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Katz, Gloria

Sophia Maier Garcia

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Sophia Maier (SM): Wonderful. Okay. Yeah. So if you just want to start by telling me a little bit about your family and how they ended up in the Bronx.

Gloria Katz (GK): Okay, I have a book. Interestingly, I've been keeping genealogical records for maybe 20 years. So I can tell you that my paternal grandfather arrived in Detroit in 1913. His oldest son, Isaac, his name was Menachem Mendel Matoren and his son Matoren had arrived in — I must have it recorded somewhere — but earlier in the century. And my grandfather came with his oldest daughter, I think the second child in the Matoren family. They came on a ship that went from a town called Dombrovitz, or Dohritza in Yiddish, via Siberia, the ship went via Siberia. I don't know, I guess they got on a train somehow. I don't know who met them in New York. I haven't seen, at least I don't remember seeing, that ship's manifest. So my grandfather arrived to the home of his oldest son, who may have already been married. The family legend is that my grandfather was born the same year as Tsar Nicholas II. So when he served in the army, he could serve in an Army Band, not in the military unit, but he did serve apparently in the Russian army. He was a rabbi, he was an Orthodox Jew. He was not Lubavitch or any particular sect. He was just an Orthodox Jew. His wife remained, my grandma Gittel remained in Dombrovitz. She was a storekeeper and she remained there until 1923. He didn't see her for 10 years. Somewhere in between the family ended up in New York. I know I've seen a record that my uncle Isaac tried to go from Detroit into Canada to work. He may have been an alien at that point and was turned back. And they they ended up in New York. And my grandmother came over at that point. Oh, my grandfather had come with a daughter [Pauline]. She married in Detroit and her husband was a pharmacist and I think a bootlegger, and he was killed. And she was a widow with three children.

So by the time my mother arrived in New York in 1927, her parents were already living on the Lower East Side and my mother moved in with them. They were waiting for my mother's youngest brother, Froim, who had been supposed to come over on the ship with my mother, but he had some eye sickness, and they didn't let you into Ellis Island if you have — it was still Ellis Island, I believe. And they looked at your vision. So he came a year later, my uncle Froim came a year later. My mother was living with her parents on the Lower East Side. And she was a beautiful young woman. And she put cold cream on her face and woke up with a rat about to bite her face. Quickly thereafter with a family moved to the Bronx, Park Avenue.

I think my mother was quite well educated when she left Europe. She was living with her older sister, Duarel. The older sister was married and had two children and unfortunately died in the Holocaust. Okay, that was the only child of Mendel and Gittel who did not come to America. Duarel took over the family business. And so, my mother and my Uncle Froim were living in the Bronx on Park Avenue and I know from the 1930 census that they were joined by my Aunt Pauline and her three children [Rose, Norman, and Muriel] in the same apartment in the Bronx. We have that address somewhere, but it's not

a good time to look for it right now. My father's mother [Chana] was divorced by her husband and she, my grandmother on my paternal side, was from a town four kilometers from Siget in what is now Romania. But it was on the Tissa border river, across from Ukraine. And it was 200 miles from where my mother grew up. My grandmother, after the divorce, joined her brother, who had come over sometime in the early 1900s: Uncle Louie Katz and his wife Rose, who at that point, had three children [Mayer, Carl, and Sheldon]. My father was born — my mother and father say they were born in 1906, we have no actual records. And I suspect my father chose a date that made him about my mother's age, I think he might have been a little younger. There was a Bible, a family bible that my mother had in her hands at some point, she must have given it to a relative. My mother's actual birthday could have been acquired, but my mother and father chose birth dates. So my father, who was born in a little town called Krechinov, which is four miles from Siget where Elie Wiesel also was from in the Marmarosh. The Marmarosh was in Czechoslovakia, and it's in Ukraine now. It's just a mountain area in the northern part of Romania, the southern part of Ukraine.

So my father and his two sisters [Ruth and Blanche] were left with my great grandmother, who ran a *shenk*, which is like a bar. And the three little children were raised initially, by my great grandmother Hinda Katz. My grandmother Chana took a job [in America]. She was a very good cook, because her mother had run this, you know, this bar restaurant. And she worked in a kosher home as a housekeeper for rich Jewish people. And I think I found those records. But again, she was lying about her age, she didn't want the people to know that she had three children [in Krechinov] that she was trying to raise money for and that she was divorced. I never knew any of my grandparents. My grandfather remained [in the Mamarosh], and he married a third wife. My grandmother was the second wife. And he died in, I believe, in Usograd, which is now in Ukraine, with his third wife, but my grandmother was here [in the United States]. She got money through her work. You know, she was very close to her brother Louis. And she brought my father over, I believe it was 1921. And I mentioned to you that he was on the Olympic, which was the sistership of the Titanic. I didn't know that until my father died.

SM: That's crazy. That's so cool.

GK: And he came with a bunch of young guys, young kids, with someone taking them. And he was met, I believe, I'm not sure who met him, but he did see his mother. But he went to live with his uncle, Uncle Louis, who at that point already had a child who was handicapped, and initially my father cared for that child and started elementary school at PS 151. I think on 92nd Street [in Manhattan], it's not there anymore. They built a high rise and put a school inside of it. I actually was a substitute teacher there for four days once. It was first at 91st and 92nd. I can't remember exactly. And his uncle had a —

SM: You just accidentally muted yourself. Yeah.

GK: He had a spray painting business where eventually my father tried to work. And my father was a very healthy — he was little, he was malnourished when he came here. But he couldn't stay in the spray

painting and they were landskite family members who are in the for business and ultimately, my father became a furrier. Not his own business, he was an operator, he sewed the skins together. And that was his career for his whole life. He dropped out of school almost immediately because he was very short and they put him in the fourth grade and he was flirting with the girls. And he wouldn't do as he was told and he was expelled. I believe he was expelled. He tried working with his uncle and somehow he did many, many things because the Depression happened. And, you know, my mom got an eighth grade diploma here [in New York City], but she was educated through almost going to normal school to be a teacher in Europe. And my parents met on a ship, a boat that was a singles cruise around Manhattan Island. And it was for young immigrants. My mother was beautiful and always dressed very creatively. My father was a very handsome man at that point. They were tiny. I mean, he was like, five four, she was probably five feet tall. She packed sandwiches that her mother made. Oh, they were chopped string beans or something like latkes. And my father had no food. And he approached her at that point. My father was not a linguist, but he picked up English very quickly. I think he was like a wild child being raised by his grandmother. There was no grandfather because he was named the Uncle Koppel. He took the name Jacob [in the United States], everybody called him Jack. My mother's name was Esther, it was Esther in English and it was Esther in Hebrew. So they must have spoken English by then because my mother acquired an eighth grade certificate. And I think somewhere I have that certificate, I think it was from a school on the Lower East Side. So I don't think they immediately went to the Bronx. But he was then living with his Uncle Louie, who was rich. He had this spray painting business. He moved from 84th Street in Yorkville, where the Hungarians were and it was the Austro-Hungarian empire. And he was a good businessman, Louis. And so Louis' family moved to Crotona Parkway in the Bronx, apparently to a large apartment, and in the 1930 census, they already had an Irish maid. Because the son, the oldest son Mayer was handicapped, he had meningitis. And he was what I would say now as a school psychologist, probably moderately mentally retarded. He was a gorgeous, tall man, but he stuttered and he was somewhat slow. My father was close to him for Mayer's entire life. I think Mayer died before my father. They were first cousins. And there was another son, Carl, who ultimately became an accountant and moved down south, so I have southern relatives. And there was a third son, Sheldon, who became a neurosurgeon very early. And the story is that Louis invested in property and they were going to build with some other people. They were going to build the Triborough Bridge. And it wasn't built on that property. They said he died of a brain tumor, and that's why Sheldon became a neurosurgeon, but I think he committed suicide. I think like a lot of people during the Depression. There may have been insurance. His wife was brilliant, Rose. Aunt Rose was not a blood relative, but from that same area in Europe, became very close to my father, and taught my father a lot about business because she had come earlier to the United States. These people had no education whatsoever. But their kids obviously did.

