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Bronx Oral Histories

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Yelloz, Eva

Sophia Maier Garcia

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Transcriber: Sophia Maier

Sophia Maier (SM): I'm very excited. This is the first official interview for the Bronx Jewish History Project. So yeah, if you want to start by telling me just a little bit about your family and how they ended up in the Bronx.

Eva Yelloz (EY): Of course. Okay, so I arrived in the Bronx in September of 1949. I came on a former warship, the USS General Taylor — or a similar name to that.

Harold Schultz (HS): It was a liberty ship, not a warship.

EY: Liberty ship. It was used for bringing immigrants to the United States. And we wound up in New York Harbor. My mother, Felicia Kopytko Schultz — her father sent his three younger brothers and a sister to America in the late 20s and early 30s. So therefore, my mother had three uncles and one aunt in the Bronx. Hence, she asked to be sponsored. And after much ado, they did sponsor her. And we came to America — my father, my mother, and myself. I was the firstborn. And we lived originally — they found a furnished room for us, right opposite the 182nd Street entrance of the Bronx Zoo. Bronx Park East, I think.

HS: Bronx Park South.

EY: Bronx Park South, I'm so sorry. And the land lady's name was Mrs. Langer. She was a widow, and she gave us a bedroom with one big double bed, and my parents and I slept in that one double bed until we found our apartment to move into at 920 Avenue St. John, Bronx 55, New York. That was the first address that I remember because I was a kindergarten girl within the year and it was very important — my parents told me — to memorize my address and my phone number. I even remember my first phone number. They used to have phone exchanges. Ours began with Melrose, so our number was ME5-7728. And that was a very important thing for a child to know, their identity and their contact information. So we lived there. My father didn't have a real profession. His father in Poland was in the leather business. He made boots and custom-made shoes for farmers and for wealthy people. So he had a small leather shop/factory, shoemaker, and his wife helped him. My mother was a seamstress. Her father was a tailor for Hasidic Rabbis in Warsaw. He outfitted the Modzitzer Rebbe and the Kozhnitzer Rebbe. My grandfather was Leibish Kopytko.

SM: Okay.

EY: And my grandmother, Chava, the one I'm named after, she helped her husband, you know, they were so close. So he, my grandfather, would not leave Poland. My grandfather, he was an ordained rabbi. But he did not practice in the rabbinate. He worked. And he was such a great Torah scholar that when he was 40 years old, he was asked by the Kabbalah society to join the Kabbalah group. He and his

brother Itche which is the diminutive form for Isaac — those are the only two that remained in Poland — they sent their younger siblings to America, they wanted a better life. And my mother told me that her father, he did not believe that America was a place for him, because, when they used to read the newspapers in those days, it was always negative things on the front page. They read a lot about Al Capone, and all his, you know, mafia connections. So he says, "*Amerike, iz nisht ein ort far mir, es iz ein ort far Al Caponyikes*." You know, "America is not for me, it's a place for Al Capone (and those like him)," so he didn't come.

My mother entered the Warsaw Ghetto. She was an apprentice in the home of manufacturers of clothing. She was 14. She was sent to be an apprentice in a non-Jewish home. And not only did she learn how to sew, which was her whole family's profession, but she had to take care of the children in that house. Clean up, cook for her room and board. Didn't get a nickel.

SM: Yeah

EY: And the only time she came home from the time she was 14 to the time the war broke out — when she was 19 — was for Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashanah, Passover, and the summer vacation she had some time. So she was in this home in Warsaw. Her parents lived about a half an hour away in a Jewish small village that I believe was called Ruda Babitza. And she heard that her parents were moved to the ghetto, and there was no way that she was not going to find her family. So late at night, she told me, she sneaked out of the family where she was an apprentice, and she went into the ghetto, which was surrounded by strong gendarmes [German military police], but it was late at night, they were smoking, they were drinking, and she was a skinny little teenage girl. And she squeezed her way in. And she heard people moaning and crying, because they were overcrowded in the ghetto. Four, five, six families in an apartment where five people lived. She went to the first apartment, she told me, she said, "Do you know where Leibish Kopytko is?" And they said no. So she persevered, persevered, and went to the next. By the third or fourth place that she knocked on the door and "Do you know where Leibish Kopytko and his family are?," and the man told a little girl to get off the chair. And he told my mother to sit down. And once he told her sit down, she knew the news was going to be bad. And she said, "No, she will not sit down. Tell me." He said, "Come with me." And he sneaked around. They got to another building. And at that building, she heard crying, but a crying that she recognized the voice. It was her mother. And her mother was crying because her father had been shot by a Ukrainian soldier who was inebriated on a Friday night, when he came out of the *shtiebel* [storefront makeshift prayer hall]. And he blew his brains out, and the *chavra kadisha*, the burial society, they had to take all the parts that they could find, and bring it together to bury him. No place to bury a Jew in the ghetto. So they put him in soft earth, like a quicksand area, like a pit. And then a few weeks, maybe two weeks later, they removed my grandfather's body, and they shaved his beard — and he was already dead two weeks — and they put on women's clothing. And they put him on a wagon, a horse and wagon, with dead women from typhoid, typhus. And that's how they removed him from the ghetto, to give him a proper — if you want to call it proper — burial, and we have no idea where that is.

And of course, the next day, they were rounded up to go to Treblinka. Women — maybe the sisters and the mother — went in one car, and my mother was in another car with her little brother, who was under

bar mitzvah age and burning with fever. He died in her hands. And then a neighbor of hers told her you have to jump. And one person picked up the other and the other — one was killed immediately, they went with the wind, they went under the tracks. The next person jumps against the wind. My mother took note of that. And she was in shock because her little brother died, but she still jumped and she was shot three times and saved by Christian farmers. It was the first snowfall of the winter, November 2, 1942. And she had amnesia, no idea who she was, in shock. They took her to a barn on their farm. And they took out as much shrapnel as they could, and they put only antiseptic powder. They saved her for three and a half months. And when it came the spring of '43, Passover, they told her she has to leave. And they took her to the woods. They took her to the underground, in the pine forest — it was a group who lived in the woods and they were partisans. And they didn't believe that she was Jewish.

SM: Really?

EY: They thought she was an infiltrator. So they were going to kill her. And suddenly she remembered a prayer, and she screamed "*Shema Yisrael*," and they said, "Okay, come in." And for three [years] — from 1943 Passover until the war ended in '45 — she was in the underground, and she was a guerilla fighter, and she was a demolition expert.

SM: Wow.

EY: She used to put together dynamite sticks and put them on the tracks to sabotage the trains. Many times — I think three times — she was caught three times. She saved herself. And one amazing time that I recall is, they said to her that "you're a Jew." And she said, "I'm not a Jew." And one was a Catholic, and one was perhaps a Protestant. And my mother used to babysit for Catholic children, and they had to learn the Catechism. My mother had a phenomenal memory. She knew the Catechism in Latin by heart. And she started saying, "*in nomine padre sanctum*," on and on, I cannot repeat it, and that's how she was saved one of the last times. So, after the war, she went to Szczecin, to a camp. And there, only days of being in the camp, with her arm being partially crippled from her wounds, she was still a very attractive young woman. From a distance, she heard a man calling her Fela. He continued calling her name over and over. And as they reached closer to one another, he looked at her, he said, "I'm sorry, I thought you were Fela." She said, "I am Fela." He said, "I'm sorry, I'm looking for Fela Rechtman." My mother says, "That's my first cousin from Lublin. She's gone. She's dead." So then they became friends. And within three months, they got married. And then they applied to go to Germany to a displaced persons camp, where I was born. And then they came to America. And our family met us at the ship. And it was very difficult for them to help us, even though they were secure.

HS: Tell her the name of the camp was Eschwege.

EY: I was born in Eschwege, bee Kassel - which is in the region of the castles near Hessen.

SM: Okay, yeah.

EY: And America was not easy for us at all. My mother learned English pretty quickly, my father faster. My mother became pregnant with my brother, my first brother. So my mother —

HS: Our father learned English at PS 6 on Tremont Avenue.

EY: That's right. So I didn't remember that, but PS 6. My father went immediately, within weeks, to the English for immigrants in the evening. And he was a quick learner. And his spelling was great. You know, he was a good student. And he got a job at a chemical company. He mixed perfumes at a chemical company in Manhattan. And it was very difficult. He was still the oldest son, firstborn, spoiled, young man, where his mother used to chase him to the river to feed him food. Very spoiled Jewish boy. And my mother was more of a worker. My father was a dreamer, my father liked to write. And he didn't have a real profession. He didn't know how to handle business. It was always a lot of — there was tumultuous behavior between them, and it was very hard, but they continued having four children. And we lived a hard life in the Bronx, but we were not the only ones to live like that, so it seemed very normal. And my mother put me in the Hebrew school. The first Hebrew school I went to was in the Soundview neighborhood, at 1769 East 172nd Street. And it was called Yeshiva Torah V' Emunah. It was co-ed, and I loved it there.

SM: So if it was co-ed, it wasn't run by any of the Orthodox groups?

EY: Yes it was.

SM: Oh, it was?

EY: There was only orthodox. We never heard the word reform. We never heard the word conservative.

