh, uh, my employer, my boss said no. I'm gonna fire you instead. And, and, uh, I was in some real shock then. I was still very young and, uh, thought I'd done a good job and tried to defend myself and, and he said, oh, well, okay, I'll give you another \$50.00 a month raise. And I'll probably do that every eight months or so the rest of your life if you want. But the truth of the matter is it's time for you to go out and earn a living. And he's the one that calls the real estate, uh, firm, Allan-Grayson Realty and Company...

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm mm.

(Sam Massell) ... and set up an appointment and I went over there for me to have an interview and I got the job. But it was a wonderful thing that, uh, you know, he should just toss me out like a bird to learn to fly. And, uh, meant a lot, of course, in my life.

(Susan Hoffman) Your father's, uh, one of three, obviously he had two brothers and the three were in development, real estate, construction together.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) Uh, and then the Depression hit and, essentially, they split off and your father went into law.

(Sam Massell) My uncle, uh, Ben Massell, uh, was a major developer in Atlanta, back as you mentioned, uh, before the Depression.

(Susan Hoffman) He was a big deal. Let's look at some of the quotes that I have here.

(Sam Massell) Yes. Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) "Sherman burned Atlanta. And Ben Massell built it back." And that was from Ivan Allan, Senior, "Atlanta's one man boom who changed the physical appearance of Atlanta more than any one man in the city."

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) And that was coming from Mayor William Hartsfield.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) He was a big deal. He built a 1000 buildings.

(Sam Massell) He was.

(Susan Hoffman) He established the skyline.

(Sam Massell) He was, uh, Georgia's largest tax payer. He, he was quite a, a, a factor in breaking more to development of our city.

(Susan Hoffman) Was he an, an inspiration to you?

(Sam Massell) Uh, he was a challenge, uh, I realized I couldn't compete with him. Uh, because he had a lock on, uh, much of the development in Atlanta [laugh] and, that was why in, when, uh, I was in real estate, I undertook the development of doctors' office buildings because, uh, nobody would do more than one, uh, and he didn't want to do any. And I became the world's only specialist in doctors' office buildings. If I hadn't gotten really bit by the political bug, I'd a

been a multi-millionaire like he and the others.

(Susan Hoffman) But you spent some 20 years in realty and early on, you made a name for yourself winning awards and you really put yourself out there. I mean, you established yourself.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. Uh, in fact, uh, one time for the, uh, the, uh, Georgia Association Of Real Estate Boards presented me the Alvin B. Cates trophy for the most outstanding dealer of the year and I said, you know? I may be reaching one of my life's ambitions and that was that somebody was gonna meet Ben Massell and they were gonna say, Ben Massell, Ben Massell, you related to Sam Massell?

[laugh]

Because that's what I got the other way all the time.

(Susan Hoffman) Well, after 20 years in the business, you did make some changes. But along the way, you, you had all kinds of, um, uh, political aspirations. You held little offices to start with here and there. And, you got started at Mountain Park, Georgia. And you faced some opposition because you were Jewish.

(Sam Massell) As far as we know at the time, it was the only city in the United States where you could vote and hold office and not have your legal residence there. My residence was in Atlanta. But if you were a property owner, you could do that and I had bought a little cabin there and, and, uh, uh, was interested in, in the community and, uh, the political bosses asked me, uh, if I would like to run for the city council because of the race there was coming up.

(Susan Hoffman) They pursued you?

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm mm.

(Sam Massell) And, uh, I said, yes, I would. And, so, uh, I treated it seriously and in fact, uh, my girlfriend, uh, the same Doris Middlebrooks...

(Susan Hoffman) Uh, huh.

(Sam Massell) ...who, uh, I married later, uh, and I went to, uh, the clerk's home, to copy down the list of registered voters and, uh, to communicate with them and, and, uh, the, uh, clerk, and he's a little, said, Sam, you don't have a chance. And I said, why? And she said, well, they found you're Jewish. [laugh] Then, uh, I ran anyway. Uh, and the way they ran there, not against each other but just all the names in one pot and the top five would be elected. There were eight of us running. I came in sixth so I lost the election. But it was moral victory and I was very young and only had my cabin, uh, uh, a few months. And, uh, then, uh, as luck would have it, uh, a month or two later, uh, one of the, uh, elected city council members sold his property and moved to Florida, and the other four elected me to fill the vacancy.