And so my mother and father were married in the living room of my maternal grandparents' apartment on Park Avenue in the Bronx by a Rabbi named Rabbi Shulfenthal. And I've seen, there is no ketubah, they couldn't have afforded a ketubah. This was in 1932. They must have met in 1930 or 1931 because my father had his two full sisters there. Rose and Blanche, Rikel and Blimah, who my grandmother

earned enough money to bring them over in 1928, I believe. That was only one year after my mother arrived here. My paternal family lived with my father in the 1930s; my grandmother, her two daughters and my father were living in an apartment on Crotona Parkway in the Bronx. So that was how my family really arrived in the Bronx. And my parents got married and they lived, as many people did during the Depression, in a number of different places on the east side of the Bronx. I don't know if they ever skipped out on the rent as people did in those days. My father and Isaac, my mother's oldest brother, established a Zekel business, a business repairing canvas bags in which potatoes and onions were collected and were delivered for vegetables. And then the bags would rip and he would repair them. And my father somehow either picked them up — my father got a car then — because I guess there was no fur business initially.

SM: Well nobody's buying furs during the Depression, really, you know.

GK: During the war. So my father had this car and he parked it on a hill. He got a driver's license, and I have [a copy of] his last driver's license. And somehow, in the night, the emergency brake — something happened — it rolled into somebody's door. And he paid for the damage and he never drove again. And therefore, after I heard that story, I got a license and I never drove really.

SM: Yeah. Oh my goodness.

GK: My father had a dress business at some point. And he loved to dress my mother, and my mother was beautiful. And she could not sew so when she came here she — of course, she was going to be a teacher. And everybody went into the garment trades, which my two aunts did, Ruth and Blanche. But she couldn't sew but she was beautiful. And she had the perfect figure, which was then like a 12 or a 14.

SM: Yeah, right. Nothing like the standards today.

GK: It’s sad, now the common [size] is like a two. In Hawaii, the Japanese-American women are so thin. The clothing is a two, it fits on my thumb. So they would call her out, she would put on the clothing even though she was very short. But she could show it off, and I think she did that. My parents got married, they had their own apartment. But my maternal grandparents lived with them at some point. Gittel and Mendel were too kosher for my mother who was also kosher. So my mother said they cooked separately because my mother was kosher, basically, but not kosher enough for them. And I don't know what happened, you know, because it must have been chaotic, when my Aunt Pauline arrived with the three children. Three brilliant children, but they were orphan children. And I think my father became like the man of the house. You know, because my grandfather [was a religious Jews and my] grandmother came here and sold pretzels on the street on the Lower East Side. My grandfather occasionally gave Bar Mitzvah lessons, and my mother really couldn't work. My Aunt Pauline was a fabulous seamstress, very industrious. She never got re-married, but she had some fantastic lover, Mr. Bunin, who was an engineer. They were together until he died I guess. She went to California, but she’d

come back to see Mr. Bunin and stayed with him in the apartment unmarried. And my mother took me by the apartment; in the 1940s and early 50s, scandals were discussed in my family. Norman went to Townsend Harris; he was my much older first cousin. His older sister, Miriam went to Hunter High School and college, but she didn't finish. Norman did. He went to City College. And Miriam somehow was the youngest of those three, and got out to California and married somebody in the Air Force. This was during World War Two already and Muriel had a child. Norman ended up in California, too. Rose married someone who was an officer during the end of World War Two, you know, I guess during the time when they were partitioning Germany.

SM: Oh, yeah, the Cold War.

GK: No, before the Cold War, but I forgot what it was called. But at some point, [cousin Rose] gave me little things because everything was sold on the black market. I have like a little thing that says "Occupied Japan" on the back of it, you know, she gave me an ashtray. And my brother was born in 1934. And my parents, you know, had this wonderful, healthy, rebellious child. And my paternal grandmother died in 1939 of cancer. She was only in her 50s, she was beautiful. She had not remarried. But she saw her three full children married. My Aunt Ruth married and had three children. Blanche married but didn't have any children. But when grandmother Chana died, my brother was the — I think at that point — the only grandchild and she left money for him to go to Yeshiva. But he went to Salanter, which is now part of that big yeshiva in the Bronx. It was an excellent, excellent school where my brother learned English. The English faculty was fabulous. But he hated it. He hated it. He had played in the street with all the street kids. And when my mother would take him to school, he he acted like he was ADHD. She said he walked all over the desks. He was horrible, because, I think, he wanted to go to public school with the kids that he was friends with. He lasted through the seventh grade, though. Well, he was a very good student and the favorite of my [maternal] grandfather, the rabbi. Of course, the Hebrew. The other grandchildren were jealous, because my brother was very, very bright. But in seventh grade, there was an incident where my brother was sitting at a desk next to another kid. And then the other kid said, "You want to hear wild horses," and put his fists under the desk and began to pound and my brother put his ear down and the rabbi hit — I guess he hit both of them. The rabbi turned around, my brother went to push him out the window. It was the first floor. But my brother was expelled and his wish came true. He started eighth grade in public school and made Stuyvesant High School.

He was rebellious. And I think he never really got along with my mother. I mean, he did terrible things. Like Harold locked her out of the house while he was carrying groceries for her. He went inside, locked the door, and he said, "I won't let you in until you get me a new Superman comic." And she went to the next door neighbor and got old Superman comics. And he said, "They're old comics." And I don't think he could read yet. He obviously couldn't read, he was like five years old or four years old.

He had a tantrum in the street. He wanted a hot dog. My mother said it wasn't kosher. A cop came over and offered to buy the hot dog. I mean, he tortured her his whole life. At the end, when he was a teenager, I think still in Stuyvesant, he also said, “Pull the trigger,” and we shot my mother [with a BB gun], but my father said, “You can move out.” And my father put him in a rented room, but of course it didn't last because he wanted to come home and eat. And my mother was a very good cook. So he came home, but he was disturbed at some point. My brother never had therapy. But he took the family pictures, my father took thousands of pictures of the family, of him, of me, of my mother, family members, but mostly of our immediate family. And those pictures are all going to Fordham University.

SM: Yeah, that's going to be fantastic, it would be wonderful. Yeah.

GK: So Harold blackened out his face with ink in the photographs, and subsequently I washed it off as much as I could, but there were always multiples my father would take, like in my different poses, or the two of us together and he had one of those accordion cameras. In the 40s, I was not yet born. My brother was born in March 1934. I was born September 1944, because of the Depression, my father not having stable employment in fur. But during the war, women started wearing fur. My parents were in their late 30s, by the time they had me they were in their 30s. I don't think it was intended, but my mother was pregnant when they were drafting men of 39 years. And he said my mother was pregnant, he was deferred. At one point, there's also a family story. They said, everybody who passed the physical go to the right, if you didn't go to the left, so of course, he passed the physical and he went to the left and didn't get drafted. His younger brother-in-law was wounded at the Normandy invasion. So Froim dragged his leg. When I was born, I was the youngest on both the maternal and the paternal side.

SM: Okay, the real baby of the family.

GK: I was the baby of the family, I had all the privilege. My cousin Anna had polio. And when she was two years old — it's on my father's side, my Aunt Ruth's daughter — Anna had polio when I was growing up. I guess, elementary age, I was so much taller and thicker than her because I was, you know, I was nursed, my mother said, I saw the blouse she wore that had buttons in the front, and I would begin to salivate. Apparently, she enjoyed nursing, she nursed my brother until he bit her.

SM: Oh, my goodness.

GK: I don’t think she nursed me that long. But I don't think we were ever bottle fed. Meanwhile, I was growing up with all these relatives in the Bronx, all of them older than me. I have cousins from Isaac, one cousin who fought I think in the Pacific. So he was, I mean, these cousins were old enough to be my aunts and uncles. Rose, who had gone to Hunter College, you know, Norman, and they were all like these grownups when I was still a child.

