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Gurock, Jeffrey

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Transcriber: Magnolia Meekma

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

Jeffrey Gurock (JG): I'm not exactly sure how they first got to the Bronx. My father grew up in Harlem. Then, the family moved to off the Grand Concourse in the 1930s. My mother grew up in Brooklyn. And when she married my father, they moved to near Parkchester, to Newbold Avenue. In fact, the building is still there. When Parkchester opened, they were among the first people who moved in. I don't know how they got into Parkchester because it was very difficult so many people wanted to live there. And if you've read my book about Parkchester, you know they were very careful as to who they let in. My father was a fireman and that was the number one occupation of people who lived in Parkchester at that point. My mother was a bookkeeper, she worked in the Empire State Building. I always laugh when I say see worked on the third floor because someone has to work on the third floor. My brother was born in 1946 and I was born in 1949, and I lived in Parkchester until I got married in 1974. After a year of living with my wife in Cincinnati, Ohio, I had a fellowship working on my dissertation, we moved to Riverdale, in the Bronx, and we've been there ever since. That's the basic storyline. My parents lived in Parkchester a few more years, and then they moved to Danbury, Connecticut. We have a summer home, which they winterize, and my father died in '86. He was 75 years old, and my mother lived two more years and she died at age 80. So that's the basic storyline. My brother got married in 1969. They moved first to Connecticut, and New Jersey, and now the family lives in Atlanta, Georgia. So my brother is just going to turn 77, and I'm going to turn 74 in November. That's the basic, the basic storyline.

SM: So your parents were born in the United States. Do you know if your grandparents were born abroad or here?

JG: Okay, so my father was born in the United States, in 1911. He was one of seven children. The family came in 1905 from Belarus, they're Jewish. My mother came to America from Poland with her family when she was less than one year old, so effectively, she was born and grew up in America. The Gurocks were tailors and the Lerner's, my grandfather, was a ritual slaughterer he slaughtered kosher meat. They lived in Brooklyn and they were very religious, the Gurocks were different not so religious. Effectively, both my parents were American, my father was born here and went to Dewitt Clinton high school. He was at City College for a few months and then dropped out and then had different jobs. In 1939, he got a job with the fire department, and he worked there for 20 years. Like I told you a moment ago, firemen were the number one occupation of people in Parkchester.

SM: Tell me a little bit more about I mean, I know you wrote an entire book about it, but tell me a little bit more about the environment and Parkchester while you were there.

JG: It was predominantly Irish Catholic, a lot of Italian kids, a few Germans, and a significant number of Jewish kids. We belonged to the Orthodox synagogue although we weren't overly Orthodox Young Israel, Parkchester on Virginia Avenue which is today a mosque and you might know from the book that I've become friendly with the Muslims who occupy the building. A sweet young man helped me do the work with the book, there is actually a picture of the two of us in the book. As I remember, the various ethnic groups got along pretty well. There was very little anti-semitism. By the way, there were no Latinos, no African Americans in the neighborhoods until 1968. I don't recall ever seeing a black kid in the playgrounds. The other thing is I went to a Jewish school in Yorkville, I went to a day school, Yorkville on a scholarship. I was a good athlete, I always say I was on an athletic scholarship, which wasn't true. I took the subway, every day, from Parkchester down to Yorkville. As I indicate in the book, the subway skipped over the South Bronx because I took the express train. So you know, there wasn't much interaction with the minority groups. I can't say I had many Irish or Italian friends, but I didn't have any enemies, either. I mentioned this in a book, kids fight on the basketball court, and it wasn't because I was Jewish. Some people have said that their experience was different, but my experience was that the white groups got along very well. As I indicated in the book, I never even thought about the fact that the city was very segregated. I mean, that's the way that's the way it was, and I also say that my parents were very civil rights oriented. They were very proud when Rabbi Heschel marched with Dr. King, it just wasn't part of our lives, it was very different, very different. I went to college, at City College, but it was overwhelmingly white. In fact, this movie just came out, and I'm in the movie, "The Five Demands" about the black takeover of City College and open admissions in 1969. The point I made in that movie was, this is the first time it ever dawned upon me that, while I mean, I knew there were racial problems, but, you know, I played lacrosse. I mean, I should have a picture here of my team, one black kid on the team. In the front row, our Vasquez, Gurock, Lucas, McCann, Marino, Moscatello, you recognize the names? English, Italian, Irish. I've written a lot about race but race wasn't part of my life.