SM: Okay.

EY: But because it was after the war — it was 1952 — there was a rabbi by the name of Ephraim Oshry. He was the *posek*, the decider, of the Kovno ghetto. So when people in the Kovno ghetto, when they knew that their wife was going to get killed with their child, the man used to come to, you know, to this rabbi, Oshry, and say, "I don't want to witness my pregnant wife's demise tomorrow. Can I kill myself?" And he says, "No, you cannot. You mustn't do that, because you might live." So it was — this was a very difficult man who saw horrors. And he treated us kids in the school in a horrific fashion according to today's education.

SM: Yeah.

EY: Yeah. So he didn't hit us. We did get hit sometimes on the hand with a ruler. Maybe the second, third grade, whatever. But he was an angry man, and he gave us a very frightening, frightening attitude of Judaism. Like you're not allowed to touch this. You can't —

SM: It's the *can't* do.

EY: It's always what you can't do. And his favorite expression: "*mer tar nisht,"* you're not allowed to. So it was not an easy upbringing. Where at home, also, my mother was a religious woman from her background. My father was not religious. So there was a conflict always. One is more traditional. The other one, he lost his family, he was against it. My mother lost everyone too, but she still had faith. She had hope. He did not believe that at all. My father used to see candle lighting, trays of *yahrzeit* candles [memorial candles] on every major holiday. 12, 18 candles on a silver tray. And it was hot in the summer. It might have been, you know, let's say Rosh Hashanah time; it was an Indian summer, they called it, it was hot: "Why are you putting all these candles on? It will not help you." So he was more of a realist, but also a skeptic. So that caused a tremendous rift in their relationship. It was bad.

Then we had neighbors, they were American. They never suffered the war, but they say they did. How so? They only had chicken once a week from 1942 till 1945. And when my mother heard that, she used to get very angry. How dare they say things like that? Because you don't understand, people are not even looking at their neighbor and seeing the horrific suffering, no matter what you read in the papers, or what you heard about. The media was not like it is today. A lot was hidden. And everybody loved Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the savior of the Jews, until they found out many years later what he really was. So also, I remember when I was a child, communism was a very, very dirty word in the Bronx. In my house, it was a horror — it was the filthiest word you could use. My mother, every Friday night — you never invited people for dinner, because we were not rich people in our area in the Southeast Bronx — but they liked to schmooze. They liked to talk about the past and what it was like before the war, they wanted to bring back their old life in a familiar surrounding. And you didn't have sisters and brothers and cousins and uncles and aunts — *you* were the survivor. So you had one person from Czechoslovakia, my parents from Poland — Hungarians, they stuck to —

SM: Themselves a little bit?

EY: Yeah, they're a little, you know, snobby?

SM: Yeah.

EY: But others that survived got together in my mother's house. And my mother baked: she made strudel, she made babka, she made not the best — didn't make rugelach. *laughing* The things we wanted, she didn't make.

SM: Of course.

EY: So Friday night, you find four couples, five couples in my living room, and drinking tea, having coffee and cake and fruit and melon. And children were there to be seen not to be heard. So my little brother was sleeping, my baby brother, the one who was older than him, Larry, and I helped serve because I'm the oldest girl. 5, 6, 7 [years old]. So one of the couples started talking and preaching about — I didn't even understand it — but it was about communism, how great it is. And my mother heard this —

HS: What was the word?

EY: About communism. This is the time of the Rosenberg trial, right after. They were executed in the electric chair. And it was a blight to all Jews. You walked around, you don't ever — we wouldn't even wear a red dress, because of Reds. You know, the commies. Red socks, never wore. I mean, my Italian friends wore red socks. My Irish girlfriends were red socks, but not me because that was too close to "You're a Red." So this couple was discussing, and my mother was listening, coming back and forth from the kitchen with the fruits and the tea. And she says, "Ach, you're talking about communism. You see this door, *ir zen dem tir*, you see this door that you came in from? *Du zehst di tir vas du bist areyn gekommen*, you see that door that you came in? *Fun der zelber tir vestu aroysgeyn*, from the same door you're gonna get out. *Harold laughs* I never saw my mother extricate a Jew, or anyone, from her house. She was very hospitable. She was a good actress, no matter how bad, hospitality. Typical from the times of *Avraham Avinu*, our biblical forefather Abraham, hospitality is the number one Jewish trait, in my house anyway.

SM: No, absolutely. I agree.

EY: So when she let that couple out, and she stood by the door, to me it was shocking. And then as I got older, my father explained to me that it was a terrible blight, the communism, that was an ugly thing. And many Jews are very liberal. And Jews always want to fight the underdogs, so they became card carrying communists in the United States. But that to us was an ugly word. And then, you know, you remember the neighbors. And look, they called you — I was called a refugee from the age of four years old, "Oh, there goes Chavaleh, or Eva, or Evalein, the refugees' daughter." You know. And then my mother sewed my clothes. So I wore European style clothing. I didn't wear straight skirts. I was dying for a straight skirt, but no, pleated skirts, flouncy skirts, hair in a bun. Not in a ponytail but wrapped up. Different than the other girls. I was never like the American child, I was always an outsider. And even at 76, I still have that feeling that I am the child of Holocaust survivors. I am the child of immigrants. I was born [abroad], even though in the US zone. I've always felt different than American people. I have friends that are American, but the closest people that I have in my life — even though I don't see them often because I live in the West Coast, and they're on the East Coast, or elsewhere — are those that came from my background.

SM: Yeah. So yeah, so tell me a little bit more about the neighborhood. Was it predominantly Jewish?

EY: No, it was a blended neighborhood. At the beginning — I think when I was four or five years old at 920 Avenue St. John in the Longwood area — I would say that there was 30 or 40% Jews. Looking back at it now, and I'm thinking mathematically, my building had Irish, Italian, a few Armenians. And then in 1956, when I was 10, there was an airline called Trans Caribbean [Airways], and it was owned by a

Jewish person by the name of Roy Chalk. And he made a special fare from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Idlewild Airport — JFK was called Idlewild before the president's assassination — $47.99, something like that, advertised in the Daily News, advertised in the New York Post and the LA Times. Then you find the Puerto Rican people and their families starting to arrive. So our neighborhood, by '56, I would say 30% Puerto Rican. And we had Blacks, and we had, a couple here and there, we had what was called in those days — which is politically incorrect today — we had mulatto children in our neighborhood.

SM: Yeah, mixed race.

EY: And they were very looked down upon. And they suffered very badly from being mixed race. But luckily, our mother, she loved humanity. Because she suffered terribly as a Jew, why should that child [be punished]? What did that child do? Nothing. So she did bring them into the house. Like she saw a kid coming home from school, latchkey kids. Women started working in that time. So it didn't matter what they were or who they were. I went to Hebrew school, I came home at 4:30, 5 o'clock every day. My brothers went to public school. They didn't — my first brother went to Hebrew school like I did, and he did not get along with the rabbis, and he rebelled. And he was expelled from the school. And that was the end of that until Bar Mitzvah time. So very different. I was raised differently than my brothers were, I was more European. So my mother used to bring the kid in. There was always cookies, there was always milk. She shared whatever we had with whatever kid needed it. So I was raised like that. That was a good thing. And I think that the kids in the neighborhood, they liked to come to our house. They liked the fact that somebody other than their mother, but then again, if my mother was in a clinic with my brother who had asthma, and I came home, and if I needed help, other neighbors were there for me, too. And there was no such consideration, "Oh, she's Jewish, and we're not Jewish." It was very, very liberal.

HS: Egalitarian. We had an egalitarian neighborhood, and we were ingrained as little kids to believe, you know, to just take it for granted. We're all poor, we're all equal. It had nothing to do with, "You're Puerto Rican, you're Black, you're Cuban." We're all the same.

SM: Yeah.

EY: And that was a good thing in my family. But I cannot tell you that other families that I went to school with were the same. I did have friends — in Yeshiva Torah V'Emunah, where I went — that their parents looked down upon anyone that was not Jewish. They were very, very, I will not call them racist —

HS: They were insular.

EY: Insular. They were frightened of people who were not like them. Then after first grade at Yeshiva Torah V'Emunah, there was a rabbi's wife living in our building on Avenue St. John, her name was Rebbetzin Springer. She worked as an assistant principal in Bais Yaakov of the East Bronx, which was on Kelly Street.

SM: Okay.

EY: And she had no children, she was called an *akara*. An *akara* is a barren woman, a biblical term, as she was already in her late 30s, maybe early 40s. I can't tell you how old she was approximately. But she was a woman that wore a hat, she was properly dressed with long sleeves and skirts only. And she insisted that my mother remove me from the co-ed school and send me to an all-girls school. I didn't want to go. I liked the school I was in.

SM: You knew the environment.