SM:What was that environment like for you? Was it like having a bunch of like aunts and uncles or, you know —

GK: I mean, there were always kids around and then my father's half sister, who was in Budapest during the war, he had three half sisters in Budapest, who, in 1944, they were all marched out. The youngest one died. My aunt and her sister survived. One sister married a non Jewish soldier and sort of disappeared. I could never find her after I saw her once in my childhood. But she moved to Australia. But my Aunt Rose was a widow by then, had one daughter who was a hidden child, and had then on her way to the DP camp, someone said that man's a doctor, he lost his whole family. She went after him, and they had a child, Arnold, and in 1949, Rose went and got her child Elaine. She and her daughter never had a good relationship, because when she went for her daughter, her daughter said, "You're not my mother." Elaine had been raised by Christian family. Never got along. But Arnold was born to the Doctor and Rose, and they settled in the Bronx. And he was a physician at Fordham Hospital. I only learned recently, I thought he remained at the hospital because he couldn't do a private practice because he couldn't pass the license exam, but he did. And Sheldon the neurosurgeon — they said he failed — Sheldon got somebody to go through the records. And he had passed, and he became a licensed physician. I only heard that story after my 75th birthday. I never knew because my Aunt Rose was a female taxi driver when there were no female taxi drivers.

SM: Wow.

GK: They [Aunt Rose and Dr. Max Schwartz] bought a house in the Pelham Parkway area. A house on the corner where he was going to have his private practice, but he remained at Fordham and he died in service. So she got tons of money, because if you die in service if you work for New York City there's a lot of money that comes out of it. So she had Arnold and she had Elaine. I don't know if Elaine got married when her name was Schwartz the doctor. I don't know, but Arnold went to Columbus High School, and he lives in Portland, Oregon now. You know, he got my crib and I have a memory of the day I had to leave that crib. I was born in 1944 and I guess they pulled the side down for my bed. We lived in a three room apartment and I was in my parents bedroom.

SM: Okay. And were they still living on Crotona Park?

GK: They ended up right before I was born. Rose, Louis' widow, encouraged them to get a nice apartment. And we lived there until I was 18 at 1086 East 180 Street. The building no longer stands. It was a gorgeous building. But somehow, I think it was meant to have elevators and the elevators did not come in. So we lived in a walk up, but it was marble. It had fountains in the front. It was stunning. And it was knocked down when people were marauding in the East Bronx for the copper pipes, but it was a building full of veterans from the war. People who were Holocaust survivors, people who got out of Europe before the Holocaust, Jews from Eastern Europe. My mother was multilingual. So she spoke

Ukrainian to the Ukrainians and German to the German Jews. And my father was very social. So they had a lot of friends. And there were loads of kids my age.

SM: In the neighborhood around it, was the neighborhood itself predominantly Jewish or?

GK: No, no, but I thought everyone was Jewish. No. I mean, my mother let me eat — Mrs. Marsweski, I think she was Ukrainian — my mother even told me the cookies were made with lard, but I was allowed to eat them. And the next door neighbor's, the Casaros, were Italian-American. I don't know if the mother Mrs. C was a widow, I don't know if she was born in Italy or not. But I know she had a son who was a little bit older than my brother, and she had a niece who was a good friend and would come and visit. And so she was Italian-American. My kindergarten class — I donated my school pictures — and you can see that the kids in my kindergarten class were not all Jewish. It's clear some were very dark skinned. There the teacher has her arm around a black girl, Bernadine. But somehow it seemed to me a very Jewish environment. Maybe I had no grandparents, but other Jewish kids had grandparents. My friend Mirel Axelrod had grandparents living in the building, they were her paternal grandparents. The parents and the grandparents had gotten out of Vienna right before the war. And they even got their furniture out. I mean, they got their furniture out! Max Axelrod had a PhD in math and Rose Ully [Axelrod], the wife, had been analyzed by one of Freud's students.

SM: Okay. Yeah.

GK: My brother studied and he was so rebellious. He went around saying Heil Hitler during the war. And when, after the war, he studied German — who studied German? What Jewish kids study German? And that was his language, because it would be easy because he knew Yiddish. My parents spoke — I believe I thought about that the other day — I think they spoke English to each other. My dad was not a linguist. He had been here long enough. My mother picked up languages easily. All but romance languages, although I'm not sure. You know, for all I know, she had an Italian neighbor next door. But my brother heard enough Yiddish because he had his grandparents. I did not. He heard Yiddish and he wanted the German. Max Axelrod, Dr. Axelrod, became a bookkeeper. Of course, you'd never work as a professor. Oh, they [my brother and Max Axelrod] would listen to German opera.

SM: Wow. Okay.

GK: And, you know, he helped my brother, I guess with his studies because he had two daughters [Mirel and Judy], and they were younger. So, I think, he must have known my brother was bright. My brother, he was just a piece of work. Which made me a piece of work as well, but I was a good one. When he said pull the trigger it was his fault. We shot my mother and he got the gun, which he bought himself. And we were sitting with my mother shelling peas in the doorway and he said pull the trigger and I was his little sister. I pull the trigger and it grazed her cheek. She ran to the mirror. She was vain, she was gorgeous. And at that time we had no telephone, so my mother waited until my father came home. My

father took the BB gun and put it over his knee and he bent the metal. My brother said for years after, “I don't know how he did it.” My father worked on a sewing machine, he was not a big man. My brother went out, he earned money, tips you know, with bagging groceries, and he got another BB gun. But, you know, this is the kind of thing that happened. My mother bought me golden library books. I mean, we went out. I went to kindergarten, but I didn't go to any preschool. I hung around her, she was a housewife. She could never really work. She said, “I don't know why.” She was my father’s wife, she was beautiful. I think he loved her. I think they fell in love. I think they had a good sexual relationship. And I think he was willing to support her no matter what. I was in the house with her till I was five, you know, of course in the street with the kids and she was with the mothers blah, blah, blah. But I followed her around and she took me out and bought golden library books. And one of the first books that she bought me was the *Night Before Christmas*. And I fell in love with the idea of Christmas. So my brother said, “Let's hang our stockings up on the radiator.” In the living room there was one of those old fashioned radiators. We hung up, I don't know, our socks and my father's socks and the next morning there was nothing in it.

SM: Yeah, I wonder why.

GK: But he went to the — we lived right next to the Bronx River and the Bronx Zoo — so, I remember being I must have still been a preschooler. Harold arrived with a cardboard carton with a turtle in it that he found in the Bronx River. And he said my mother should make turtle soup. She said turtle soup is not kosher.

SM: I had never wondered if turtle soup was kosher, but now I know the answer to that question.

GK: I don't know. She probably was not about to throw it out. I remember it as a big turtle. The Bronx River was clean, and then as we lived there, the neighborhood deteriorated. People threw trash in it. We could see the Bronx River from our back window. And we could see Bronx Park, we were right across 180 street from the entrance to Bronx Park. Right between the 180th Street Station and West Farms [Road]. There was a lovely bridge over the Bronx River. It was a beautiful building. You know, very, very large. I guess that's why I've always wanted to live in a large apartment building. I have been back to the site with my niece and her children. There is a community garden on the side of the building. And the guy who's a Vietnam vet who was running it at the time we were there — it must have been more than 10 years ago — he said, “You know what that is?” The fountain that was up on the upper level of our apartment building was in the ground. I said, “That's the fountain that was in front of the building.” You had to climb up three steps. There were no flowers at that point, but there were shrubs. And then there was a walk and then there were eight steps. And then there was the courtyard with this fountain that didn't have water. It had like plantings when I grew up, and we faced that fountain and Bronx Park.