(Susan Hoffman) And, but there is some backlash potential. You said, roughly a year later,

[laugh]

your cabin mysteriously burned to the ground.

(Sam Massell) Yeah.

(Susan Hoffman) Do you think it was in retaliation because of your religion?

(Sam Massell) Well, it was suspicious and, uh, uh, I think they were surprised to find out I had insurance.

[laugh]

But, surprised or disappointed. But whatever. Uh, yes.

(Susan Hoffman) All right. All right. Let's move along. Uh, and look at, um, your next stop. You, you essentially went, uh, for an office on the executive committee that ran the elections in the city of Atlanta.

(Sam Massell) The, there were two members to each ward, they were called then, rather than districts. There were eight wards. Sixteen members. And, uh, two, uh, Blacks. Uh, A.T. Walden who was a prominent lawyer and, and, uh, Niles Amos who was a, a very successful druggist. Both came in to qualify to run for their seats in their ward. And, uh, the committee turned them down. Because they were Black. They went to court. They won the right to run, to for the executive committee and, uh, 15 of the 16 members resigned. So, when I heard about this, I contacted, uh, Maurie McDougal, wonderful person who had remained on and, uh, told him I would help find other people for the other seats which we did.

(Susan Hoffman) Tell me about the bombing in 1958. You will recall that one of the oldest and grandest synagogues in Atlanta was bombed and it was really backlash, uh, southerners taking law into their own hands, uh, lashing out against a rabbi up north who was speaking in support of Civil Rights and the Jewish community at large was very nervous because he was speaking out so, uh, vibrantly. Uh, tell me about that. You were 31 years old. Again, it was in 1958.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. It was, uh, at the temple where I was a member.

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm. Hmm.

(Sam Massell) And, uh, of course, uh, it was quite shocking and emotional for, uh, all of us. Uh, the, the, the good that came out of it in some good seems to come from everything.

(Susan Hoffman) Sure.

(Sam Massell) Fortunately, was that the, uh, entire community, the city of Atlanta, the business community, the political community, the, the media, uh, the religious community, everyone came to the, uh, support of the defense of the temple and, uh, the Jews in Atlanta. And, uh, there was just an outpouring of, of love and, and, uh, support and, uh, strength and it, uh, it, it, it was very rewarding. It was, uh, very healthy and I think it was, uh, I think it made all of us better

people.

(Susan Hoffman) Soon after that in 1961, you decided that you would run for the board for aldermen, which is today known as the city council. It was also the vice mayor's job. Uh, and you were trying to get a candidate to run and essentially, he wouldn't. So you went home and you asked Doris, what do you think? Do I have your blessing? And she said, yes, you do. Why did you decide you wanted to run?

(Sam Massell) Well, uh, Everett Millian who, uh, had been a state senator but also a city alderman, uh, was the one that really clued me into the need to, uh, to replace the, uh, incumbent who had voted against a, uh, public housing project, uh, Atlanta's first public housing project on a, on a racial, uh, move and, uh, or means. And, uh, I just felt that, uh, uh, you know, he knew more about it than I and if somebody needed to run, uh, I'd take it on. Uh, not only did I get the blessings from my wife, there were two other people I had to ask before I would do anything that bold. One was, uh, A.T. Walden, that same, uh, African-American attorney that I mentioned earlier...

(Susan Hoffman) Hmmm mm.

(Sam Massell) ...who, uh, had become a good friend of mine. Uh, and the other Helen Bullard who was the political guru of that era. She, she ran, uh, Bill Hartsfield's campaign, Ivan Allan's campaigns, uh, mine, Sidney Marcus' uh, she, she was really, uh.

(Susan Hoffman) Was she enthusiastic?

(Sam Massell) Yes. All three of them said go for it and so the next day I qualified myself and ran for it.

(Susan Hoffman) And, you got in and you went from, uh, really a ceremonial role to, uh, a role of great substance as vice-mayor and you essentially wrapped your arms around social issues to a large extent and you sort of, uh, labeled or, uh, acknowledged that Mayor Ivan Allan, Junior was really kind of a bricks and mortar mayor. He expected loyalty from you but you didn't really give it.

