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Hilde Klein: In 1948, when Israel was declared a state, I was three years old and I can remember being in a Jewish Community Center. We were downstairs and people were dancing around, and I was just being lifted from arm to arm all around and it was — I didn't really know what was happening because I was only three [Laughs]. But it was so joyous and I can still remember that. That was, I guess, my earliest recollection of that, but we lived in a Jewish neighborhood. We always did. We lived on Monroe Avenue before it became part of the Cross Bronx Expressway. [Laughs] In those days, it was a mixture of apartment houses, low-rise apartment houses, and private family homes. There were vacant areas. Not every inch of space was taken up with a building, you know? My sister and I, my sister's name was Elaine — she was four and a half years older than me, she's of blessed memory now — but we used to play out on the street, potsy and hopscotch. We'd just jump rope and all those kinds of things that kids don't do today [Both laugh]. We just had fun with simple things. We'd go out to play and it was like, "Okay, just be back for dinner," kind of thing. My father, on Sunday mornings, he would take my sister and I to the park. The name of the park was Claremont Park, a very large park in the Bronx. I would be sitting in one of those big wicker stroller type things, and my sister would be walking along besides us. In the springtime when the weather got warmer, the whole family would come to the park. We would have blankets and chairs for the elders that came, and they would bring lunch in baskets and dinner. We would spend the whole day there. We kids would put on roller skates. In those days, they had the ones with the key, you would unlock with the key. We'd roller-skate around and, of course, there was a playground. So we'd go on the swings and the see-saws and the monkey bars. We'd just have a great time, the cousins together. Then when we got hungry or thirsty, we would just come back and eat. Those were really, really nice memories.

As we got older, the families sort of separated. We moved to Mount Eden Parkway right across the street from the park when the Cross Bronx Expressway went through. When I was a kid, younger, I went to PS 70 and I can remember in the wintertime, there was a big yard. They would convert it to an ice-skating rink in the winter and kids would ice-skate in there. On May Day, we would dance around the maypole. My sister and I when we were still in the same elementary school, we would wear these flower crowns around our head with streamers hanging down and get dressed up with our black patent-leather shoes and white socks. We would dance with everybody around the maypole. That was also a really good memory. We had really good teachers, and I think maybe the most important thing in a Jewish family at that time was education.

Sophia Maier (SM): Yes. You're not the first person to have said that to me.

HK: When we moved to Mount Eden Parkway, we were around the corner from a Jewish community center and we were also around the corner from a library. That library — I lived in that library. [Laughs] I'd come home — I think they allowed you 10 books to take out at the time — my arms would just be filled with books. I could read a book a day and sometimes, if I'm really engrossed today, I can still do that.

SM: Yeah, me too. [Both laugh]

HK: So I'm just an avid reader. When I was younger, and I guess to some extent still, I wanted to be a writer. I would write all these poems and short stories and I just loved writing. But I also loved singing, so it was like, it had to be a balance. When I was in, I think it was sixth grade, sixth or seventh grade, I was sitting in the auditorium. I think it was every Monday, the whole class would be wearing their midi blouses. The girls would wear blue pleated skirts, the navy blue skirts and all, and we would have an assembly. We would start off by singing the national anthem. The principal one day happened to be sitting in front of me and she happened to hear me singing the national anthem. So the next week — I don't know how she found what class I was in but you know, I guess it wasn't too hard, I was in sixth grade — she had me singing the national anthem. Then a talent scout came to the school and he wanted to sign me to *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Now you're very young, I don't think you've ever heard of —

SM: I'm familiar with it. I never watched it, but I definitely know.