And Bronx Park had a playground. It was right across the street and there was a hill and we sledded and we had my uncle, my Aunt Blanche's husband, Bill Kaufman, was a house painter. We had incredible

toys and games. Whether Bill stole them or the rich people threw them out. So we had a Flexible Flyer sled, we had Monopoly, we had Chinese checkers. They came to us from Uncle Bill who had no kids. He was a good friend of my father's somehow *landsliet*. You know, they were Hungarian Romanian. My aunts married men who were basically Hungarian Romanian. And Bill would come with these things. And we had all these games and I would play with my brother, even though I was so much younger. So, in our apartment — the apartment was interesting, because it was the third floor and you walked into this huge, what they would call, a box room now with no windows. We had a dining room table in there and a large closet, and the trunk in which I sat facing my mother when I pulled the trigger. My father was the only one who visited his brother-in-law [Froim] when he was had been wounded in World War Two, in a VA hospital. And his wife had little kids, I don't know if the wives went or my other uncles, but my father was loved by my mother's family also. So he went to visit Froim and so we had army blankets and women would knit squares. So we had a beautiful blanket made out of knit squares that were sewn together that was given to my Uncle Frank [Froim], because he was, I think, in for at least a year, maybe longer, in a VA hospital. And my father would go there, no car, just public transportation, because after the accident, didn't drive.

SM: Yeah, no driving.

GK: I mean, he once walked across the Bronx. My cousin Norman, who was my Aunt Pauline's son, who went to Townsend Harris, had a date. Maybe he was at City College. It was Christmas and Norman was sick, and he had a date. My father walked across the Bronx to tell the girl. Oh, I don't know, that's the story. I can't believe my father didn't ride because my father worked on Saturdays. I mean, if he could, but he went and told the girl that Norman couldn't make the date. And this is my mother's side of the family. Norman, Charlene, and Rose, Pauline's kids were all gone. And Pauline was gone. And Pauline came back and forth from California to visit my mother and her other relatives in New York. But Norman was already out there. And he married — I think it was still in the 1930s or the early 40s — a Jewish girl in California. Her father was a garbage man. He had some kind of garbage truck with horses. He saw this guy in the street and he says, "I have a daughter, are you Jewish?" And they got married.

SM: That's one way to do it, I guess.

GK: And I think Pauline went out there right after that. And Mirel was out there married to the guy in the Air Force. So she was married three times and she was a slut like me. She had one daughter and then had another daughter who apparently — I have no contact with the other daughter — died because she was diabetic. She was also mildly mentally retarded. And probably very mixed up because her mother was really problematic. But everybody else more or less remained in the Bronx. And Isaac had a house in the Pelham Parkway area. I remember many, many parties or family gatherings in the backyard. I don't remember being in the house, I remember being in the backyard. There were also already younger kids from Isaac, who was so much older than my mother, whose kids had kids. Dorothy, his oldest

daughter, had kids almost my age. So there were kids around, I'm sure that I wasn't sitting there just with the grownups. My mother's family probably spoke in Yiddish, because they had ultimately gotten it together with the parents except for the one daughter who died in the Holocaust. Now in retrospect, I feel there was a lot of depression in the family because of losing her. One of her children survived. He was a partisan, he was a teenager — when the Einsatzgruppen came, the teenagers left that town and so a number of them survived. I have many cousins in Israel, I met a lot of the survivors. But my cousin was in Poland, in communist Poland. And he met someone, a Jewish girl whose family had survived because her mother had a sewing machine and her husband left. When her husband was in Siberia, she went to Siberia with a sewing machine and survived the war with her daughters. And her daughter Hassia said, "I'm marrying a Jewish guy." And she met my cousin [Sender Wolkan]. And it took years. He didn't get out until I was a graduate student in the late 60s. When he finally got out, he could correspond in Yiddish and my older siblings all — I think we all read and wrote Yiddish. We all went to *shul*. We all learned how to read. My cousin Stanley did go to yeshiva, I think. But he wasn't the favorite because my brother was smarter. He resented that apparently. Either my mother or Stanley, who is my cousin, has been dead forever. But I know the grandson, his son, my second cousin. I get confused about how that works. So Stanley ended up marrying a *shiksa* after being a Korean [War] vet and went to live in Holland and I have Dutch cousins.

SM: That's pretty cool.

GK: One is transgender! My family became — I mean, one of Norman's grandchildren is African American. His son [Martin Jaffe] married an African American widow, I think she was a widow or divorcee, with two brilliant daughters, and then he had a child with her. And he was Norman's favorite — that black kid, who I think is a filmmaker now — was Norman's favorite grandchild. I never met the kid, but I saw Norman. Norman, I believe, is still alive in his nineties. But I, in the whole transition to retirement and Hawaii, I couldn't keep my finger on everybody. But I'm the only one with any interest in this, apparently. On my father's side, I do know where everyone is, because it was just three siblings. And one didn't have any children.

SM: Yeah, so it's much easier.

GK: However, I have thousands of — one of them is *ba'al teshuva* — and I have hundreds of cousins. Hasidic cousins. But my cousin was a *ba'al teshuva*, married a *ba'al teshuva*. They had 10 children. Each of those children had children and now they're great grandparents. And his wife is Miriam Smetana, his name was Eddie [Isser] Smetana. Eddie's wife is my age, but she keeps having these great grandchildren, and they're all over the world. All over the United States, that's for sure. But one was even in Odessa for a while. So, and I keep — I, every Friday, I send a Happy Shabbat with a picture of something from Hawaii to them. So I keep up with them. And Miriam tells me, but I'm not giving them any presents anymore. I'm tired of it. There's too many of them. Glass, it's breakable, she tells me they all have little children. I was collecting these little vases for all of them whenever they had more kids —

finished. I get invited to the wedding, I go. And I'm weird. They think I'm weird because I'm single. I have money. I live in Manhattan. Nobody is in my apartment when I'm not there. One time, Eddie [Isser] and his wife came to visit me when I lived on the Upper East Side. I had to tell the doorman they were not in costume, because they look really odd with the sheitel, the thick stockings, and the beard. I mean, this is not the people who usually come to visit me.

SM: No. *Laughs*

GK: They wouldn't eat my cream cheese, they bought their own. They only will eat a banana because it's wrapped in skin. I got them paper cups. But I saw them in Montreal. Miriam's mother liked me better than she liked her daughter because I wasn't religious. You know, I'm exactly Miriam's age, except she has, you know, like all these great grandchildren *Laughs*. But I'm close to them. And Isser is a little alienated from his older brother, Heshy, who became a civil engineer and married a girl [Lilly] whose parents were survivors of the Holocaust who ended up living in Germany, and Heshy's wife's father was head of the Jewish congregation in Nuremberg. Lilly's mother died in one of those German old age homes for Jews. But he met her when she was a nanny in New York. So he met her, and they have very successful children. All — for the most part — the children are all college educated, physicians, lawyers. Everybody is very successful in the next generation, which is typical.

SM: Yeah, no, absolutely. That's something I've definitely seen as a trend throughout everyone that I've spoken to. So let's go back to the neighborhood a little bit. So tell me about shops and amenities, other things you'd like to do.

GK: On 180th street, our building was isolated. And it touched on a neighborhood that was not Jewish. So when my brother got the room, it was not in a Jewish person's house. But when you walked up 180th street and across Boston Road, that was the shopping street, and I would go with my mother. I went with my mother — that's when my brother had a tantrum, the hot dog tantrum. And it was probably an Irish cop who said, "I'll buy him a hot dog, if you don't have the money I'll buy him a hot dog," and she's saying, "It's not kosher," while he's in the street kicking and screaming. So I remember that my mother took me to what was called a commission bakery. And one of my first expressions in English was half Yiddish. It was *katschke* cake, because Drake's Cake had a duck on it, a Drake. And it was a commission bakery, didn't sell fresh food. The food was wrapped in plastic, it had this picture. So I have a vision of her carrying me and saying *katschke* cake. Maybe I was in a carriage, maybe I was walking already. There were all kinds of greengrocers. I went with her, there was a chicken market, where she picked out the chicken. I think they killed the chicken, they plucked the chicken, but she came, sat, and pulled out the pin feathers there, I think. We also were near Tremont Avenue, and my school was on Tremont Avenue. I went to P.S. 6 in the Bronx that looked like a castle. They said it was a Civil War hospital, it was that old. And it is still standing.