EY: Yeah. I didn't want to go. But that principal, Rebbetzin Springer, she had a lot of influence on my mother, and she pressured her. So she took me to Bais Yaakov, she drove. The Hebrew studies were in the morning, and the secular studies for the afternoon, so she left. So I went to school one way with the Rebbetzin in her car and she drove. It was amazing. Women hardly drove in 1953 — it was ‘52, ‘53. So I went to school with her. And I spent second, third, and fourth grade, in Bais Yaakov School for Girls of the East Bronx. At times, I felt very, very lonely, because I was not accepted because I didn't come from an ultra-orthodox home. It was traditional, but I didn't — I did not exude that religiosity because my father did not take me to *shul* on Shabbat. My father went for a ride in his car, my mother lit candles on Friday, so I was a very confused child. So I didn't know what was right. The teachers told you that you must do this, you can't do this, and the restrictions of Shabbat. My father went and did something else. It was very confusing to me. But I did tend to follow what the teachers told me. And my mother pretty much kept to those rules for a while. So it came to be, after maybe in the third or fourth grade, my father looked at my test papers. And he saw that many of my answers were marked wrong. And they weren't wrong. Not in math, but also geography. I was very good at that. So he said, “This is not a good school.” And he went to the school — the first and the only time that he ever took interest in my education — and he spoke to the teacher who was maybe 20. And she was a former seminary student, she went to seminary, which is also Bais Yaakov, from the age of eighteen, post-high school, for a year, and then you get your certificate.

SM: And you go teach.

EY: And you go out to teach. So she was not one of the brightest bulbs. So he tells my mother, “You’ve got to get her out of there.” And I was in the fourth grade. Because of three years, my timetables were not up to par, my division of fractions were not up to par for my age. So my father talked my mother into removing me and returning me to Yeshiva Torah V’Emunah. I went back there, of course, I was inadequate. So I had a principal, an American woman, she made fun of me. She used to read my poor scores out loud. Not fun.

SM: No.

EY: But I was very surprised that a woman with a university degree, that had a master's degree in education, would even treat a child like that. Today I think back on it, but in those days, the sensitivity of children was not respected as it is today. Eventually, I did very well in spelling, and I won a spelling bee, and I went to the National Spelling Bee in Washington, DC.

SM: Wow.

EY: My principal did not like that.

SM: Had you ever traveled outside, you know, on big trips outside of the city?

EY: That was my first time ever. My father did take me — my father was a country boy. You know, Kolo, Poland is not a cosmopolitan city. In those days, it was more like a suburban area. It had farms. My father heard that in Vineland, New Jersey there were chicken farms for sale, and they were cheap, whatever that means for those days. So my mother was never ready on time, she could never go out of the house. And the kids and the floor has to be washed, the typical European house mom. She was disorganized after all, she went through a lot. I don't know if she was that way before the fact or as a result after the fact, I'll never know that. If she had ADD, ADHD, because it seems like she did. But it was undiagnosed in those times.

SM: Of course.

EY: So my father relied on me, and I went along with him to Vineland, New Jersey. That was a great Sunday trip. And we used to look for chicken farms. And then he came back with real estate perspectives — you know, a sheet, not a brochure, just a sheet of paper with a chicken on it and a farm name. And my mother said there's no way in heaven that she would ever clean chicken coops. She's a city girl. No way. And a lot of people did go *Phone rings*

HS: Is that your phone?

EY: Yes, it’s ok. I should have turned it off.

SM: It’s all good.

EY: They did go, their lives changed. But my mother was a city girl. She just couldn't condescend to living like that. And that was another rift, a lot of rifts. Just because you get married and you have a family and you’re Jewish and you're both survivors, it doesn't mean that it's going to work, because you come from two different worlds. So I was the only child in my school that had an absent father. And my mother was a single mother of four children. And it was very embarrassing. I was like, the only child in my school. And it was — I used to lie and tell them that I went here and I went there, but I didn't. And

eventually, I got caught in a lie or two, and I saw how ugly it feels to be caught in a lie. And I decided that I better tell the truth. Because no matter how bad it is, how painful it is, at least you don't have to recall so many things to get your story straight.

HS: It's hard work. Telling the truth is easy.

SM: It continues to spiral.

EY: That happened to me, I think, when I was about 12. I was about 12, it hit me that I don't do things like that. But it was not easy being a child of a Holocaust survivor. But it was good, better in the Bronx than it would have been elsewhere, because there were so many of us in my class in Yeshiva Torah V' Emunah. I graduated in 1960, there were five out of six girls in the eighth grade that were immigrants like myself. There was only one American girl, and she was very different than us. She lived on Pelham Parkway in a fancier apartment. Her mother used to get pizza on Thursday nights, served in their house. My mother didn't do that for years after that. They had a very, very different attitude about life. Our house was much more serious. But my mother had a sense of humor. She survived that way. It's sort of — it eased our lives. The humor, when it came, the sporadic humor, the occasional dry humor, whatever it was, it did ease the pain. And I think we all inherited it in some way. And we're all fighters. But the Bronx taught us how to fight. Not that we were ever in so many fights.

SM: Yeah but just living it.

EY: Just living every day and seeing what other people go through. We were not the only ones who went through what we did. Jewish or Christian, or Black or Puerto Rican. It didn't matter. Each of us had — I hate to use the term — a cross to bear. So we had that commonality, so we felt like we were not alone. At least that.

SM: Yeah. And so tell me a little bit more about, I guess, things you liked to do for fun. Music, food you liked to eat, things like that.

EY: Music was a very important thing in our household. So my mother had a record player, and she liked *chazanut*, which is cantorial music, whether it was an individual cantor or a choir of cantors. Or it was, you know, religious based Yiddish music. She liked Yiddish theater, so she knew a lot of Yiddish theater. She knew themes from Poland, but even on the Lower East Side, St. Mark's place, they had the Second Avenue Yiddish Theater. I have been to Yiddish theater several times with my mother alone. My mother used to leave my brothers alone in the house and take the subway downtown. And I went to theater at least 8 to 10 times.

HS: And it was also the 46th Street Theater in Brooklyn.

EY: We never went to Brooklyn.

HS: Mommy told me about that.

EY: I never went to Brooklyn until I was in my late teens.

SM: Yeah. It's quite the *schlep*.

EY: You went to, let's see, Delancey Street shopping. Essex Street shopping before school. You went to — there were specialty stores. So you went to get underwear in one store, cotton. It had to be cotton. Shoes had to be leather. Very, very organic. We were very organic. She had plants in the house. But going back to what we were saying, music was an integral part of our life. There was always music playing in our house. The radio was on or a record was on. And my mother sang opera, she was a soprano. And she took secret lessons when she was 16, 17, 18 from a professional opera singer that was a teacher. Her father never knew, because girls are not to expose their voices to the public. You know, that's their sexuality. Their hair, exposure, their voice exposure. *Kol isha*, it's called, the voice of the woman. You know, it's not taboo, but it's not for public. It's solely for your husband. So she had problems with her father, she was more modern. So the music was a very important component in our household. Food was the penultimate. No matter how bad it was, she tried to make the best food for us. Balanced diets: vegetables, starches, potatoes was a big thing in a Polish household. We ate rice not too often. Beans a little bit, with chicken soup. It was always Friday night, we had chicken soup with potato or a little bit of rice, a little bit of beans. Matzah balls, noodles. Wow, that was a big thing. Roast chicken with potatoes. During the week, once we had veal, and once we had k*lops*, which is a meatball or meatloaf. And it was always — every day it was something else. It was a varied diet. And she — you know, European people are not salad people, Eastern European. So you got other types. You got lettuce, tomato, cucumber sliced with some mayonnaise in the middle for dipping. Later on, she did evolve. And yes, she made salads. And yes, she bought feta cheese. Food and baking was like a second nature to her. She didn't ever follow recipes. Ever. I've never seen my mother use a recipe book or a sheet of paper out of a drawer. It was always, it was called in Yiddish, "*Mehr shit und mehr geest*." it sounds like a horrible word. But it means to like — what you use when it's dry measure, it's *tau shitten*. And when it's pouring liquids, it's *tau gissen.* It was the oil — she never used margarine — it was oil or butter and flour and sugar and cinnamon and vanilla. Always something going on in the kitchen with baking. Tons of challah. We used to have sandwiches on challah that was just — your mouth was not large enough to bite into. And leftover meatloaf on challah. She would not let us use condiments because her cooking was too good for ketchup or mustard.

SM: Oh, gosh.

EY: You had to eat it the way she made it. Condiments were for people who couldn't cook. *Laughs* That was her. She was very adamant about such things. So talk about music, we all loved music. Not

necessarily her music. My brothers were into rock, rock and roll. But me, I was not allowed. Because when I started listening to Elvis Presley, she saw it on The Ed Sullivan Show.

SM: Yes!

EY: She goes, “That is vile.” It was profane. You know, she called him Elvis Pretzel. Why? Because he used to twist his legs around like a pretzel.

SM: Oh my goodness.

EY: She had terminologies that were very unique. And she used to, you know, listen to — she didn't like Lawrence Welk, she didn't like stuff like that — she liked things that she could sink her teeth in. She liked French music. She liked Balkan music. She found out — we found out, I think 1962 — that her father's family — or her uncle that was going to pass. I went to visit him and he had black eyes. My mother's three uncles had very, very dark brown eyes. And they loved to fish. They used to go fishing in Florida. When Uncle Ben got ill, he came home. And I went to visit her Uncle Ben, who was a men's clothing [maker], men's suits and coats. He was a very talented man. And he loved me — he lost a daughter, one daughter, he remarried, he had a daughter from his second wife — but he loved me as his niece's daughter. So when I visited him in the hospital, and I saw his eyes were so dark, and his skin was so tan. And I asked him, “How come my mommy, my mother, is so light and rosy complected with blue green eyes, an aquiline nose, and how come all the uncles are all dark?” So he told me that at the end of the 1700s, that his family came from Turkey, from Izmir, to Poland, that originally we come from Sephardic roots.