They are also Parkchester cops and Parkchester cops made sure people behaved. You read that in the book, so sometimes I climbed over the fence to play basketball before the playground opened and I got arrested, so to speak. They would ask for my name and I said my name was 'Peter Stein', because when Peter Stein got stopped he said his name was Jeff Gurock, so it evened out. It was a beautiful community, a nice place to live. Very safe. I have to say, we kept to ourselves. We knew our neighbors, but we were involved with the synagogue a lot. That was the focus of our social life. There was an incident once where there was a bully in the neighborhood. Smullens, Irish bully. One day he took my brother's Spalding ball, and threw it over a fence over the park. There was a parking garage, which was next to the playground, so he threw it over the fence over the roof. My brother started crying and he went home. He told my father. My father was a tough guy: he was a fireman, he had been a wrestler. So we went out to the street and found the kid Smullens. You know what he did? He punched him in the mouth. "Give me a quarter" and he gave my father the quarter. That's not in the book. You know what the kids Smullens did? Nothing. He didn't tell his parents. I always say the next 5 years, whenever my brother and I went out to the playground, Smullens said, "Stay away from those two kids, they got a crazy father." That's 1950s Bronx justice. No guns, no knives, some bullies, and he was an equal

opportunity bully. He picked on everybody. You know? They didn't mess with me after that, because my father punched him in the mouth. Anyways, we enjoyed living there. Most of my Jewish friends went to public school, most of the Catholic kids went to Catholic school. But we met up in the playgrounds and particularly on the weekends.

SM: What kind of things did you like to do for fun? Like you're saying you were outside a lot playing games with the other kids and things?

JG: Playing sports. There were a lot of organized teams, which I didn't play on, because I went to Jewish school, and I came home late. On the weekends, I played ball every day, and hung out in the neighborhood. There were no gangs to worry about. I have to say, as far as our synagogue is concerned, that synagogue, when I went back to the synagogue to do my research, it occurred to me that it was very small synagogue. The leadership of the synagogue was very committed that all of us, the boys, not the girls, the boys, learned how to lead the services and be committed to a very positive Jewish life. The fact of the matter is that I became professor of Jewish history, Zvi Gittleman became a professor of Russian Jewish history at the University of Michigan, Neil Winkler became an Orthodox rabbi, and Lewis Bernstein became one of the producers of Sesame Street in the very start and did a Hebrew version in Israel, designed to bring Arab and Jewish kids together, which unfortunately didn't work out. My brother was a synagogue president. I don't know if you go to church or whatever it is, but when you went to the synagogue, the boys didn't sit with the girls. In Orthodox synagogues, the men and women sit separately. So we then sit with our fathers. We sat in a separate boys section. I should also tell you that my wife and I have been members of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, for 40 odd years. Why did we join that synagogue? Because this is important, I guess, when we moved out of Parkchester, we all moved together so to speak. This was a startup congregation in Riverdale, and I mentioned Lewis Bernstein, right? I sit next to him in the synagogue today. Our kids went to SAR Academy, which is a Jewish school. You are a history person, so you know, this is a very common immigrant phenomenon. You move countries and you seek out your old neighbors. In this case, we moved to a new neighborhood, and sought out our friends and we've stayed there ever since.

SM: Tell me a little bit more about Jewish life. I know you said your family wasn't really orthodox. Did you guys keep kosher?