SM: Of course it is.

GK: That neighborhood didn't change that much. I went back and saw the site of my building, and they built nice housing, but the church on 180th Street is still there, some Protestant church, partly boarded up, but it was there. And there was housing all along there, but there were lots of stores, and they were independent stores. I distinctly remember the chicken market. I remember the sweet potato man in the street selling sweet potatoes and the chestnuts. Those things we could have, but my brother used to go to the lot and make a fire and it was called "mickeys," they would — the boys — because they were much older, they would cook the potatoes. There was a vacant lot near us before you reached Boston road, and there was a drunk in the street, and there were daisies in the lot. And my fantasy was that he peed and made the yellow daisies grow. *Laughs* But that's where they were, but across the street — I mean not the shopping — but there was this hill and we sled down the hill, and there was a lot of snow. And then the summer. My father came home. We lived on the third floor. He took a blanket, Uncle Frank's army blanket, and I think I would go upstairs — he had cold coffee, not hot — and I would bring him, no thermos, like in a glass jar from borscht. He would relax because the days were long, he came up on the subway, you know, but it was still light, and we didn't have dinner till later. My mother always cooked a wonderful dinner like a dairy dinner in the summer. We had fruit. Oh, there were, I remember, the horse and wagon with the fruits and vegetables in front of the building. I mean, we always had fruits and vegetables. I don't know how long it lasted, but in my childhood we had that. And there was also some construction, somebody dumped sand, and so we played in it. There was no playground yet in my childhood. My early childhood they built a playground in Bronx Park. But when there was no playground, I was playing with Mirel Axelrod. We had no shovel. Somehow there was a little glass jar and the top of the jar and we were playing in the sand pile and our mothers were there. And Mirel and I had a fight and she bit me, but somehow our mothers remained friends. Ullie was very well educated. She was the one analyzed by Freud's student. My mother was different because my mother was a more Ashkenazi Jewish type, creative. My mother had many breakdowns, by the way, because she was a woman ahead of her time. She was very creative. She read, she read Yiddish, she read Hebrew. She didn't fit in and she wasn't American. It was like torture when I became a Brownie, she became a co-leader, but you know, this was — but she said, "I was a Girl Scout in Europe. That's why I'm straight. I stand tall. You're curved." But turns out, I had curvatures of the spine but they were never diagnosed. So I couldn't stand that straight. So anyway, there were lots of places to buy food and we ate very well. There was a candy store in the building, it was in the building. It was Mr. Cohen's candy store. That's where the phone was.

SM: Oh, okay.

GK: We had no phone initially. And he had all the ice cream. I think it was Breyer's ice cream. And the candies. And Mr. Cohen's family lived in the building too. So I was friends — I can't remember the relationship, you know, to him, but I know that he had the candy store. There were candy stores around, because when I went to Yiddish *shul*, at the Shalom Aleichem Folk Shul, which was on 180th Street, and my dad would pick me up when it was dark in the winter, and he would sit with a former furrier,

who had heart disease, who had opened a candy store near the train, and he would buy me an ice cream cone in the middle of the winter. And my mother would freak out. You know, the candy store owner would put wax paper so it wouldn't melt and it wouldn't melt, it was 30 degrees! Come home with an ice cream cone, and my father — my father was always social with these people. He knew everybody. My mother was a little less social. But our neighbors were young. We had a young divorced neighbor who would sit talking to my mother in that box room at the dining table, her dog Spiky would come in. Spiky was mostly Shepherd. We never had pets, by the way, my brother and I. So Harold never had a pet and his kids went crazy for it, so of course they now have dogs. You know, my grand nieces and grand nephew are dog people. And my niece and nephew. So I was telling you about the stores and, I don't know, whatever.

SM: That was wonderful. Yeah. I also — what kind of like music and things would you like to listen to? I know you said other folks were listening to German opera.

GK: Rock and roll, mushy love music. I remember the early Elvis Presley movies. My brother was listening to opera, and he was an opera lover, but it certainly worked because somebody would give him good opera tickets [when he was an adult]. And he would take me, his wife didn't like opera. And at that point, I was living in Manhattan. And he worked for Seagram. He was an executive, you know, businessman. And so he would take me to the opera. But I don't remember much, I remember being taken to see the Nutcracker very early, a small production of The Nutcracker. I remember the mice in the costume, I remember where we were sitting. I remember seeing a Spanish opera when I took Spanish in Junior High School and I won the Spanish medal, even though I cheated. I helped someone cheat once, but I had the highest average in junior high so I got the Spanish medal when I graduated from Herman Ridder. And that was the language I took, but I had some Yiddish also, so I had both languages. And also ultimately got licenses to be a school psychologist in both. I couldn’t use the Yiddish because the Hasidim didn't trust me, but I used the Spanish a lot.

SM: Yeah, I'm sure. I mean, I speak Spanish as well. So it's been very helpful in all this kind of work in school.

GK: When I was a school psychologist, the kids knew I knew English, so it was mostly interacting in English. And I had colleagues who spoke Spanish who were native speakers. So you know, I understood everything and then I supervised in the Heights, in the Washington Heights area. I supervised bilingual school psychologists and I can understand what was going on when they did their assessments and so on. But where was I?

SM: Just about the music, about the Spanish opera. Yeah.

GK: I remember being taken to some of the stuff, not disliking it. But of course, like all the kids, I liked the popular music. When I was a Girl Scout, we went to an Arthur Murray dance studio and learned the

fox trot. The girls. I remember when I got to Bronx Science, there were kids who would — you know, I was in an incredible class, and there were a lot of upper middle class kids that would play instruments and there was an orchestra. But when I got to Bronx Science, I looked like a juvenile delinquent. I dressed in black, I wore black, you know, nobody talked to me the first few years. I had a girlfriend who did, a buddy from junior high. I wasn't friendless, but I was a fish out of water. I was gonna send you a picture of me with my Irish boyfriend, but I decided not to. But I guess I can still send you, me with Kevin Callaghan. And I remember that, you know, by college, my ex-husband [Elliot Gorlin] was at Baruch. And there was a fraternity and all the music was the popular music. I did not get involved in classical music until I was divorced and dating someone who was of my background, but he [Harry Cohen] had — he was a physician, and many physicians are talented musicians, but he couldn't play anything, he could whistle anything he heard back. He did not play an instrument. I took piano lessons by the way. In junior high, they put me in the orchestra class, an SP class that did music. They give me a flute, I can't blow into the flute. So they give me a clarinet, and I can't play the clarinet. And I insist, because now I'm my brother's sister, "I want typing." So Mr. Raven, the music teacher somehow put me [on a chair without any instrument]. I didn't get typing, but at the end of the row, I couldn't sing. It was a musical junior high. The teachers put on musical comedies.

SM: Really?

GK: Oh my god! We had — I mean, a famous opera singer [alumna] — I can't remember her name now [Roberta Resnick] — who went to that junior high. And the kids would be in these musicals. But I was just audience. But I listen to QXR all the time, WQXR. I'm a member of many music organizations, I live on the block of Carnegie Hall now. And now I recognize everything classical. That's my music, the classical music. And I actually, somebody in my class at Bronx Science was a relatively famous composer. He's dead now. Arnold Rosner. They did a profile of him in the New Yorker Magazine. And when I went to one of my high school reunions, we dated very briefly, but he was a genius. I couldn't deal with that. He got a position as a professor of music. He earlier ran a bridge parlor. He was so brilliant I couldn't be with him. And I have never been with stupid men, but he was too smart for me.