HK: [Laughs] Well, he came home with me, my parents signed the contract. After he left, they stayed up the whole night and decided that nice girls don't go into show business. So they went down the next morning and had the contract nullified. For my whole life, I've wondered what that other road would've taken me. But if that had happened and I had gone that route, my whole life would be different. I wouldn't have my children, my family, my grandchildren, my wonderful husband. So I guess I'm not sorry. I'm not sorry. Today, I've always stayed singing, whether it be in school productions or in synagogue choirs. In fact, I am supposed to be singing in our synagogue's choir for the first morning of Rosh Hashanah. We have a COVID surge here. So I am really giving it second thoughts because we had a rehearsal last Wednesday night and I was sitting next to this lady, and she got COVID like a day and a half later, she tested positive. I was saying, "Oh my gosh, I've had it twice already." I've been very lucky because Paxlovid was out. It kind of saved me, but I'm very immunocompromised and it was a real concern.

But anyway, getting back to growing up Jewish in the Bronx, most of my cousins were kind of like we were, where we weren't that religious anymore except for one cousin, my cousin Marty. He became kind of ultra-Orthodox. I have nothing against being ultra-Orthodox, but my cousin became very intolerant of anybody else's views. Not only religious-wise but right across the board. That was something very unattractive in him, and, eventually, we sort of parted ways. We

email once in a while. He had, I think it was three children, he has a great many grandchildren. He's always talking about moving to Israel but he hasn't done it yet [Laughs]. And he's just a few years younger than I am, so I don't know if that'll ever come to be. But I think the main takeaway from growing up Jewish in the Bronx, or maybe it's anywhere, is my — I have a deep feeling of love for Israel. I just feel that no matter what happens here, there's always Israel. They will take you when nobody else will want you. World War II was something so horrible that I'm sure everybody lost somebody in that war. Part of my mother's family lived in Russia at the time. They escaped into the forest to avoid the Nazis and they died of starvation. So when I see these things happening in the United States, it's like something ugly has been rearing its head. It always has, but today, I think it's gotten a lot worse and I do worry. I don't go back to the Bronx anymore. My high school — I went to Taft High School — and when I was there, it was rated one of the top schools in the entire country. It's gone today. Just gone. It became, I think, a trade school, after many years. Then I think that failed and they just shuttered it. Places that — I just heard the other day the Paradise Theater — oh my goodness, we used to love going there with the stars in the ceiling. They'd be twinkling and we'd have our school graduations held there.

SM: Okay. Yeah, I've heard that.

HK: Yeah. I can remember, because I was in the chorus in each one of my schools, we were in one of the boxes that are elevated and we sang during the graduation. But it was always a thrill to go to the Paradise Theater. There's just so many different memories. On the weekends, my mother did not want to cook so — and we were kosher. Actually, I'm still kosher.

SM: Wow, okay.

HK: We would go one day to this — my parents call it “the dairy place.” It was a dairy restaurant and they had knishes and they had mushroom and barley soup and vegetable soup and all different kinds of fish. So we would eat there. Then on the other day, we would go to this delicatessen on 170th Street. They would have the most delicious open-faced sandwiches. You could get pot roast beef or hot turkey with gravy all over it and these thick french fries. The pickles and the sauerkraut and the coleslaw. They were just such delicious memories. We kids sometimes would walk down to 170th Street, and they had the barrels of pickles just laying out there. It was like a nickel a pickle [Both laugh] Grab a pickle. Those were fun. They had the salamis hanging in the window. It was just a different type of a time. My father used to go out on Sunday mornings and he would go bring back smoked herring and the whitefish and all of that good stuff and the bagels and the bialys. It was just food, food. Which is very funny because I was a very skinny kid. I really, really was a very skinny kid. My mother, she would cook, but it was always just enough. If you wanted more, there was no more. I shared a room with my sister, and our favorite games were Scrabble and Monopoly. We used to spend days. I had a friend who lived in our apartment house. Her name was Irene House, as a matter of fact. I used to envy her

stamp collection. She had the most wonderful stamp collection so I decided I wanted a stamp collection, too. But I could never find the kind of album she had. I loved that album and I just had a regular stamp album and just collected all these stamps. I don't even know what happened to that stamp collection, but it was fun.