SM: Oh, interesting.

EY: So suddenly my mother woke up. My mother started becoming interested in making stuffed grape leaves, and she started listening to Turkish and Greek music, and it became a household phenomenon, because now she found that her roots — and her skin was a little sallow — she goes, “Look, I can't believe it.” She started opening up to another world, and this was about 1962. My mother was interested in background and culture, and she gave all this to us. So music was important to all of us. Food was too, we’re all foodies.

SM: Oh, so am I. *Laughs*

EY: You know, he eats much less than I do, my brother, but we all cook. There isn't one of us who doesn't cook and I don’t know if my brother bakes, I'm not a big baker, but I know how to bake. But all of my children bake and all of my children cook. That was passed on, that was an important component to our childhood that we have good things for the house. And because she was a dressmaker, clothing, even though we were poor, she didn't want people to see us ragged. Other people didn't care about that

so much. In our house, you left the house shoes shined, pants washed. She taught us how to hold the pants on the edge, how to steam them with a cotton baby diaper. And to steam this *Points to the crease in Harold's pants* I don't know what to call this in English.

HS: Crease.

EY: Crease. I was thinking of it in Yiddish, it's called a *kant*. So we all learned how to iron. Right? And we learned how to, if there were stains on clothing, to take it off right away. She wasn't a clean freak, but the presentation out there in the world, she wanted you to look like a *mensch*.

SM: Yeah, it matters.

EY: It is very important, from where she came, that when you went out of the house that you didn't look like a slob.

HS: There's a reflection upon her. Her children were a reflection upon her abilities as a parent and a mother. And if we were sloppy, dirty, whatever, it would reflect poorly on her.

EY: It was all she had. It was very important. And I don't know, my youngest brother is not as fussy as the three oldest ones. But we try very hard. I mean, it's already a habit, but it came from young childhood. She gave us that. She was a lot. You know, you can't call her a coo-coo head because she suffered in her life. She went through living hell before her 20th birthday. One day, you have a mother and a father, three sisters, three brothers, and 108 aunts and uncles and first cousins from two sides. 108 people are dead. And the pain never left. From the moment she — I remember all those yahrtzeit candles — until she died she lamented that she was left alone in this world. And that affected us. And it affected my first two children, because I remained in New York until 1981. The end of '81. So my first two children were affected by that more than the other two. Hitler and what he did to the Jews and all his cohorts, it didn't just hit that generation. It has left a mark on their children and their children's children as well.

SM: So tell me a little bit more about like the shops and amenities in the neighborhood. Or in the Bronx in general.

EY: Where we lived on Avenue St. John in the Southeast Bronx, from the age of four until the age of 12, 1958 we left that area.

SM: And where did you go after that?

EY: After that we went to live right by the zoo. 178th street and Southern Boulevard on the corner.

HS: Not even a mile from here.

SM: Yeah.

EY: I used to walk from 178th Street to Fordham Road if there was a bus strike or something and then I walked up to Roosevelt High School across the street. I mean, it was a 45 minute walk from my house to there. But you had, on Tremont Avenue, from Southern Boulevard up the hill towards the Third Avenue El, there was a kosher butcher on Tremont Avenue called Harry Tubis. There was a bakery across the street, I don't remember the name, that had every Jewish product that you can imagine. There were clothing stores that the owners were, the proprietors were, Jewish. They were not high end clothing stores. But they were like, you know, you have John's Bargain Store. We didn't have that. But there was Harry Horn. And he was a Polish Jew, he was a survivor, married man with children. And he liked to flirt with the women in the store. My mother got me a job there when I was 14 years old. And, you know, they had tables with merchandise on it. And people came and they look at the merchandise, and then they mess it up. So here I am, 14 years old, working —

SM: Putting it back.

EY: And you felt like you're folding laundry all day long. Not fun, but my mother needed the money. So I kept some for myself to buy myself school clothes, because I didn't want sewed clothes from home. I wanted to go out to Alexander's department store, which was a big place where many, many Jews in the Bronx shopped. And it was, you know, 10 minutes with one bus up Southern Boulevard to Fordham Road then the number 12 bus up to Grand Concourse. And it was the haven for Jewish clothes and housewares and shoes and boots and you name it. There wasn't a time that you walked out without four bags. And it was so affordable. But on Tremont Avenue next to our house there was a big vegetable market and everything, and there was screaming going on in the market. And people were taking cucumbers.

HS: Marmion Avenue.

EY: The nice stuff was up front. So these vendors, they put the nice cucumbers, tomatoes, the nice cherries, those were in the front of the displays. And behind it — they give you a couple of nice ones from the front — and then when you're not watching, when you're a kid shopping for your mother, they gave you some other ones that have rotted. And you came home, and your mother took everything out of the package, and said, "Look what they gave you!" You know. And her favorites, one of her famous Yiddish expressions *Harold laughs*, "*Az meh shikt a nar oifen mark, frai'en zikh di kremer*." When you send a dummy —

HS: A fool

EY: — to the market, the merchants rejoice, because they could get away with it. But my mother did not allow us to get screwed, quote unquote. You have to take the bag and go back and get a fresh tomato, a fresh this or that. Say, this is rotten. And veryyy embarrassing of course, as children. I don't know if my brother Harold did this.

HS: Oh I remember, for sure. There was, I don't recall the name. It was a farmers' market. We didn't call it that then, it was a big fruit stand. And across the street, there was a little shop, a dairy store, where they sold butter, but the butter was on a big block. And farmer cheese, pot cheese and cottage cheese and eggs and milk and halvah. So my mom would send me there and my brother and — I don't know my sister, if she was too old at that time.

EY: Yeah, I did.

HS: And when I would go she'd give me $1. I'd get like a pound of butter, a dozen eggs, and I would get a piece of halvah for a nickel. And then she would, you know, she would notice — she knew the prices — and I'd get in trouble. And she would say the same thing: when you send a fool to the market the merchants rejoice.

EY: She was very calculated. She was not cheap, at all.

SM: No, but she knew what she was doing.

EY: There were people that had more money than we did, for sure, that were tightwads. My mother tried to always give us what we needed. We didn't always get what we wanted.

SM: Yes.

EY: But we got what we needed. As an adult today, as a mature elderly person, I say to myself, you know, it was not easy growing up. But she was very fair about things like that. She didn't want us to want. She wanted us to have. She didn't want us to go to somebody else's house and act like starving people. So she would try to give us as much as she could afford to. And she, you know, she knew how to manage her money. Her bills were always paid, even though she was alone. And she always made sure that we had proper nutrition. The only thing she did not worry about was our teeth. She could not afford a dentist. And that was a sad thing for some of us. Some of us, not all of us. So there were plenty of good stores within walking distance. And you could take a couple of shopping bags, or later on, we bought a *vaigela*, which was a shopping cart with wheels. Anything with wheels, like a wagon, is called a *vagon*, but a little one is a *vaigela*. It's a miniature form of a wagon. And it was embarrassing. You know, teenagers, 12 years old, 13. You want to look fashionable. You walk in with a cart with wheels? Eww! So I didn't want to do that. I would suffer, take shopping bags, but I wouldn't take that cart. Eventually I got older, I realized, oh, this is not important. But you met friends when you went shopping in the marketplace. You met other girls or boys that were your age that also were going shopping for their parents. So wasn't only you.

SM: That were suffering in that way. *Laughs*

EY: Yeah. So it was — but you know, it was embarrassing at first. So then you saw, on Saturdays, when you became a teenager you had started dating, you saw girls with curlers. But the Jewish girls did not wear curlers, for some reason. It was more the Italian girls and the Irish girls who wore curlers with a kerchief over it, because they were going out Saturday night. So they assumed that if you didn't have your curlers on, you're not going anywhere.

SM: That you're not going out. Oh my gosh.

EY: That you're not popular. So that was something. I don't know if that was a Bronx thing or Brooklyn too. I'm sure it was.

SM: Yeah, that's funny.

EY: It was around the boroughs, but those things you didn't see anywhere else in America. I don't think. I've discussed it with people from other states. It was really a New York thing. With the curlers in the hair in the 50s and 60s. That indicated you as being popular and having a date on Saturday night.

SM: So what kind of things would you do if you had a date on Saturday night?

EY: Okay. So, definitely bowling. For sure. Definitely movies. 100 percent. Pizza came out on Tremont Avenue in the Bronx in, I would say, '57, '58. They were Italian immigrants from Sicily. They opened up little shops — they're very industrious — and they made pizza. Just plain pizza with marinara sauce and mozzarella cheese, some garlic and some oregano. It wasn't a fancy thing. It didn't have condiments on it or anything. And you got 15 cents a slice of pizza, 10 cents for a paper cup of Coca Cola.

HS: Or a bottle of Pepsi. A 12 ounce bottle of Pepsi was a dime. So if you had a quarter, you had a meal.