JG: We kept a kosher home. My mother came from a very Orthodox background and my father did not. We didn't travel on the Sabbath, but we would watch TV and listen to radio on the Sabbath. We went to synagogue almost every Saturday. In the book I tell the story about being called by the rabbi during a snowstorm to come to the synagogue. It's a funny story. It's an indicative story. We lived around the corner from the synagogue, we lived a block away on Metropolitan Avenue. Actually, the family lived in three different places over the years: 1566 Unionport, then 1470 West Ave, across the street on top of Macy's, and then 1368 Metropolitan Avenue which is a block and a half away from the synagogue. You know to have a minyan you need 10 men in an Orthodox synagogue. So a number of times in the winter,

when it was snowing or very cold, we'd get a phone call — services would be at a quarter of seven in the morning — so we'd get a call from the rabbi at 6:30, to my father, we need your boys and you to come down to make a minyan. We would go down to make a minyan, and after the minyan my father would go to work and I got a reward from the rabbi. He gave me a shovel to shovel off the street. So when I met this kid, this Bangladeshi Muslim kid, Tazmidul Islam, I told him the story and he said that's funny, I use the same shovel that you used. I don't think it is the same shovel literally, but it's the same story. Great kid, and I've made him famous. In fact, let's see, Parkchester book. These are all my books, [turns around and points at bookcase]. Very often authors have pictures of themselves in the book. I did this one, if I can find it. Oh, yeah, hope you can see. You see us here we are, [shows image]. Okay, that's me and Tazmidul. He became famous for a few minutes within his community. We were exceptional kids because we went to an expensive Day School called Ramaz in Yorkville. All of us, all of us. Let's see, Louis Bernstein's father worked in the garment industry. Neil Winkler's father worked in the garment industry. My father was a fireman, so we couldn't afford to go to that school, so we were all on scholarships. We were known in the congregation as the wiz kids who went to Ramaz on scholarship. It wasn't easy being a poor kid. I wasn't a poor kid, but I went to a school with a lot of really rich kids. I've been dealing with that issue my entire life. Turns out my kids went to the same school many years later. I always tell them, don't let them tell you that your father is a professor, tell them your grandfather was a firefighter. Blue collar roots. That's why I write about just plain folks in terms of my own work.

SM: Tell me a little bit more about your experience at the day school.

JG: We rode the subways from grade one. Where as some kids came in school buses, some came with private cars. My brother was three years older, he went to the school also, Lewis was two years older, so we went as a group. Then by the time I'm in third grade — Stanley Silver's father was a rabbi to another one of our congregations and the Winkler children, Neil Winkler's sisters, I have to be fair about this, they also want to go to day school. My favorite story about the subways was, by the time we were third grade, imagine this. We're going home: in first grade, my father would come to take us down in the subway, Stanley and me, and then Mrs. Silver would pick us up and we would go home. By third grade we were going by ourselves. At nine and ten years old alone in the subway. We were going through Spanish Harlem and the South Bronx, all the way back. One day — I've told this story all over the world — one day, we get on the subway and Mrs. Gittleman is on the subway, whose son has become a famous professor. We were afraid of her. We didn't like Mrs. Gittleman. We thought she was a witch. Not a W but a B. We get to the 110th street station. My friend Stanley gives me the high sign. We don't want to be on the same train with her. We get off the train. By the time we got home, Mrs. Gittleman had already informed our mothers, so it was not a happy situation. But think about it, it was the subways. Again, it didn't appear to us that we're going into a so-called “bad neighborhood.” That's the way we lived back then.

SM: What about the school itself? What was the school day like, or what were some of your experiences coming from a different part of the city than some of the other kids, different life experiences than some of the other kids are having?