Something to do on a rainy day, and that was the nice part about living in an apartment building. You most likely would have a friend who would live there. You could just go in the same building no matter what the weather and have a nice time. I had a best friend named Michelle, and she lived around the corner from me. She lived on, I think it was the fifth floor. I used to take an elevator up to her apartment until one day, I got stuck in her elevator. After that, I wouldn't go in the elevator, so I would stand outside because she was supposed to be meeting me downstairs to play. I'd yell up, "Michelle's mother, could you tell Michelle to come down?" [Laughs] To this day, we are still friends. I met her when I was four years old, and I'm 78 right now. So that was a long, long friendship through thick and thin. Today, she lives in assisted living which makes me very sad because Michelle is such a vivacious person. She always, no matter what the hardship in her life, she always seemed to bounce back up. We used to laugh and laugh over the silliest things. We didn't need to take drugs, we didn't need to drink alcohol, we would find something funny and we would go off into peels of laughter. We'd make our own fun. So oh, I don't know. Do you have questions for me?

SM: Yeah, sure. No, I've got a whole list of them, but I always — I'm training another girl to do this work right now. I always say, I'm like, "The best interviews are when you don't have to say anything. They've got so much to share that you sit there and you just enjoy." So I don't mind at all. I guess going back a little bit first though, tell me a little bit about how your family ended up in the Bronx.

HK: My father started out in Brooklyn, his parents were in Brooklyn. I think he was going to school there and his father got a touch of tuberculosis. So they went to live in — was it Monticello? It was near Monticello, upstate, until his father got better. My father at that time, I think he was in high school, and he worked at the Saratoga Race Track in the summertime. He earned enough in those years to start my grandfather, his father, back into business. They bought, I guess, a building in the Bronx at the time, the South Bronx. So that's how they wound up living there. My grandparents on my father's side had an apartment on 170th Street, and I was very impressed by it because it was a sunken living room [Laughs]. It had a step down.

SM: Yes. The craze.

HK: There was a huge grand piano in the living room. It wasn't until just a few years ago when I learned that my grandmother, she should rest in peace, was an opera singer in the Russian opera. She lived in Russia and my grandfather came from Romania. How they met, I do not know. But

one of my cousins went back to Europe and he actually got some documents, the ship's documents, of where my grandfather came over. So that's how they wound up in the Bronx.

My grandmother's side of the family on my mother's side, I think they both came from Russia. I think my grandfather once told me he grew up on a farm in Russia. But you know something? I feel so badly now that I didn't listen to all the stories that they told me. I guess a lot of people have those same kind of regrets. You know, when you're a kid, you're busy, you don't want to hear all these old people stories. But they were first cousins, my *bubbe* and *zayde* from my mother's side. They wound up in the Bronx. My mother was a twin and in those days, they had babies — they didn't go to the hospital — they had them right there in the apartment. So my mother and my aunt Bertha were twins. My aunt Ruth was a couple of years behind them, so there were three girls in the family. My aunt Ruth used to tell me stories of when she was growing up, and it was during the Great Depression. There were gas lights on the streets, they didn't have electric lights. My grandparents had a dumbwaiter in their apartment. You could hear the clanking going up. It was in the kitchen and they would just send things down. I don't even know what went up and down that dumbwaiter. But she used to tell me that she'd come home from school during the Depression and people, people's belongings were out on the street. They were being evicted. It was a very difficult time. I guess that's why people of that generation were always very money-conscious. They saved a lot more, I think, than people do today. Everything's credit. In those days, there were no credit cards, I don't think. Just like when my kids were growing up and they started to drive, there were no cell phones then. So we sat home and worried every time they took the car or were out with a friend who was driving.