SM: Yeah. Oh my gosh.

EY: So my mother gave me a dollar and I could buy all four of us pizza, a whole slice and a coke. On a date with somebody, definitely it was bowling. Bowling was a big thing. And movies was. Bowling and movies was really what you want for dates. So kids think of — you didn't go out for dinner to restaurants when you were 15 or 16 or 17. Once in a while, you know, you go to — there was Poe Park, which is very close to here. And Poe Park, on Saturday nights in the summer, had free concerts and a bandstand. Very common for a bunch of girls from Theodore Roosevelt, a bunch of girls from my Hebrew school that I knew that we blended together, Pelham Parkway area. We used to meet at Poe Park. And there were boys that also went to Poe Park, and you eye each other. Maybe you didn't go out,

but you did schmooze with each other. And it was nice. It was very different than today. And I don't recall, at that time — there was smoking, cigarette smoking. Marijuana? Most probably there was, but we were not into that at all. But going, as a student, in Theodore Roosevelt High School from 1960 to ’64, we attended across the street from this university. There were a lot of kids that came from the Catholic school community, which is on the opposite side of the street of Fordham Road, Arthur Avenue.

SM: That's where I live now.

EY: Bathgate?

SM: Yep.

EY: All these streets. And there were all these groups such as Dion and the Belmonts. They lived right across the street from here.

SM: Yeah.

HS: On Belmont Avenue. Belmont and Arthur Avenue.

EY: But they didn't all live in the same building, there were four of them. There was Dion DiMucci, which was the lead singer.

HS: He’s still alive.

EY: And they got involved with heroin, and one of them OD’d in the building, right behind the street here. It was a horrible scandal. As my mother would say, “Oy, a scandAl, a scandAl!” It was in the newspapers. So you had to stay away from people like that. Of course, the girls were very fascinated. It's always a performer and you go after them. But I was afraid of that. I was always afraid of anything that you got in trouble with the law. And had to deal with, I think, because of my mother's Holocaust survival that anything to do — that you don't get involved with doing anything where the law can touch you.

HS: Our mother brought us up to be very, very skeptical and distrustful of government.

EY: Yes, it’s true.

HS: Anything that vaguely resembled officialdom. The police we were terrified of. And we had a healthy respect for officialdom, but we steered clear. If something even smacked of officialdom, we wanted nothing to do with it.

EY: I remember that when I was just 19, 20, the Jewish Defense League rose, and the rabbi was Rabbi Meir Kahane, may he rest in peace. And his son died, and he died. I write, I started writing in Theodore Roosevelt High School with a teacher by the name of Mr. Martin Lobenthal, and he taught me Creative Writing in my second year, I was 15. And he validated my ability to write well, and that meant a lot to me, because that never happened to me before. And I started writing in the school paper, I was a reporter. And I wrote editorials, eventually, for three years I was on a school paper. And that began my so called career in writing, but I deferred from it for a long time, until the age of 47. I went to college in California, and I got an associate's degree in journalism, and my entire life changed thereafter. It has continued that way since. This neighborhood here, that we're sitting in right now, is a tremendous boom. It changed my whole persona. It could have happened in Brooklyn, it could have happened in Manhattan, but it didn't. It happened in the Bronx.

And my mother — going back to Meir Kahane — a friend of mine was very close friends with Meir Kahane. And they told me that he needs letters written about himself and his movement. And I didn't know much about it. I was very naïve then. So I went to Brooklyn for one of the first times in my life. And I went to 13th Avenue Borough Park, and Rabbi Meir Kahane had an office on top of some stores up rickety steps. And he told me to write something for him about his movement, two pages, I wrote it. He went bananas, and he wanted to see me every couple of weeks. And my mother was watching the news, and she saw that some of his thugs, quote unquote, were being arrested by the Russian — I don't know if it was the Russian Consulate or the Russian Embassy, in Manhattan off of Fifth Avenue. And she said, "*du geyst nisht ahin*," you're not going there anymore. Because she says, "*ikh bin nisht keyn reykhe froy*," I'm not a rich lady, "*ikh hab nisht keyn gelt dikh aroystsunemen fun turme*," I have no money to get you out of jail. If you're gonna be involved with him, you are eventually gonna go to jail. And I was scared out of my wits, and I never went to Meir Kahane's office again. And my friends, the Hagers from Brooklyn, they kept on saying, "Meir Kahane wants to see you. He likes your writing." But I did it for free. So I said, I'm sorry.

I never listened to my mother. Whatever she said, I would do the opposite. Tweezing my eyebrows. You know Jewish girls in the 60s, they're pretty natural. They had unibrows, we all did. So no big deal. But I had friends. You know, I came to high school in the ninth grade, not the tenth grade, because you go to parochial school you graduated from eighth grade and you're in high school. So the group that came in in 1960 were from the schools that were right across the street. I was the only girl in Theodore Roosevelt, in ninth grade in 1960, that came from a yeshiva. So I was very influenced by peer pressure.

SM: Of course.

EY: So they left school at 2:30, one day we got out and someone didn't have anybody home, and you go to their house, and they're all tweezing and shaving the ends of their eyebrows. So I got caught up in that and the ends of my eyebrows never grew back. And it was a sorry day of my life. Now, you know, big eyebrows are in. And I think about that. This is what happens. Thank G-d it was only eyebrows.

SM: Yeah, right? *Laughs*

EY: But there were girls — there were situations here in the Bronx that were, I thought, really unusual. One of the girls in my class that lived right across the street, she didn't come to school for three days.

She went out of school Friday, and we didn't see her on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. And then we found out that she had a boyfriend, and he took her for a ride. And his parents owned a country house, and they had an affair. And then her father took a gun, he took them and they went to a city hall. And then they went to the priest, and they got married. And about seven months — she never came back to school — but months later, she had a baby boy. We used to see her on Grand Concourse walking towards us, you know, with a baby carriage. And we were 17 and we were in our senior year, she never made it there. And it was a terrible embarrassment for her. Those kinds of things were not common at all. Today it's like no biggie, but for us it was.

HS: May I have one of your cupcakes?

SM: Of course. We're not supposed to eat in here, but it's all good.

EY: He has diabetes, he’s going to have low sugar.

SM: Yeah, no, no problem. That's why I — don't spill the crumbs everywhere. No, it's okay. Diabetes runs in my family as well, so I get low blood sugar from time to time.

EY: I have it too, but I don’t have type one. I have type two.

HS: She’s not insulin dependent, but I am.

SM: Yeah. Thankfully my mom is the only one out of all her four other siblings that isn't insulin dependent for diabetes. She doesn't because of diet, because it's type one, generally she's able to keep it under control. But it's always a thing. So I understand, no worries. Enjoy the kosher cupcakes.

EY: This is the first time I've been with my brother as an adult alone for two days, three days. I am having such a good time with him. Nothing can compare to siblings if they get along. As to connect, because your whole past, the foundation of your life that you live today came from this place here. And we're sharing it. I guess I'm getting old, because I really appreciate this.

HS: When we got off the Henry Hudson Parkway to come here, we went onto Mosholu Parkway, and we saw the end of Sedgwick Avenue. Oh my god, Sedgwick Avenue. And it ends there. And then we passed where the Grand Concourse begins.

EY: Chills.

HS: It was like passing through a time warp or a parallel universe from a long, long, long time ago. Eva has been gone from the New York City area for 42 years.

EY: Since 1981.

HS: I left New York, the Bronx, in ’74 for Brooklyn. And I've been gone from New York for 30 years. And I haven't been back to the Bronx, a few times, but in the decades, probably not even 10 times I've been to the Bronx in the last almost 33 years. And to be here, we passed the Botanical Gardens, reminded me of stories about our mother and my first wife. All kinds of stuff like that. I must have been in this area, without exaggerating, at least 1000 times in my life. And to actually be on the campus, never on the campus here, and that was like, “Oh my god. This is a big place.” And our mother used to take us to Fordham Hospital. You don't know, you probably were a little girl when they tore it down.

SM: Yeah, it hasn’t been around. Probably not. Yeah.

HS: It was a horrible hospital, but it was there. Part of the Fordham University campus was the property that Fordham Hospital was on. Fordham was the city hospital. And, expanding on what my sister was saying, that to come here is like a very strange experience for us. After we leave here, we’re gonna go down to 178 Street where we used to live. I went to PS 67, diagonally across on Mohegan Avenue, which is like a service road. And it's bizarre, it's surrealistic to come back here.

EY: You know, one thing I must say, that my mother gave us a good education. The Bronx was a place, because of the zoo, and we lived close by, and because of the Botanical Gardens, my mother was an amateur botanist. She knew all the names of hundreds of plants in Latin and in Polish.

SM: Wow.

EY: And she gave over — I noticed that when I first got involved with horticulture and botany when I moved to California, more than when I lived in New York, that I said, people used to ask me, “How do you know the name? How do you know about ranunculus?” I used to say my mother told me that when I was a child. Back at the time, that was our hangout. We used to walk there on Saturdays.

SM: I love the Botanical Gardens.

EY: We used to bring sandwiches with us. We’d sit on the grass. And there wasn't a time that she didn't show us what this is called in Polish.