JG: It wasn't easy being a scholarship kid in this school. Two quick stories. Maybe fourth or fifth grade, we had a play, and I was going to be Abraham Lincoln in the play, walk across the stage, and as I walked across the stage the slaves stood up, like I freed the slaves, right? So the teacher says, Jeffrey, listen, when you come bring your father's top hat with you. So I said to my father "top hat," and my father said, "top hat? Who's got that?" The second thing was they'd have birthday parties in school for kids. One day, one of the kids as a party favor to the youngsters gave them a party favor of a couple of goldfish for your goldfish tank. In a Chinese food carton. Well, I didn't have a goldfish tank. Not only that, but by the time I got home, these two goldfish were dead. It wasn't easy. But, you know, listen, the night I graduated from high school, after graduation, a portion of the class went out together. We went for a ride on the Staten Island Ferry which cost five cents, and some other kids went to the Copacabana club. Because they were ostensibly in it from an orthodox school, they couldn't drink because they were under the age of 18. So of the 56 kids in the class, I'm only still friendly with two of them. One of them is one of my doctors, and he's a dear friend. I just spoke to him before the new year. I've gotten over it, but yeah, it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy. But where did you grow up? Where do you go to school?

SM: I'm from Monroe, New York. About an hour upstate.

JG: Oh Monroe, New York, it is close to Monroe High School, right?

SM: Yes, Monroe Woodbury. Right next to KJ, Kiryas Joel. That's where I went to public high school. But it's very interesting. I saw, right now I'm at Fordham's Graduate School of Education, and I just continued doing this from undergrad, but I teach in the Bronx right now. It's public school, but obviously, a radically different experience than my predominantly white suburban, high school experience where a lot of the kids were Jewish. All my closest friends were Jewish and everything, you know, and it's very different, but it's very — I mean, I love it.

JG: Do you study with Dan Soyer?

SM: Yes.

JG: You know we did a book? We were a part of this big book project called *Jewish New York*.

SM: Yes, I have it somewhere here.

JG: Annie Polland who is the president now of the Tenement Museum, did one volume, and I did the one called *Jews in Gotham*. It's here somewhere, it's one of my books.

SM: Dr. Soyer is our guy for this project. I guess the faculty advisor.

JG: Yes, a very good guy. His grandfather was a very renowned painter. So good guy. Also, we've got a different perspective on being Jewish, very left wing which is fine, you know, he studies radicals, which I study a little bit, but that's not my major interest.

SM: Did you feel like you got a good education? Going into college, did you feel like you were on good standing from that experience?

JG: Yes. Went to City College where I met my wife. My wife also went to Ramaz, but she was three years younger than me. Seniors never talked to freshmen. I was on the basketball team, and she wasn't interested in sports. We met in City College. You know how expensive City College was back then? \$38 dollars a semester, it was a free school. So I won a state scholarship back then. It was a 300 question exam and based upon numbers of answers, based upon what borough you were in. Anyway, I won the scholarship. So what did I do with the money? I bought four tires, my father's car, and it was free. You can't see this [points], but a few years ago, I got an award from City College alumni, and I got up there and I said, "What did I get for \$38 dollars a semester?" First of all, I met my wife. Second of all, I studied with some terrific historians like Bernard Bellush. I played lacrosse for four years with guys who I'm still friendly with fifty years later, and we've been to our children's weddings and bar mitzvahs, funerals of parents, wakes of parents, that's how life is. We lost one of our guys and our coach of course died. We are still close. Brothers, really. We go skiing together every year. We have a Super Bowl party at my house, a July 4 barbecue. We always approach each other as brothers. We're very, very close. So I'm very blessed as far as that's concerned. City College was great. \$38 dollars a semester is crazy. It was during the Vietnam War, open admissions. There were three riots on campus during the four years, but then I went to Columbia, and studied American Jewish history. A PHD in '77 or '76. I taught at Yeshiva for 48 years, also at some other schools like Harvard and Yale and College of Charleston and Temple. I taught at the Hebrew Union College and Jewish Theological Seminary. I've gotten around. I've written a whole bunch of books.