But those days, you could, when I was a little girl, you could walk down the street where my grandparents lived — I think it was Anthony Avenue or near Anthony Avenue — on Fridays, you could smell all the cooking going on at everybody's house. The chicken soups and the chopped liver and all of that good stuff. You just knew what day it was. My grandmother, when I would come into her apartment, it was like she had just washed the kitchen floor. She had newspapers down all over the kitchen floor after she washed it. I never could understand why she would put newspapers down after washing the floor, because it would seem to me that all that black print would get on the linoleum. In those days, it was linoleum. And I've talked to other people who have had the same experience and I thought it was really strange, but I never thought to ask her.

SM: Yeah. It just makes me think that she didn't want people to get their dirty shoes or something on the freshly cleaned floor.

HK: Maybe.

SM: That's why she put the newspaper down. I don't know. That was my first thought, I don't know.

HK: Yeah. It was a very large kitchen she had, too. But come Passover, my grandparents would have the Seder in their house in the living room because they had an apartment. They would open up this huge table and all my aunts and uncles and my cousins, we would all be there. When I was little, we kids were relegated to sit on the couch. So we were down here and the tabletop was up there. My grandmother would sneak us, before the Seder, she would sneak us some matzah or something to eat because she didn't think we would last. My grandfather, really, he went through the entire Seder in Hebrew and we would sit because we didn't know what he was really saying. Too little yet to read on the transliteration side of the Haggadah. But we remembered that and we remembered the sips of wine and Elijah. So every year when we would make a Seder, when my kids were growing up, I would send the kids out of the room for something, and then I would pour Elijah's cup of wine. They'd come back and they'd say, "You did that. Next year, I'm not leaving the table because I don't think Elijah came. I don't think he came." But they never did leave the table, they never did that. [Laughs] So, you know, I think of funny things that happened, but let me let you ask some questions now.

SM: So what did your parents do for a living?

HK: My father was — I like to call it offset printing, but I'm not exactly sure. He had plates for printing and during the war, he wouldn't have been drafted because my sister was born in 1940. They weren't drafting fathers, but as it happened, he had a government contract. It was something to do with the war so he didn't have to go. But it was a big factory, you know? When I was a teenager, I worked there one summer. You would think I knew what was going on, what they were producing with all of the printing press and everything, but I didn't, I really didn't know. So that's what he did. My mother was a housewife which was good in a way and bad in a way. Today, everybody works. But in those days, when I was growing up, we'd come home from school for lunch. They let us out for lunch and we'd walk to school and walked back. I think it was really a good thing to have a parent around because it gave the home, I think, stability. A lot of times today, I'm not even counting all the broken homes because then only one parent is there. But even with the two-parent family, most everybody is working. So the kids come home from school and either they're latchkey to come in and leave it to their own devices what to do. But when I was growing up, I'd come home from school, there were no questions asked. The first thing I would do is sit down and do my homework. There was no going out to play and doing it later. Actually, nobody helped me with my homework. Nobody. In high school, if it was a geometry question I didn't understand, we'd call up somebody in our class and the two of us would hash it out over the telephone. We'd figure it out or we'd ask questions in class and get help. I asked a lot of questions [Laughs]. Believe it or not, I was a very shy child. I really was very, very shy. You could say something to me, I'd be in tears. I had a teacher in the sixth grade,

Mr. Rich, I was in a school play and they would take us out of class to rehearse it. Then I think the day before, we had a kind of dress rehearsal and somebody put red lipstick on me. We rehearsed and then they rushed us back to class and I sat down. Mr. Rich said to me, “Your face looks like the side of a barn.” [Both laugh] All these years later, I still remember that.

SM: Oh my God. So mean.

HK: It was like so humiliating, you know? But in those days, teachers used to do that. But I loved school. I just loved school. Today, I went through as an adult, I got my master’s degree because I married — I made the city universities. When I graduated in 1963, I graduated a half year early. Then, you didn’t need SAT scores although I did take them. If you had an average, I don’t even remember what it was anymore, you could get into any one of the city university schools without anything else. So that’s what I did. My parents wanted me to go to City College. I wanted to go to Hunter College in the Bronx because it had a “campus,” and I had visions of sitting out on the grass and studying and all of that. I went to my grandparents so they could intervene for me, and I finally wound up going to Hunter College. But I sang in the choir down in Manhattan at the college down there. So my father would have to meet me on Jerome Avenue because that’s where the train was. Today, if it were today, I wouldn’t even dream of going on a train at night down into Manhattan alone. But then, that’s what I did. So anyway, that’s the story. I don’t really know how my mother’s parents came to live in the Bronx, but they did, so okay.