SM: Wow. *Laughs*

GK: And sometimes, on rare occasions, they will play his music on WQXR. So I went from rock and roll — I still love the popular music. I go, not frequently, but I will go to musicals. I just bought a ticket for the new Cinderella that's coming out, Andrew Webber. That ad just came in. So when I come to New York, I know I have that ticket. *Laughs* But I'm not a musical person on Broadway. I spend more time at classical concerts and dramatic plays. I love chamber music. I lived near the 92nd Street Y for many, many years, and went to chamber music there. So I evolved, I would say.

SM: As most people do, right?

GK: Yeah. I like Barbra Streisand a lot. I mean, that's my favorite. And her biography is going to be coming out.

SM: I didn't know that. That's great. My grandma always — she shares the story about how when she worked as a secretary downtown for one of the modeling agencies or something, I guess right before Barbra Streisand got famous, she worked as a secretary there. So she says that she like sat in her chair.

GK: *Laughs* My friends saw her in one of those clubs. A friend who wants you to interview her.

SM: Okay, perfect.

GK: She's also a Bronx girl, and Bronx Science girl, and City College girl, but then got a doctorate in education from Harvard.

SM: Okay, okay. Yes, I remember you were saying about the Harvard. So tell me a little bit about your education growing up, your school experiences.

GK: I started kindergarten. I was very creative, apparently, because the teacher gave me like the biggest piece of paper to paint on. And I wet it so much the paper ripped. But I loved painting at the easel. And it was my first school experience, and I liked it. I mean, I liked the other kids. I have a picture. If you ever see my kindergarten picture, we even have a Doll Corner. And I was a kindergarten teacher for a couple of years afterwards, because my kindergarten experience was so good. Mrs. Levan, who had a long braid on top of her head, you know, around her head, and her arm around the black kid, she must have been a left winger. I bet you. I bet you. She was one of the few Jewish teachers I had, I think, and I'm pretty sure she was Jewish. I don't even know for sure. The next year, when I entered first grade, my parents enrolled me in Sholem Aleichem Folk Shul Number Two, and I learned to read English and Yiddish simultaneously, without any problem. And to write them. And I think you have a first grade picture of me sitting very proudly. And I was always a good student. And I liked school. My mother had a breakdown, several breakdowns, when I was in elementary school, but at one point, someone who's still my very good friend, her mother would have me come at lunchtime, because my dad had to work and my brother — at some point, my brother was so much older, he had dropped out of college and enlisted in the army, and he was away already down South training and then in Hawaii for two and a half years, which is how I ended up in Hawaii. So anyway, I finished elementary school, I made the SP's, so I went to Herman Ridder Junior High School, which was a very special school. And I was in this very, very special school, I was in the better SP class. There were some kids from my elementary school who were very bright. I remember Cheryl Kurtzer. She lived near me on Wyatt Street near the post office. We started a newspaper when we were in fifth grade together or fourth grade together. I had a lot of friends whose parents were American born. I had my brother who was too, you know, so my English — and my parents bought two encyclopedias. They had a Wonderland of Knowledge, and some other one that was updated yearly. And I would sit reading the Wonderland of Knowledge. That was

wonderful, I mean, even when I got older, and I should never have given it up when we broke up my parents apartment.

SM: So did you feel like — a sidebar for a second. So did you feel like, culturally, you had a very different upbringing experience than people who had American born parents?

GK: No.

SM: No? It wasn't different?

GK: No, except that I had — but there were other kids in the other school. And I think maybe most all of their parents were European, maybe not the boys because they were learning — the Yiddish teacher also did their bar mitzvah lessons. But I didn't feel — I was such a good student. I had my brother, my brother had friends who had American parents. The whole environment was this, in my head, this Jewish environment. All these kids. My brother was like 10-11 years older with friends. There were always kids around striving academically, some were brighter than others, but I didn't feel a difference. No, I don't think so. I was aware that my parents had, my mother in particular, had an accent. But I was very proud when she could talk to people. She was friends with my third grade teacher who was a widow with a kid and they would sit and talk. And this young woman, who was obviously American born who was a hairdresser, a manicurist or something — she was Jewish — my mother kind of mentored her until she got a second husband. So I saw my mother, I was aware of her accent, less aware of my father's. He had very nice handwriting. Somehow he learned English, until they kicked him out of school.

SM: Yeah, that was a special thing. *Laughs*

GK: My mother, her handwriting shook, so she didn't have a nice handwriting. But then she could write in Yiddish, he knew Hebrew, which I didn't know. I was learning Yiddish. So I think I didn't feel [different] because my cousins were all older, they were doing well in school. I don't, I felt like — my best friend [Anne Frankenstein], when I got to high school, her mother was an Irish woman. She wrote in this poetry class. We did the Herman Ridder Magazine. She said, "My mother was an Irish Colleen." And she told me her mother was Jewish. Her mother was Catholic and Irish, in Northern Ireland, and converted to Judaism. And her mother was so Irish, I didn't know that my friend was half Irish.

SM: Wow. Yeah.

GK: Later Anne reverted to Catholicism and married an Italian guy, you know. We were — well, you know, this postwar generation — I'm not postwar, I was born in '44 — but all of us kids, I think we just felt like American kids. And I felt it was a Jewish environment, but we were all alike. When I got to City College, almost everybody was Jewish. And everybody, practically, was Jewish at Bronx Science. Not

Herman Ridder, it touched more on the East side [of the Bronx]. When I got there, there were Hispanics and Blacks. There were blacks in my SP class, a few guys who I think did extremely well. One of my elementary school colleagues became head of like RCA Records, you know. And then I went to high school with these kids who are — all these women became doctors and lawyers. Ron Lauder was in my high school class. I didn't feel any difference until I felt the socio-economic difference at Bronx Science. It was a relief to get to City College. And I didn't have to study that much, you know, because I had that great high school education.

SM: Yeah, you know, I'm interested in what you're saying about the socio economic difference, because I feel like I definitely have spoken to some folks who were not — you know, Jewish folks — who were not really exposed to, like, upper middle class kind of people, not in their neighborhoods, until they went up there to Bronx Science.

GK: Or maybe to college.

SM:Yes.

GK: But I reverted to my own people in college and married someone who was basically — I think his mother was born in Europe. I don't know about his father. But that was my first marriage. I definitely married someone of the same social class, but not the same intellectual level of my family, I felt.

SM: Was there a lot of — I guess, were your parents or the people around you very politically active or kind of anything like that?

GK: Intentionally not. My father's union was a Communist union, but he never joined the party, obviously. He didn't even want to be an officer in the union. My father avoided it. He worked on Saturdays, at a Madison Avenue fur shop, so he didn't do what religious Jews do. He had Greek friends, they were Greek furriers. He was friends with Greeks. And he was not politically active, but I think, I know, there were people in my family, on my mother's side, who were more. But no, I never encountered their generation's left wingers until I was an adult.

SM: Okay.

GK: Oh, but the Bilanders lived across the hall from us. They were a Communist family. And my brother was sent to Camp Kinderland, which was a Communist camp, where he refused to share his stuff, because he wasn't a Communist. And my parents drove to — my father didn't drive — they rented a hacky with me vomiting going up to the Catskills to get him back. There's a picture, I don't know where that picture is, they all were wearing white uniforms with red ties. That was a real Communist camp. I saw videos of it after. That was not my brother's [style or politics].

SM: No, not from everything you've said.

GK: But my neighbors recommended it. It didn't work on my brother, but when my cousin Eddie was sent to the Hasidic camp, it worked on him. No, no, no. And I'm probably, in my immediate family, I am the most left wing. My nephew and his wife have voted Republican. My brother even voted Republican. I think my parents voted — they loved Roosevelt — they voted the straight Democrat line. I mean, I guess they were middle of the road, but I dated people who were more left wing. I was part of that, you know, era when we were more left wing. But those are my views.

SM: Absolutely. So um, yeah. So after high school, you went to City College and you became a teacher, right?

GK: No.