SM: Was education an important value in your house? Would you say that was something that your parents really tried to instill?

JG: I think so. For sure, for sure. My father did not go to college, but he read a lot of the books that I brought home that were assigned to me. There was no doubt that I was going to go to college. Again, my parents were thrilled that I was able to go to this high class, Jewish school, on a scholarship. There was no question and my brother became a journalist. He became a producer of the local news for ABC Channel Seven. Now he's retired and, again, lives in Atlanta, close to his grandchildren.

SM: Going back a little bit, some more, I guess, fun, personal questions. What kind of music did you like to listen to? Was that something that you enjoyed growing up?

JG: Rock and roll. You know, my mother wanted me to play the violin. I was terrible. There was a choice between playing on the junior high school basketball team, and going to the 92nd Street Y for violin lessons. I had the violin for a few months and I stopped and just recently, I gave the violin to a grand nephew.

SM: Wow. Okay.

JG: You know what, it was in the basement, and it was in a case. This is good news, so my cousin took it to repair and he said it was basically in good shape because the elements never got to it. But music wasn't me, you know? I can't sing at all. I wasn't in a choir or anything of that sort. Music wasn't athletic. [Sports are] more important to me.

SM: What about food? What kind of things did you typically eat at home? Did you guys ever eat outside of the house or anything like that?

JG: Rarely, rarely, because you know what? There were no kosher restaurants in Parkchester. One deli on Starling Avenue just outside Parkchester and we rarely went out to eat. Sometimes on a Sunday. There's also a Bronx story. We would go to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine's cafeteria. But, we didn't eat out much. That was the way it was.

SM: In the house, was it traditional Eastern European Jewish fair?

JG: You know, no, no. American food but it was kosher. Tonight is Rosh Hashanah, we have a big crowd coming here to our home. We're going to have brisket, we're gonna have to have kugel, we're going to have chicken soup, you know, all the good things.

SM: Did you ever or often travel? I mean, I know you had to travel into Manhattan for school. But did you travel around the city or outside of the city? With your family or with your friends?

JG: We had the summer home in Danbury, Connecticut, called Lake Waubeeka. I actually did a small book about Lake Waubeeka which was started by Jewish firemen. We didn't go to summer camp. We went to this lake. And again, very fortunate I have friends who have been friends for seventy years. There's only one famous person from this Lake Waubeeka. A young girl named Carol Klein. You ever heard of her?

SM: No. Sounds familiar.

JG: What about Carole King? She became legendary. She's 10 years older than me, and she babysat for me. I don't know if that's true, but that's okay. It was a community which back then was 99% Jewish. Today, we don't know what the proportion is. I would say maybe 30% Jewish backgrounds. So we got away from the heat, remember me talking about no air conditioning. But we went away to the mountains, the Berkshires, and we got away from the heat. I tell the story about people opening up their doors and windows because it's so damn hot in Parkchester. We escaped. You know, I want to tell you something else about Parkchester. We were not driven out of Parkchester. So there were African Americans and Latinos in the neighborhood for six years before and — I was going to college, I lived at home, I went to college — and we weren't afraid that they would move in. In fact, we barely knew anybody who was Black, but they were there. Why did we move out of Parkchester? Because we became rich, not the richest but I was a professor, I had a job, and my friends had good jobs. We moved to the new neighborhood. So that informed part of my book too. You know, maybe it was you or somebody else, but I went to your seminar. White flight, you know. So I talked about the Black flight, namely, when the Bronx deteriorated in the 1970s. Where did the upstanding lower middle class, working class African Americans and Latinos moved to? They got kicked out because of the labor strike and they moved to Parkchester, a lot of them. There was no violence. There was no violence towards the Blacks moving in, as you know, from the book. There was some nastiness. You know, nastiness. Nastiness isn't the same thing as protesting. The desegregation of Parkchester, so now I'm talking about my book. The fight took place, not in Parkchester, but at the offices of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. You know, street demonstrations and stuff like that. But, a good place to live.