(Sam Massell) Well, we were two separate offices. Uh, it was interesting. Helen Bullard handled both of our campaigns. Uh, but, uh, we supported each other, uh, most of the time. Uh, built, uh, the Peyton Wall which was a separation between Whites and Blacks trying to stop integration in, uh, I publicly, uh, took issue with that.

(Susan Hoffman) And he was once a self-professed segregationist.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) But then ultimately really came around.

(Sam Massell) Oh, yeah. He absolutely did.

(Susan Hoffman) Was he sincere? Do you believe he was sincere?

(Sam Massell) Well, he was sincere in knowing that was the right thing to do that time had come, uh, to, uh, accept people of color, uh.

Embrace the changes?

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) You, you watched the transformation that Ivan Allan went through, uh, even though you didn't always agree. Um, but the two of you together, had to lead the city of Atlanta, uh, the burgeoning new South through a very difficult period. Did you do a good job?

(Sam Massell) Oh, yes. I think Atlantans can be proud of not just of our work...

(Susan Hoffman) Hmm mm.

(Sam Massell) ... but that of, uh, the leadership all over the, uh, the media was very courageous, our daily newspaper, the, uh, the religious, uh, community, uh, really came together, the top Catholic and Protestant and Jewish, uh, and others that, uh, would step forward and lead, uh, rather than follow and it was a wonderful time, in my opinion, of strength of a city that, uh, knew what it had to do and, uh, knew right from wrong.

(Susan Hoffman) All right. In 1969, you decide to run for mayor. It is a brutal, brutal campaign. Historians infer that Allan, Ivan Allan, uh, Junior didn't think you were good enough for the job.

(Sam Massell) Well, I think it was more that I was more liberal than, uh, my major opponent, uh, who was Rodney Cook, uh.

(Susan Hoffman) And Rodney Cook was the candidate that really the business folk had put forward...

(Sam Massell) Yes.

...as your opponent and Ivan Allan was in lockstep with the business community. In your very last press conference that was held in your home, a lot of people thought you were gonna take the high road and at that time, in that setting, you called the groups supporting your opponent, "small core of self-appointed king makers". And you proceeded to name the president of the bank, Ivan Allan, Junior, the owner of Atlanta's two largest newspapers. You referred to them as the power pack who would not let me sit in their clubs and did not want me in the mayor's chair. A reporter asked you, is it based on your religion. And your response was, "I don't know any other way to explain it."

(Sam Massell) Hmm. I stand by that.

(Susan Hoffman) So.

(Sam Massell) That's pretty clear. Isn't it?

(Susan Hoffman) Well, it's very interesting. You had the 1958 bombing, the city comes together, political leaders, business leaders, the community.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. But you don't want to accept the fact that I was very liberal, that I believe in Blacks and Whites having equal opportunities. I believe in Jews and Gentiles having equal opportunities. You know, that was very clear that, uh, that's exactly what happened. I stand by every word. I didn't remember it that well but it sounds like I was very articulate.

[laugh]

(Susan Hoffman) Well, clearly, you did well enough. Early on in the evening, uh, the African-American vote had not come in but as soon as the African-American vote came in, you ended up taking 90 percent of the African-American vote and 10 percent of the White.

(Sam Massell) Yes. Which four years later has reversed itself after there were enough Blacks to elect their own, uh, obviously they wanted to and they did and, uh, Maynard Jackson was elected with 90 percent of the Black vote and 10 percent of the White vote.

(Susan Hoffman) All right. I'm gonna ask you about that in just one second. But let's look at your time as mayor. Because Maynard Jackson was now vice mayor. And, and really Atlanta politics was never the same. You immediately set about to, uh, change the make up of, of the city employees. You started appointing African-Americans, women that had never been appointed before...

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) ...to various departments within the city.

(Sam Massell) Yeah. That's pretty liberal. Isn't it? I appointed the first woman to the city council in Atlanta's history and they thought I'd lost my mind.

(Susan Hoffman) Can you tell me what you think you're most proud of as the mayor?

(Sam Massell) Well, I think MARTA probably because it's, uh, both physical needs, uh, the economy, but it also served the, the, uh, lower income, the transit dependent and I'd say that was probably the most important thing.