SM: School psychologist. I'm sorry, I remember you said that.

GK: I majored in psychology. I was an extremely good student. I'm Phi Beta Kappa. I won one of the psychology awards. But I married at the end of my junior year, because I was dating my husband who had graduated that year, and he had a low enough number to be drafted possibly. So we got married. And I went to work, I got a job in psychology as a psychometrist. And I did it for a year, but then I decided that I wanted to enter the school psychology program at City College. So I needed to become a teacher because the classes started — I couldn't work in a nine to five job, so after a year, I got a substitute license. And I had taken enough education credits, so maybe they credited me, and I got a job in a really nice school, P.S. 50, in the East Bronx. But my ex-husband — again, they were after him for the draft — so I gave up my space in the school, because they wanted men, and went to this horrible school near Fordham Road, where, I mean, the kids were wild. I was so impressed they had the sporks, you know, the fork spoons.

SM: Yeah, yeah.

GK: And then I come in, and I had a cluster job, which meant I went to different classes. One of the classes the kids were so wild they pulled the legs off the turtle.

SM: Oh my god.

GK: So the next year, I did become a kindergarten teacher, and I liked that a lot. It was a huge kindergarten class, I could express my creativity. I had other women like me, young women, we were all the same age. One of them was supposed to marry, she was Greek and she was supposed to marry a Greek — she ran off with some Jewish guy. One of them was Irish. And I'm watching, she has some date, and on New Year's Eve, she's coming across the television dancing with this guy. Somebody got

pregnant, oh my god, and had to get married. It was a lot of fun, but I got my school psychology degree. And I divorced the first husband. I mean, it's a long story, but we were not suited. I mean, I should never have gotten married then. Then I was single again until I was almost 50.

SM: Okay.

GK: And I used the school psychology degree because they were desperate — when they deinstitutionalized the mental hospitals — for psychologists, and they hired all kinds of people with, you know, like, I think I may have had 60 credits already, but I didn't have a doctorate. And it wasn't in clinical psychology. But I worked at Manhattan State Hospital and then enrolled in a doctoral program at CUNY in child development and education. It was a new program. I was going through a lot of stuff: I had to work, I had my own apartment, I was a divorced woman, I was having a social life. And I exhausted my time limit and they eventually kicked me out for exhausting my time limit. And they never — my mentor left, she ran off with some professor and then her husband took her back and she went to Denver. And I mean, it was like this crazy thing. So I immediately — because I then got a job as a school psychologist when they [legislated] 94 142, the law of inclusion — the Board of Ed finally hired school psychologists, and I decided I wanted to be a supervisor. I'm already old, so I enrolled in a master's degree, but I got all the credits. So ultimately, I got my doctorate in school administration and supervision from Fordham.

SM: Okay yes, I remember. Yep.

GK: And I did become a supervisor. I mean, before that I almost exhausted my time limit that time too, but the Jesuits were so kind, and I had had breast cancer in between because I was already an old lady. Just when I graduated, that same year, I met my second husband, who had been a school psychologist in Scotland, in Glasgow, who is not Jewish, at a psychology conference in Banksá Bystrica in Slovakia.

SM: Oh my goodness.

GK: [The Czechs and Slovaks] had split [the country], and he had Czech money, and I had Slovak money, but he knew his way around better. We ended up drinking in a pub. I didn't know he was an alcoholic, so that marriage didn't last. I mean, we were together 15 years. And he moved to the states and became an American citizen. And that's how I got to Hawaii, because he had been to Hawaii, and I had never been even though my brother sent grass skirts and coconut bras.

SM: Oh, that's too funny. So when you were teaching in the Bronx, did you find that the kids and the, I guess, resources available to them were very different than the experience that you had growing up?

GK: When I was a kindergarten teacher it was unique. I was at a school where in kindergarten the kids who later went to Catholic school came for kindergarten. So there were Blacks, Hispanics, and white,

mostly Irish, kids. I think all Irish kids. We had 50 kid kindergartens with two teachers and two paraprofessionals. And I loved it. Those parents loved me. And those children loved me, and my teacher, my co-teacher, I remember one year, she had lizards and all this reptile stuff. I couldn't — I have a snake phobia. I come in early before everybody, one of the lizards got out, it was a big black lizard. But we had a blast. We had parents of all the ethnicities just in that kindergarten because the kids, when I came as a cluster that one semester after I gave up my shot at the decent school for my first husband, who became the school librarian. He was someone who never read a book, he had a Bachelors of Business, and he ended his career as a school librarian. He had a second wife, and then a third wife, who moved him from the school, and he's been married to her for like 30-40 years. I have no contact with exes, by the way. But no, I really enjoyed teaching. But I had the opportunity to become a school psychologist. Well, first to be a clinical psychologist at Manhattan State, and then become a real school psychologist, which I also liked a lot. Because I had a wonderful teacher as a sophomore at City College, Sophie Elam, who — she was unusual. She was of German Jewish background, married some Southern WASP American and was really left wing. She lived on Riverside Drive, and she also had the braid around her head. I adored her, she adored me. She watched me grow up. She, when I divorced my first husband, she was very upset. And then she died, I think, shortly thereafter. But this is like, from that — I was sitting in her class. She said something and I made a face and she reacted to me. And she had a project, when you took her class, you adopted either a group or an individual child, from the projects near City College or some kid in your neighborhood whose parents agreed. Black kids. And she would go and visit their home. She was a social worker, she did not have a doctorate. But working with her and she — in a two way mirror, I saw her people doing psychological Wechsler [IQ tests] . And you know, I think it was the wisc then. I wanted to do that. No, she was not a psychologist, but the whole idea of working in the schools with kids. Well, I guess, seeing her with the parents, so that appealed to me as well. So it took a long time until New York City hired people with my background, but ultimately I got to do it. And by then I was older. I wanted to be a boss, you know, and teach other people. And I've mentored a lot of people who are school psychologists of various backgrounds.

SM: Well, that's wonderful. So did you ever feel like, I guess, growing up or even later, that because you were a woman that ever presented any sort of barriers or you had different expectations from your parents or teachers or things?

GK: I think that yeah, it was that era, but see, at Bronx Science — I just met somebody who’s my age, he's the retired Dean of the Law School from the University of Hawaii. I met him yesterday. And he comes from this Yiddish background, although he was born here, but his cousin was in my class at Bronx Science. He said, “I had a cousin” and it turned out she was exactly in my class. She's a physician. She's a hematologist. So there were — I mean, Marlene Krause was in my class. She got an MBA from Harvard and an MD. She's a business woman ophthalmologist. I mean, when I was working as a psychologist, this girl [Rise Melcher] walks in. I remembered her from high school. I didn't know her in high school. Well, I knew who she was, because these people were living on Riverside Drive on the Upper West Side and Ron Lauder, with the mother Estee Lauder. And she walks in and she says — I

had to test the children on veterans who got scholarships — her name was Rise Melcher. And I recognized her, and yeah we were in the same class at Bronx Science. She was able to get a scholarship to go to medical school. I was already working, so she was like a year out of college and I guess did pre-med. She goes down to Tulane, marries into the Ochsner family. I don't think she was Jewish, or she was half Jewish. All the hospitals there [in New Orleans] are Ochsner hospitals. And she's also an artist, Marlene Krauss was — you know, so clearly there were no barriers. I took biology, I got an A in biology, but I couldn't touch the frogs.

SM: *Laughs* The frogs, that's what I was thinking.