HS: Lilacs.

EY: Lilacs. She was a lover of lilacs.

HS: In those days, the Bronx Zoo, which we went to constantly — I grew up there.

EY: I grew up there too.

HS: And it was 10 cents on Tuesdays and Thursdays, free the rest of the time. The New York Botanical Garden was 10 cents on Mondays and Wednesdays, free the others. Now, a family of four will probably spend upwards of two hundred and fifty dollars to go.

EY: Are you serious?

SM: Oh, yeah. I mean as Fordham students we get to for free, which is nice. But now it's only free on Wednesdays. So they take a lot of trips, and they do a lot of school trips and stuff, they'll go on Wednesdays.

EY: That was a formation of our personality. I know that — I can't say I love all animals. I mean, I'm very frightened of, um —

HS: Snakes.

EY: Snakes, yeah.

HS: Me too. We were brought up that way.

EY: Reptiles. You know, my daughter, who is a very intelligent and deep woman — she's an attorney in Jerusalem — she told me, "You know, Mom, the reason you're afraid of reptiles" — I mean freakishly afraid — "Is because your name is Chava, Eve from the Bible. And maybe subconsciously, because of Eve and the reptile, that's why you have this fear of serpents." I don't know if that's true, but it sounds good!

SM: We'll go with it! That definitely works. *Laughs*

EY: She's an attorney, but she does research for the Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs. She's not a fellow there, but she's a researcher, and she works with the director. And I just was hired by them.

SM: Oh, really? That's wonderful.

EY: To do a public relations project. To bring Black Zionist youth to Israel, just like birthright, to show them that Israel's not an apartheid state and that Israel is a great place to live. And, you know, I'm gonna try to get a quarter million dollars by the end of next month for this project.

SM: Wow, that's awesome.

EY: So the Bronx has given me a very good education, not only in secular studies and also religious studies, but also in human relations. I think that, if I didn't grow up here, and if I didn't have so much to

do with so many kinds of people and immigrants, and people that are very foreign to my culture, that I never could have gotten to where I am today. Ever, in any way. This was a crossroads for a lot of different Jewish people. And you know, if you look at statistics, you find that a lot of very, very interesting famous people of society, for the past 50, 60, 70 years were Bronxites.

SM: Yeah, absolutely.

EY: But I'm sure, I don't want to be so highfalutin to say that, because I'm sure that the same numbers can be produced for Brooklyn and Manhattan. Staten Island, I doubt. *Laughs*

SM: I'd have to agree with you on that.

EY: Staten Island is a borough that shouldn't be a borough. But it's there.

HS: To crystallize, I lived on Staten Island for a year.

SM: Why? *Laughs*

HY: Because I got my own apartment. I was probably about 20, 21 years old, something like that. And we'd go to a bar called the Swiss Chalet to meet girls. I met a girl named Joyce Carter, she was a Christian girl. And I asked her, I said, "Would you like to go to Manhattan?" and she says, "I've never been to Manhattan." I go, "What? You grew up on Staten Island by the ferry and you've never been to Manhattan?" And we were in our early 20s, very early 20s. And I found out that Staten Island, even though it's part of the greatest city on this planet, the capital of the world, it's a very provincial place, and people there are extremely provincial. And it's like a paradox.

EY: I'm sure it's changed since then.

SM: Well, what I know now, it's kind of still the same way.

HS: That was 50 years ago, yeah about 50 years ago. About that. It probably has changed, but you would think, in the early 1970s, that you're a nickel ferry ride — a two and a half cent ferry ride, each way was two and a half cents, because there's a nickel, you would get on the ferry and take you 15 minutes and be in the greatest city on the planet.

EY: In my youth, when I was 16, 15, we went on the subways alone. We had a bus pass or a train pass or whatever. On Sundays, we went — the big thing with the Jewish girls in my circle — we wanted to go to Greenwich Village, because it was where hippies were, it was, you know, the Bohemian movement. It was called bohemian.

HS: What did you call it? You called it going downtown.

EY: Yeah, that's what it was called. You know, if you lived in Brooklyn, you said you were going to the city. If you lived in the Bronx, going downtown. So you took the train to West Fourth Street. And you go out and you're on McDougal Street. And you see every stripe and every color of every human being, dressed people, barefoot people with long hair, people that didn't shave their underarms. And it was, oh this is a great place, because everybody gets accepted over here. And you go to a cafe and you have, you know, a cup of cappuccino. That was like, oh, wow. You have a croissant or you have a bagel. Then you go to a place, Middle Eastern, called Feenjon. I don't know if you ever heard of that. That was an iconic place where Turks and Arabs and Jews and Greeks and Armenians and people from the Balkans, they all went together and the music was cross-cultural, and it broke all kinds of molds and stereotypes. And we all got along — no one took a knife out, no one took a gun out. No one crossed each other. We loved the music. And that was our youth, to get involved in the world and a large place, to go into Manhattan. And shopping, of course, it was 34th Street when we got mature. Alexander's was the best.

SM: Of course.

EY: But to go to 34th street, to go to Ohrbach's or to go to 14th Street.

HS: Or to go to Gimbels or Korvettes.

EY: We didn't like Gimbels or Korvettes. That was not for us. Macy's, Gimbels, Korvettes was not for us, that was like for older folks. We liked S Klein on the Square, which was on 14th Street. And we liked Ohrbach's. We liked to, you know, go to Lord & Taylor on Fifth Avenue, 37, 38th Street.

HS: Bergdorf Goodman.

EY: No, we didn't go there. We were too poor.

HS: Mommy went to Bergdorf Goodman. To get corsets fitted there. She'd buy a girdle and she'd get it fitted there.

EY: That's right. My mother was very into proper under —

SM: Underwear, yeah.

HS: Foundations. *Laughs*

EY: It was very important, because she was a seamstress, that what you wear under your clothes complimented her clothes. So you can't go without wearing a full slip, because you're gonna see through

the fabric. You can't go without wearing a matching bra. I mean, I have a daughter who's 50. I have a granddaughter who's going on 19, one that's going on 16. And I come there twice a year. I just came back the day before yesterday. There is never a time that one of my granddaughters or my daughter would ever leave a house without being perfectly matched. They change their purses, according to their outfit. This is all my mother, the lady that was, you know, raised in Europe but continued all her adult life in the Bronx. This was a very common thing, European people in the past, that they were put together very well.

HS: Prim and proper.

EY: And even if they were not well to do, it was a presentation. Society had to see you at your best. This is what I noticed in our neighborhood, no matter where we lived. But that was the time as well.

SM: Yeah, absolutely.

EY: People did not — we, Harold and I — once my mother went to Germany, to the Nuremberg Trials and she testified. And she went to Europe for the first time since she left in 1949.

HS: That was in the 60s, the mid-60's. It was the tail end of the Nuremberg Trials.

SM: Yeah.

EY: So he was wearing a pair of jeans. I was wearing a pair of jeans and a nice top, you know, whatever. And we're taking — he was driving, he was going to college and he was driving the cab. That was after '72, yeah that's right. My daughter was a little girl. And we're going to the airport to take her to Lufthansa. She says, "*ir kent nisht azoy geyn*," you can't go like this. So I say, "What do you mean I can't go like this?" "Look, look, you're wearing jeans." I said, "Everyone wears jeans." "In Europe, nobody wears jeans. Nobody." I said, "Wait till you get to Europe. You will see that you are the unusual one. The whole world wears jeans." It was hard for her to accept a fashion trend. Like in China, they all walk around with a pair of loose pants on and they're sweeping the snow on the street, but she didn't understand that jeans are a universal product. It was very hard because she was a fashion designer. And she was very put together. She never even would wear a jeans skirt. It was beneath her. So even though that didn't help, because she couldn't. And then after she came back, took a look at us, she said, you know we're clean, we're okay, jeans were now accepted after she came back from Europe in the middle 70s.

And she also was very worried about cults. She thought never to get involved with people who are trying to influence you, because that's what she worried about terribly. So once I met her by the library on 42nd Street, we were going to buy some fabric to make me a dress because I was going to Israel to a wedding and I was pregnant. So this was 1972. And she was always late. Always. So I'm waiting in front of the library across from my office, and she's not showing up. I'm looking at my watch, no cell phone in those days you know. Finally shows up and she sees a group of Hare Krishna devotees. And she looks at their feet, they're barefoot and their feet are dirty. "Oh my god, how terrible, how can they

go on the street like this?" And I said, "You know, they're a group and they believe in no shoes, they have orange robes, and their heads are shaved down, and they have a long braid hanging from the back." She says, "I think he's Jewish." I say, "Why do you think he's Jewish." "I could tell he's a Jew." So she walked away, and she walked over, and she schmoozed with everybody. She was a people person, for sure.

HS: My sister and I are the same way.

EY: Well, not as bad as she was, for sure. I don't go to strangers, she does.

SM: Yeah, my dad's like that. He'll go talk to any stranger.