(Susan Hoffman) You said in order to garner the votes you needed to pass it, you went into various neighborhoods with a chalkboard and a piece of chalk.

(Sam Massell) Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) And did the math.

(Sam Massell) Yeah, because, uh, see the sales tax is, uh, regressive tax, it cost more proportionately, uh, for the poor than it does, uh, the wealthy because, uh, everything they spend is taxed where, uh, those with more income, uh, make investments and where the money is not taxed and so, uh, went in with my chalkboard to show them that they were then paying 60 cents and a nickel transfer to ride the, uh, existing bus service and we were gonna buy that system and immediately drop the fare to 15 cents so even though they were paying one percent more on their income, practically 100 percent of their income, I'd show them where they'd actually have money to put in their pocket when the month was over. So, uh, they endorsed it. The domestic workers' union endorsed it. And then I went to the chamber of commerce and frankly, uh, you know, I didn't try to sell them on using it 'cause they didn't think they would and, uh, still don't. Uh, but I showed them that with the amount of money that would be pumped into the system, uh, to the economy, uh, they had to be for it and so they endorsed it too. One thing I did incidentally just very quickly, uh, I went up in a helicopter over the expressway during the rush hour, uh, with a blow horn, you know? And I said you want to get out of this mess? Vote, yes. And this being the Bible belt, they thought God was telling them what to do.

[laugh]

So, so every vote we got counted.

(Susan Hoffman) Then you finished your first term. You decided you would run again. Maynard Jackson was your opponent. And, you started going through the phone lists and you began calling potential voters and you realized they had moved. They had died and over time, it became apparent that the Black vote was going to be quite strong and you probably had no chance of winning. But you said you would've run anyway. Why?

(Sam Massell) Well, uh, the, the White community needed somebody to run. Uh, they would've felt I deserted them if I had not run. And, uh, sometimes you have to, you know, think beyond, uh, the bottom line and just, you know, uh, what does it really mean to the city? Uh, and, uh, I, I would've run anyway. Uh, but at the time we ran, no, we, the racial voter lists, uh, showed a majority White. Uh, but then when we did the run off, we saw it was a majority Black and, uh, there was no question that, uh, he was gonna win. And he won and he did...

(Susan Hoffman) The time had come.

(Sam Massell) ...honestly. Yes.

(Susan Hoffman) The time had come. African-Americans wanted to have an African-American.

(Sam Massell) Yes. Surely. Uh, you know, the Whites had had it for 125 years then. And, uh, it's some pretty heady wine. [laugh]. Uh, no question that they felt a Black could represent them better.

(Susan Hoffman) You left public office but you didn't leave public life. You sort of set your sights on Buckhead. Tell me about the Buckhead Coalition. Some people take offense to the fact that the Buckhead Coalition is, uh, unwilling to take members, uh, by application only by invitation.

(Sam Massell) It's, it is a group of heavy hitters who can make decisions, uh, for the community, uh, with their money without having to go back to the office to ask somebody else. We've been in business now 20 years so it's pretty successful. It's got a good history. Everybody's welcome. You don't have to be a member to use our services and.

You've also done a very good job as a philanthropist in giving back.

(Sam Massell) Uh, I, I think everybody should, uh, give of themselves, not just monetarily but, uh, some of their time and talent and I've tried to do that.

(Susan Hoffman) Do you think your grandparents from Lithuania would believe that you are where you are today?

(Sam Massell) [laugh] I don't know if my father would believe it, [laugh] much less my grandparents. But, you know, I've had a lot of luck, uh, it's obvious and a lot of good timing and, uh, I remember once, uh, during one of the political campaigns. It was out at the Druid Hills Country Club. I don't know why because that's outside the city limits. And one of my opponents was with me in the men's room [laugh] and said, uh, "Sam are you an opportunist?" He meant it as an insult, being sarcastic like he was. And I thought a half a second and I said, "you know, yes. I am." And, uh, I'm not ashamed of that. If there's an opportunity facing me, I'm gonna grab it.

(Susan Hoffman) With that, I have to say thank you very much, Sam Massell, it has been a pleasure to have you.

(Sam Massell) Thank you. Appreciate it.

(Announcer) This has been a production of Georgia Public Broadcasting.

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