GK: I have a good memory and I could pass the tests. I think my brother, when he dropped out of pharmacy school — he ultimately became an accountant — I think he couldn't cut the cat up. You had to cut a cat. So I think my brother and I would have been, he would have been a great engineer, but he chose accounting. And he never got an MBA, but he progressed. He was like one of these, you know, the 1960s, what would they call it? The guy from TV, you know, the beautiful, handsome man, corporate executives and all that. I would have liked to have been a physician, but I don't think — I don't know. I mean, I'm not scared of blood or anything. I think that's where I belonged. I have that kind of mind, I dated doctors. I don't regret what I did, because I think I had a lot of freedom. I ultimately had what was like a civil service job, I ended up with a good pension. Because I was on my own, I could save a lot. I never had to fight in a world of men. So I think that gave me — I was not this outgoing initially, but because I realized that many of the people around me were not as bright as I was and as eager to advance in the New York City school system. So I don't feel that I was held back. I think that I'm very intuitive. And I think I've made the right intuitive choices. I think that I've always gotten along with men. I think they respect me. And I respect them. I like androgynous men. And I think I'm androgynous to some extent, even though I cook and I do creative things. So, no, I don't really feel that I was held back by being a woman.

SM: Were you in the schools either — I guess you would have been out of school at that point, like out of school as a student, but were you in the schools during the 1967-68 teachers strike and everything that was going on?

GK: Yes, yes. And I was at — I had already moved to the second school. The faculty — the first school was all Jewish teachers, basically. My teachers, in my elementary school and Herman Ridder, were Irish-American. Normal school teachers, I think they went to normal schools. When I worked in the first school, P.S. 50, they were Jewish teachers. They were wives of doctors, people who decided to continue their careers, I think. But I was quickly out of that school because I gave the slot to my husband and the principal wanted a man. The next school, there were Irish — there was not as many Jewish teachers, I would say probably 50/50 or even less. The newest ones were like me, who were substitutes but they were desperate. Without much education and we hadn't done student teaching or anything.

SM: Nothing like that. Yeah.

GK: So when the strike came, some people went in, and some didn't. I was outside. We voted to become the UFT. We voted UFT. My father was a union man. I mean, he was not, you know — he was a union man! They gave him a bowl, like this stainless steel bowl, which I gave to my cousin Anna, like a salad bowl. I think he used to put his old letters in it, and I gave it to her when he died. So I'm very pro-union. I mean, look what it did for me. My health benefits. They hate me here in Hawaii, all these people who grew up in the Midwest, first generation Americans. I mean, they are amazed at the benefits I have. And they're jealous. They're my contemporaries, they don't have what I have, because it was a very strong union. You know, I would never cross a picket line. My father was in — there were labor disputes, I think. His union was allied with the meat cutters. A lot of the longshoremen who were left wingers. Here in Hawaii there's a long history. This is a labor state. I'm in a Democratic Labor state with a Jewish governor, our second Jewish governor. So, I remember that strike. I remember the teachers. I remember that, that I don't remember — I made friends with a black woman at that point, who ended up being a school superintendent and her husband was in Vietnam at the time. This was Vietnam when we were striking also. I remember, by the way, I remember sit-ins from college, you know, going back to that, and then I dated someone when I worked in Manhattan State Hospital. This guy was the acting head of the hospital. He came outside too when we protested, because there were guys who became occupational therapists with no training to avoid the draft and conscientious objectors. So that period was a very heightened political period of my life.

SM: Yeah. Great. So I guess, the last bit I'm gonna ask you about, is a bit about Jewish life. Which your family — I know you said your mother kept kosher — were they very religious? Besides your experience at Sholem Aleichem.

GK: That's not religious life. I was a comrade!

SM: You're right, that's cultural life. *Laughs*

GK: It wasn't that left, but it was left of Arbeter Ring. It was a little bit left. And my parents were elders of the school. It was part of their social life. What was Jewish life? Well my family was so Jewish. We had seders, we had Israeli relatives on my father's side who came and were with us. My father could hardly read Hebrew, my mother was the scholar, so he would read in English and he'd "invoke the eternal." *Laughs* He had his little quirks, I'll always remember that. There was always two seders. There was probably, after the meal, we probably never finished. We hardly sang the songs. Chanukah was a very big thing, my mother loved making latkes and she was in the hot kitchen. We would eat them before she ever got the chance to eat them. She learned to cook from my father's mother who was the housekeeper, so she made all things: goulash, chicken paprikash without sour cream. All the food was all Jewish food. We had a family circle, we must have celebrated holidays. We always had desserts. She wasn't a baker, so the hamantaschen came from the bakery. But we also were allowed to wear costumes

on Halloween and go trick or treating. I think my parents were not really believers. I think, particularly, I was born after the Holocaust. My mother fasted on Yom Kippur and my father came, when I was married, to eat in my house. And he would eat bacon. This was just the kind of thing. My ex-husband, my first ex-husband, did not come from a very [religious background], they didn't really have the traditions that we had. So I have a very powerful Jewish identity, but I never belonged to a synagogue. My parents, my father, bought tickets for *shul*, went to *shul*. He was a Levi, so he was always called up to do an aliyah. I remember my brother had a nice bar mitzvah. The party was at a Hungarian restaurant, and all my brother's girlfriends were all 13, I was three, they took me out in my — my parent's got me this beautiful little outfit — my mother thought I was gonna get pneumonia, it was March. So no, there were all the Jewish weddings. I mean, there was, in my generation I was the youngest one, so in the next generation there was intermarriage. But there was no intermarriage of my first cousins, as far as I know. But then I have now these black and Chinese and —

SM: Everything. *Laughs*

GK: But I have a very powerful Jewish identity. I'm an atheist. I think as I said, after the Holocaust I don't think my parents were very much believers. My brother died probably an agnostic, but he was cremated. I got a plot in a Jewish cemetery to be buried near my parents, but it was so Orthodox, I couldn't be near my parents. I had to be on a line of women, next to a strip of men. So I'm being cremated here — donating my body to science, as a cadaver, and put in the Pacific Ocean. And I can't sell my plot, so I've got this plot in the Orthodox cemetery. If I can't be near my parents, I don't want to be there at all.

SM: What's the point?

GK: I sent you a picture of their tombstone.

SM: Yeah, I saw that.

GK: You know, my mother said, "Man invented G-d so people would be good." And she taught me all the stories. I do riff with the rabbi, our current reform rabbi. I joined a temple here, because there's so few Jews. And I joined Hadassah here, which I never did in New York. So we riff with the rabbi, and I know more than anybody else, because my mother's father was a rabbi, and she sat on his knee till she was 5 and he went to America and she never forgot. And she told me everything he told her. So I feel very powerfully Jewish, but I'm a total non-believer. That's it, you only live once, that's it.

SM: Yeah. You know I think it's funny, it's like a very Jewish way to think about identity, you know? Because no one else is going to be like, "Oh, I'm such a strong Catholic, but I don't believe." That's only a thing you can say, I feel like, as a Jewish person. In my opinion. But I think it's very true. So my

last question for you then is, when you think back on your experiences growing up in the Bronx, what are the core memories or emotions that you associate with it?

GK: I think now that I had, despite the fact that we lived in very concentrated conditions and my mother's mental issues were problematic, I had an idyllic childhood. I was very well loved. I was surrounded by this family. My relatives loved me, but I was this young, very healthy kind of — I wasn't outgoing, until I went to school, then I became outgoing later in life. It was idyllic. And when I hear about other people's lives growing up, in the Bronx or elsewhere — my parents lived a long life. I had my parents till I was in my 50s. And I was close to them. And I had my brother, who was like having another parent. He used to steal my report card and sign it. They probably thought I had two fathers. These two beautiful handwritings would be on the card, you know, and it would be two different names. I just, I feel I had a very fortunate, a wonderful education, both in Yiddish and English as well. I think I was surrounded — oh! The public library. The Honeywell Library was built, but I remember the little store. It was full of books. I spent the summer, if we didn't go — we went to Rockaway, we went to Brighton Beach, we went to the mountains — but I remember taking out six books all the time, reading the books. It was wonderful. It prepared me to be with all kinds of people now. I mean, it was — small town life and big city life in the United States, and I've traveled all over the world — that Bronx life prepared me for everything.

SM: Is there anything you'd like to add before I end the recording?

GK: Well what are you all going to do with this stuff?