EY: I can be a little snobby. Or I'm afraid, I'm afraid they're not gonna take me well. So I don't go. If someone looks at me and gives me eye contact, maybe I'll talk to them, but I'm not gonna go initiate a total stranger. No way. She went to this guy, and after five, eight minutes she came back to me up, "*ikh hab dir gezagt az er iz a Yid*," I told you he was a Jew. I said, "How do you know?" "*Hab gefregt zeyn namen*," I asked his name. I said, "What's his name?" "Harry Kirshner!" *Laughs* You know, she went up to him and said, "What are you?" and he said, "Hare Krishna." So she thought it was Harry Kirshner. That joke, I told this to my —

HS: It's a great joke. It's great in Yiddish, it's better in Yiddish.

EY: Hare Krishna and Harry Kirshner, to her, were the same.

HS: I had a friend named Harry Kirshner.

EY: It sounded the same. And she was sure that he was a Jew, and look what happened to him.

HS: Tell her the story — which is very, I'll tell you, like our mother. If you don't mind me interjecting. My mother, every Friday night, she'd light candles, but it's supposed to be as the sun is setting.

SM: Yeah.

HS: And my mother was perpetually and habitually late. She didn't know what on time meant. It could be, in the dead of winter, it could be 8pm on a Friday night, she would light candles. And she'd go through.

SM: She'd do it good.

HS: Yeah, and then she would swipe her arm and go, *Gut Shabbos*. And for us, that's when the Shabbos started, when our mother announced it.

EY: Whenever she lit the candles, that's when Shabbos was.

HS: It could have been nine o'clock at night, but for us, that's when it started.

EY: That's right.

SM: That's funny. And so did you, in your experience, did you feel like growing up as a woman during this time period, you had kind of different expectations, either from your parents or from teachers, things like that, than even like your brothers or male peers?

EY: Yes, I do. I was resentful that I was the firstborn, and that I had to do the brunt of all the things in the house. Once a week, the shoes were all — my father's, my brothers' shoes, and her shoes, mine too — were lined up on the wall in our apartment, and there was a shoeshine kit there. I had to clean their shoes. And in the summer they had white sandals, you know, stride rights with T straps, you know, it was popular in the 50's. And it's like a lotion, you put it on, it was not good because it was too chalky. I'd get like a *shmatte*, you know, a rag, and I had to polish those white shoes. In the winter, it was black shoes, or once in a while — I had to do all that. So I did feel like I don't like doing this, but I had to do it because it was my job. Then when it came to cooking, I was never taught how to cook by my mother. She never says come over here my darling.

SM: Let me show you.

EY: Let me show you. Never. She gave me a sack of potatoes, five pounds of potatoes, most probably Idaho's because she didn't know the difference between that and what they had in Poland, that kind of potato, and no potato peeler. It was a small, sharp knife. And I had to peel the entire sack of potatoes. You know when you're a kid and you're not so good at this and you can cut yourself and she's used to watch how thick the peel was.

SM: Yeah, you don't want to be wasting any potato.

EY: Exactly, you're wasting. And you're not so good at it from the onset. So she used to yell at me that my peel was too thick. Look how much waste there is! So I had to learn and learn and learn over the years, maybe from the age of six maybe till I was eight that I became a very quick and a very thin potato peeler because for Polish Jews, potatoes was the staple. Then laundry. We had a machine, a washing machine in our house, no dryer, and eventually the washing machine broke. She had fixed it a few times. My mother was very technically advanced. She used to fix her own sewing machine, fix the TV set. Take out tubes, go to the drugstore, put the tubes in the tester, oh it's dead. She put a little X and an X on the tube in yellow with a crayon. Then another one? She put a red circle and a red circle where she took it out. And she figured out which tubes are which. So I had to go and get those tubes. I had to go buy that for her. And then she couldn't get out of the house on time. And she used to send me to vegetable stores, fruit stores, dairy stores, butchers, and the responsibility was great for a child. I mean, great, I don't mean wonderful.

SM: A lot.

EY: Overwhelming. And then you found that you came home, and there was all things all around the house because she was disorganized. She was a flutter brain. And you don't know if this was because of the war, or it was because of her personality. So, I couldn't stand the clutter. Since I was maybe six, seven, I hated clutter. So I couldn't do my homework.

HS: We had a disorganized, chaotic home.

EY: I could not do my homework unless the clutter was gone. So you find yourself coming home from school at 4:15, 4:30. Most of the other kids got home at three o'clock, so I'm already losing an hour fifteen. Now I'm cleaning up the clutter till the dinner and everything was over. It was eight, nine o'clock at night, and I wanted to do something fun, so I used to like to watch I Love Lucy. So I did resent the fact my grades were poor as a kid. My household was not organized. My father came and left from the time I was six or seven until he left forever when I was 16. We never found our father.

HS: Dysfunctional behavior.

EY: My father left us for the last time in June of 1962. And the National Desertion Bureau searched for my father for 10 full years and never found him, so we don't know what happened.

SM: To this day you don’t know?

EY: To this day. Of course, you got money.

HS: He’s probably passed away.

SM: Now, yes.

HS: It would have been his 100th birthday.

EY: Yes, 100 years just passed. They were the same age, 3 months apart.

HS: 1922.

EY: So I did resent, as a female, as a woman, that I have all this responsibility. I remember at the age of four, it began the pain, because my mother went shopping and left me with a baby that was about four months old, and I was four and a half. He was crying, crying, crying, and he was a big baby. And his diaper was soiled. And I used to see her taking a washcloth, maybe a tissue, there was no wipes, there was no Pampers. I used to clean my brother up with cold water and he cried worse. And we used safety pins. So I had to hold the safety pin.

HS: *Grafka*.

EY: Yes. *Grafka* is the Polish word, by the way, not Yiddish. And I had to be careful not to stick the safety pin into his body. And I thought about this, even then, that he's little and he's alive. It's not a doll. And how could my mommy leave me alone with a person? And I'm little still, because when I picked him up from the couch, I put a towel down. I remembered all the things she did to take care of him. So I did it. And it was not, Oh, thank you so much for taking care of him. It was just taken for granted. And that hurt.

SM: It was just the expectation. Yeah.

EY: And then the dishes. Lots of dishes. Always me. Always. Then later on my brother Larry started doing the dishes, and Harold did the dishes.

HS: We had two sinks in the apartment. One was a shallow or one was a deep sink.

EY: The deep was for soaking.

HS: And what we do is, my mother would pile all the dirty dishes. And it would fill up. It would fill up because she had so much to do. She had probably ADHD, she couldn't focus on one task at a time. And so we learned — and I remember our mother sitting us down, the four of us, I was a little boy, we were little — telling us she couldn't do it all by herself. She had finally realized that she was going nuts. She already was nuts, but she was going nuts. And we needed to do some of the housework. She taught us to wash, she taught us to dry clothing, to iron, to wash dishes, to cook, to vacuum, to sweep, to mop floors. Everything to maintain a home, especially — and we didn't have four bedrooms. Eva had a room and Larry. My mother slept on the couch and Freddie and I slept in another bedroom. And we had a very dysfunctional — I'm being generous to us, right, saying dysfunctional. It was very chaotic. And we learned, to this day, I have an ironing board, I do all my own. I've been married twice. My wives have never ever. I told them, I'll take care of mine. You know, because I want to do it my way. I can cook. But this comes from our upbringing. It comes from being brought up in Jewish home, because it was very important for us to be domestic, but to be Jews. My sister is far more successful at being a Jew than I or my two brothers will ever imagine being.

EY: It has to do with my primary education. I respected my rabbis and my teachers tremendously.

HS: And I had nothing but derision for these people. Because my sister — I, as a young man, as a little boy — my mother, today she would have been, in New Jersey we call it DCF. You probably never heard that.

SM: No.

HS: It's for the defense of children. Her children would've been taken away from her.

EY: Many parents were like that. Parents who left their children alone.

HS: She told us about the Holocaust, but not just in general, in graphic details of the crematorium and all that. I remember one cold night on Southern Boulevard, off Burnside Avenue, it was a beautiful, cold night, the stars were out. And I was walking in from the cold, and my mother was telling me this horrific tale. And I said to her, "Mommy, if we're the chosen people?" — I was probably six years old — "If we're the chosen people, why would God do this?" Of course, that was a rhetorical question. I didn't know any better. But she couldn't answer that. And from then on, I sort of became an atheist. I mean, I want to believe but I can't. It's difficult. My intellect doesn't permit me to do it. But that's a difference of ours.

EY: But we have no qualms about this. My husband passed away, about 12, almost 12 years ago, and I remarried one of my clients, who's a rabbi. And although he's an orthodox rabbi, and he's older than me — he's a Brooklyn boy — and he understands what Harold goes through and he doesn't think anything less of him for it. And he understands. There's many Jews who went through two different kinds of, you know, Holocaust experiences. There were those who believed that they want to strengthen themselves as Jews, and they had the opportunity. When we came to America, there was not a lot of Hebrew schools, there were synagogues. There were *shtiebels*, little synagogues. In every neighborhood, you could hear a cacophony of prayers in different tones of Yiddish and Hebrew, in one neighborhood, on a Yom Kippur day or Rosh Hashanah. Some people they went so anti, because their pain was unbearable — which doesn't take away from the pain of those Jews who remain. Everybody has a different fingerprint, period. And nobody can ever feel someone else's pain. But you have to validate when someone tells you that this isn't — you can't talk people into changing. You just have to accept them. And a Jew should accept another Jew. It shouldn't be where just because you're religious and I'm religious, so we're in a club wow let's celebrate. No. That's why Chabad is so successful. They take you as you are.