SM: I know like you said, you kind of talk about in the book, but from your personal experience. Do you ever remember anybody kind of talking about the fact that there was a fight to desegregate Parkchester? Or was it kind of just something that was happening around you?

JG: I tell a great story about this guy, Michael Horowitz. We had these Friday night forums in the synagogue. He ended up teaching at the University of Mississippi law school. He gets up and he says, "You think we can handle the fact that a few Blacks are going to move into the neighborhood?" And people were like not sure but no one did anything to stop it. The Rabbi used to say that the Blacks who moved in, were upstanding African Americans. He said it in Yiddish, but I'm translating it. Then in 1974 when we got married, and moved to Cincinnati and we've been married 49 years. The marriage almost ended the first month we were married because we moved into Parkchester during summer. My wife grew up on the West Side in an air conditioned apartment. So I'm used to the heat. She says to me, "I can't live here, how can you live here? It's so damn hot." Anyway, we got out fast and moved to Cincinnati. Then we moved back to New York, moved to Forest Hills for one year, because I was offered a job at York College. Then our friend said, "Move to Riverdale. It's a great neighborhood". And that's how we ended up there. In Riverdale, my friends, they're all married.

SM: And in the time that you were at City College as you got older, and when you were living in Riverdale, were you aware of exactly what you're talking about that kind of arson and devastation that was going on in parts of the Bronx?

JG: Yeah sure, sure. But it wasn't wasn't impactful upon me. '68, '69 teachers strike Ocean Hill-Brownsville, we knew some people who are teachers. But obliviousness, you live your mundane life. And that's how these things are.

SM: So now as a historian of Jewish history, and you're studying this kind of from, I don't want to say an objective perspective, because nothing is objective, but looking at it from the perspective of a historian, what is it like thinking about, writing a book about things that you kind of experienced or places that you were a part of?

JG: You know, it's a darn good question. Whether it's the little book or the big book on Parkchester that I wrote, I had to constantly test myself because in addition to being the historian, I'm also a primary source. So I had to be very careful with what I said, and try to document it as much as possible. To tell you the truth, my father said, "Always tell the truth because if you tell the truth, you tell the same story every time," right? The book has done very well, it would have done better if not for the pandemic because it could have been the centerpiece of the 80th anniversary, but you know, unfortunately. So some people pushed back against me and said that the Irish and the Jews didn't get along as well as I indicated in the book. I disagree. And again, there's no examples of violence against Jews. Nasty statements? Yes. We don't know what the story is about, what people are saying around their kitchen tables. In doing this book, I became friendly with a longtime priest named Father Thomas Derivan, who was on the cover. I got in touch with old time people. So I tried to verify things as best I could, you know. So that's a real challenge, the real challenge. The other challenge that I just told my students recently is when you write a book that brings a story up to the present day. Well the day you finished the damn book, it's outdated. Things have changed. And I hear that recently they've been some problems with the management of Parkchester. People are not as happy as they were in the past. By the way there are two Parkchester alumni associations. They have reunions, I haven't gone to them. But it's a wonderful question. It's very challenging, as far as those things are concerned.

SM: No, it's funny. I was just up in the Parkchester area in the spring picking up, I'm not sure if you know, Dr. Mark Naison at Fordham.

JG: Yeah, I don't know him personally but I know his name. You got some great historians at Fordham.

SM: I know. It's good. As an undergrad, as you know, studying history and trying to do history. It's just, it's amazing to have those sorts of people around. I took a course with him and I was also one of his research assistants, basically, would do things for him, so I had to go pick up samosas from a Bengali

restaurant up there, and it's still such a beautiful area of the Bronx, it's still so well maintained and the fountains and you know.

JG: We used to play football in the metropolitan oval and get chased by the cops. They chased us.

SM: My last sort of question for you is when you think back about your time growing up in the Bronx or even since you still live there today, what kind of memories and sentiments do you associate with it?

JG: You know what, I still love Parkchester. I love the Jewish experience in Parkchester. I took my grandchildren back to Parkchester. I think I told that story. Recently I took two of my grandchildren, we were blessed with 10 grandchildren, but took my grandchildren to a children's concert in the metropolitan ovals. We were the only white folk there. So the kids are on line to get their faces painted like kids like to do. There was a Latina woman in front of me — I'm still working on the book when this happened — and I started a dialogue with her. I said to her, "Well do you like Parkchester?" and she said to me, "Well it used to be wonderful, but now there's so many damn Bangladeshis here." I am thinking to myself, holy cow. So we brought our sandwiches. We sat down. We listened for the concert. Nobody bothered us. It was very nice, even though we're a minority, and then we drove around the neighborhood I showed them the buildings where I grew up and I explained to them that we didn't own the building. We had a little apartment, a two bedroom apartment. I feel very good about Parkchester. I've been called upon by a variety of groups to speak about Parkchester, you should invite me to Fordham to talk about Parkchester, tell Magda. Very robust honorarium. I'm just kidding. I have a great affinity for Parkchester and I love Riverdale. I've been in Riverdale now for forty years, you know? And again, the congregation that I was part of, now we're the oldest members of the congregation. I have a student now, she's my research assistant for my most recent book, which is coming out in October. I did a biography of Marty Glickman, do you know who Marty Glickman was? Did you see the movie "Race" about Jesse Owens?

SM: No, I mean, I know Jesse Owens, but I didn't see the movie.

JG: He was supposed to run in the '36 Olympics, but at the last minute, they took them off the team because they didn't want to embarrass Hitler. Anyway, so I hired a wonderful young woman from Stern College, which is a women's college. She did a great job, it turns out her grandparents came from Parkchester, and I didn't hire her because of that. I hired her because she was a dynamic student. We Young Israel Parkchester people talk about the Alumni Association. Oh my goodness, we feel very good about having grown up there. With parents and you know how to behave yourself except when you get off the subway. One last story okay?

SM: Yeah, go ahead. Go ahead.

JG: So at my bat mitzvah I read the Torah. I did a terrible job. The man in the second row is Mr. Gittleman, that's Mrs. Gittleman's husband. Taught Hebrew in the public schools, a lot of schools back in the day, it was a Regents language. If you made a mistake he would yell out the correction. The second mistake I made, my Uncle Louie smacked him across the heart and made him double over. The family tradition is if he had not smacked Mr. Gittleman we'd still be in the schul today. He was very committed to the Hebrew language.

SM: If someone had done that, during my Bat Mitzvah, I probably would have cried. That would have been the end of the whole bat mitzvah. After the first correction, it would have been like, all right, 13 year old me would not have been able to handle it.

JG: A few years later, another kid had his bar mitzvah, and I was one of the gabbai, one of the people who stands next to the Torah. And I whispered to Jerry, that we kept the car outside so we can get you out of town. I'm a storyteller as you can hear.

SM: Yeah no, it's great. I mean, that's one of the main reasons why I really enjoy doing these. I'm a story listener. I'm also a storyteller, but I like the opportunity to listen.

JG: Last story, 10 years ago, my wife and I went to Poland with Zvi Gittleman, Mr. Gittleman and Mrs. Gittleman's son. He taught at the University of Michigan. We went on an adult March of the Living. I taught the history of the Holocaust for many years, but I've never seen Auschwitz and never seen these things. We spent Shabbat in Krakow. We went to synagogue which was a very famous synagogue, and there was no one who had prepared the Torah reading. So you know what happened? Zvi got up and he read the Torah. He made almost no mistakes, so he knew it and Mr. Gittleman knew that he never taught his kid how to read the Torah with no mistakes.

SM: Wow. Fantastic. So yeah, thank you. Are there any other stories or anything else? Okay, wonderful.