SM: I agree.

EY: They have the greatest marketing plan of Jews in the entire world.

HS: Not only just Jews, but of any organized religion. Christians, Muslims. We're all suffering that people have gotten away from religion, and especially in this country. I have a business associate who's a born again Christian minister. He talks about his — I don't know if they call it church — trouble raising funds. *Shuls* that I've been a member of through relationships I've had have to scrape by, live from week to week. The Chabad, they're flush with cash.

EY: Yeah, but not all branches are like that.

HS: I know.

EY: The main thing is location, location, location. But going back, Bronx Jews, from the time that I arrived in 1949, my mother's family arrived between 1928 and 1933, the Bronx was a melting pot. I'm sure that the Lower East Side was a melting pot too, as well as Williamsburg and other areas and boroughs. But there was something about the Bronx that I think was different. Being that it was north of the city, and had a lot of land — we had these parkways, like on Southern Boulevard, like on Grand Concourse, and it was very opulent looking. And a lot — like my mother's Aunt Rose lived on 1888 Arthur [Avenue] just off of Tremont Avenue, and there was a park in front of her house. And then there was Crotona Park, where there was a —

HS: Swimming pool.

EY: And a lake, my father used to take out boats. There was so — it was pretty. It reminded these Jews, because it was modeled after European cities. That made them feel comfortable here. That's what I think. I think that their joy and their comfort was greater than their brethren in lower Manhattan.

SM: Yeah, I mean, it was, that's why people were moving up.

EY: Moving on up, like the Jeffersons. I don't know if you know that series.

SM: I'm familiar.

EY: But that's what it was. And I never had to move on up, I just came right here. And I was on the lower echelon, because of the parent situation, but, to me it amazes me how we survive as adults, me and my brothers. We were not the only ones who had such dysfunction. The Polish Jews were an anomaly, because most Polish Jews were annihilated from 1942 —

HS: Well starting in 1939.

EY: They started killing them. And the Hungarians lasted until 1944, so many more Hungarians survived. So we were an anomaly. We were alone. We didn't have a lot of *landsman*, compared to people from Ukraine or others. We were different. Our Yiddish — every time I speak Yiddish — for fifty years I was married to a Sephardic man, so his mother tongue was French and Hebrew and British English, and he spoke some Arabic from his grandparents, and he spoke Ladino because his mother's side was Turkish, and he knew Yiddish because he was in yeshiva in Switzerland, but it wasn't the same. We spoke English together, we spoke Hebrew together. So here I am, all these years later, remarried a man who speaks Yiddish, American guy, who learned from his grandfather who was in the same room sleeping with him, he was his roommate. And his grandfather never learned English, and he arrived here in the late 1920's. My husband was born in 1933. Yiddish was like his first language, but

he's a total American, Brooklyn boy. But, when we remarried, he said, "You know what I like about you? I love your Yiddish." It's different. We understand each other, but we always argue because he's a G*alitzyaner,* Galicia, his pronunciation is different. I say, *fleysh und beyner,* [emphasis on -eye sound] meat and bones, he says, *fleish und bainer*, [emphasis on -ay sound]. *Laughs* So it's like the Bronx and Brooklyn.

SM: Right? The accent.

EY: It brings you back to your roots.

HS: What she's saying is so true. I understand far more Yiddish than I can speak, but when I hear a Hasidic Jew who are from —

EY: Romania.

HS: When I hear them speak in Yiddish, I sort of know it's Yiddish, but it's sort of twisted a little bit. I can't really — it sounds like Yiddish, but it's not the Yiddish I know. We know a very Germanic Yiddish.

EY: I was born in Germany, so my first language was German. So when my neighbors said, "You speak German? Go back to Hitler," I was four and I only spoke German. I knew some English, but not much. I knew Hitler was a bad guy. What he did, I didn't know, but my mother used to light all these candles and cry and cry, "Hitler took them all away from me," so I knew this was a bad guy. The concept of death, I didn't understand any of that. So, I was very taken aback, and I stopped speaking German as a result of Mrs. Goldberg, my neighbor, saying that to me. And I started to stammer, and I stammered most prominently whenever I tried to speak German, probably two or three years, and then I went to Hebrew School. I was very good at Hebrew. Once I learned English and Hebrew, the stammering stopped. But it was a painful time. People that didn't even know — they were American — they didn't know what we went through, they were not kind to us to understand that it's only a language.

SM: Yeah. I think now of, because of the war in Ukraine, a lot of the Russians here will get attacked for speaking Russian, but all the Russians that are here, they don't support that. They have fled, either Soviet Russia or wherever, especially in places like in Brooklyn, where their communities are. There are some Russian Jews here at Fordham, and their parents were Soviet Jews, so they're here, and they speak Russian amongst each other.

EY: But they're different.

SM: Oh, yeah.

EY: I remember in the early 60's when Russian immigrants started coming. My mother was a Jew, she had to help the community. So Russians came, she spoke Russian — not perfectly, but my mother spoke Polish so they got each other — she sent me on the subway with a boy a year older than me, who had never been to Manhattan, to get him work papers, because his parents needed the money. He had to go to work. There were Russian men who were uncircumcised, they're still Jewish but they were not in the *brit*. So 45 year old men with a 13 year old son, they got first the kid — 13 year old, like in the Arab

world they circumcise them — then, the father had to go to the hospital to get a *brit milah*. She orchestrated that. And there were people who, when they lost somebody, they were ready to cremate. She wouldn't let them. And then there was mixed marriages, where the wife was Christian and the husband was Jewish, and she knew the husband from before the war and he survived. She says, "You cannot cremate him and you have to put him in a Jewish cemetery. And you're not bringing ham sandwiches to his grave site and have a little vodka with this." She wouldn't let it happen. She stood there like a guard and she fought for that dead man's Jewish rights to be buried properly.

So she taught us — she was not a normal person. No one came out of that normal. And as a result, we do have a lot of emotional issues growing up. But eventually, we persevered and we did not give up and we fought and we're all comfortable, we all have good professions, and we raised pretty nice kids. And I'm telling you that it's not just because you're doing a project on the Bronx that I'm telling you this, but all those beginnings that I experienced here, every single one was like a dot on a map. And it brought it all together. At the end of the day, you look back, and you say, this is where our roots are. These are the streets that we played on. These are the people that accepted us. These are the schools where the teachers really taught us well, because we all had very good educations. My brothers in public school and me in a parochial school. There was a period of 2, 3 years, which I told you, at Bais Yaakov, which I was not very proud of. But as an adult, that education, even at Bais Yaakov, allows me, because I'm a — I don't like to call myself Rebbetzin because I don't like titles and whenever they call me Rebbetzin I say, "Excuse me, my name is Eva." I just don't like that. But it helps me deal with people because I've dealt many kinds of cards, and I can see the need that people have to be looked at, listened to, respected, even if they have a very difficult situation. Or, you know not everything is what it looks like on the outside.

SM: Yes, absolutely.

EY: And this is all, we learned this right here in these environments, from all kinds of people that were negative or positive. My mother saved the life of a girl who was called mulatto. She tried to commit suicide on a Friday night. She had a Puerto Rican boyfriend — and her mother was white and her father was Black — and the Puerto Rican boy's mother — it was her only child, and she was a single parent — she did not want her son, Herman, to be with Mary, and she took him away from her. And the girl couldn't deal with life, she broke a window in the building opposite us. Friday night, my mother and I saw this, my mother took a dishrag — not a rag, a dish towel — she ran downstairs. She made a tourniquet. She commandeered a taxi on the corner of 178 St and Southern Boulevard and went to the now defunct Fordham Hospital, and she brought Mary to that hospital and saved her life. She was not applauded for it or anything. The parents never came to our house and said, "Thank you for saving our only child." But that didn't matter to her. She didn't need gratification from that. She just saved that girl's life. And I wonder what ever happened to her. These are the things that I remember. Bad things, they happened, but, you know, the negative things, they went bye bye. It's like another life. The positive things are the things that keep you going forever, you know?

SM: Yeah. Well that's fantastic. I think that's a really wonderful place to wrap it up, but is there anything else that is really on your mind that you want to share before I end the recording.

EY: I will tell you that I'm very proud of the fact that I'm sitting here, at Fordham University, which is Catholic, and I've known it since I was 14 years old, intimately, looking across the street from my high school and seeing the friars.

HS: Jesuits.

SM: The priests. Jesuits.

EY: The Jesuits. I remember they looked different, I can't remember how they looked exactly, but it was a place that I would never think of entering. It was a place that was so foreign to my being as a Jew.

HS: Anything Catholic was like, you could look at it but you couldn't touch it.

EY: And here I am embraced by this university, in a safe place, in a place where I can express myself. It is something very touching.

SM: I'm so glad.

EY: It is a very touching moment for me right now. And I interview people all the time, and I hear all kinds of stories, but I never think about my story.

SM: You never think to tell your own.

EY: It's always someone else's story I'm writing about. So this is a great feat for this school.