SM: Did either of your parents have any sort of higher education?

HK: My mother went through high school, my father was working for his dad. He used to tell me he was working from when he was seven years old. He started City College at night and he was going for his degree at night. But it became too much. He couldn’t handle the classes, the homework, and the job, so he — I’m not sure how many semesters he got through. But he would’ve made a really good professor, and he was fantastic at math. I could see him writing on an imaginary pad with his fingers figuring all the time. I really am sorry that he didn’t go through, and my mother was an avid reader. She probably would’ve done very well, as well.

SM: So what about music? What kind of music — I know that you loved to sing — what kind of music did you like to listen to? What kind of music were you singing?

HK: Show music. My favorite score was from *Carousel*. In school, I was a volunteer in the teacher’s cafeteria. They used to make me sing. Every time I’d be washing the dishes as they ate and they would want me to sing. My very favorite song of all time is “You’ll Never Walk Alone” from *Carousel*. To this day, it moves me to tears. But I love show music. I also love singing songs by Barbara Streisand, what she’s done. We’re actually doing a ’50s and ’60s show in November and three songs I’m doing are “Que Sera Sera,” that was Doris Day.

SM: Okay. I love that song.

HK: “Both Sides Now” which — oh, I forgot who sang that. But anyway, I’m doing that and “Make Your Own Kind of Music” by Cass Elliot. And I love to sing music that we do in synagogue. The Jewish prayers. And some of them are very beautiful. We have a Yom HaShoah service here every year and I sing in that. There’s a song that I do solo called “Hallowing Their Names.” It’s singing the soul of every name and the name in every soul. It’s just a beautiful, beautiful song. So I guess you could say I’m across the board, but my favorite music is from shows. *Les Mis*, *Phantom of the Opera*, I love those. Not so much *Hair* and the very hard rock kind of music — I’m really not into that.

SM: Would you go to any shows when you were younger? When you were growing up, would you go down into Manhattan to see them?

HK: That’s another memory. My girlfriend Michelle, my best friend, her mother took us down to see *The King and I* on Broadway. I looked down and I said, “Oh my goodness, that’s Lassie’s mother!” Jan Clayton was the first mother in the series *Lassie* on TV. I didn’t know she could sing. It was like seeing your teacher in the supermarket and saying, “They actually do shopping?” It’s like, “They’re a real person.” But that was my first show to see *The King and I*. Yes, I’ve been to shows on Broadway. Also in Boston, I think we — two of my kids live in Boston. I call them kids, my son is 58. [Laughs]

SM: They’re still your kid forever.

HK: So my youngest is going to be 41 and my oldest is 58. So there was 17 years between the oldest and the youngest and my daughter is kind of 3 years behind my oldest, so she’s got a birthday coming up in September. So yes, the answer is yes.

SM: What else would you — would you travel around the Bronx or around the city or go upstate at all when you were growing up?

HK: We used to go up to the mountains, Catskills. Either that — my father was in business with his brother. So in the summertime, they would take every other week off. So it was actually nine days counting both weekends. I think we went to every single hotel during my childhood that you could name in the mountains. The Pines, Brown’s Hotel, The Concord, where else? I can’t even think now. When I was really young, we’d go to the beach and they’d rent bungalows. We went to Rockaway, Long Beach, Belle Harbor. All of those places, and a lot of times, we would be in — it was attached to some hotel and they’d have music on the weekends. You could see the ships because we were right near the water. One year I remember, we had this bungalow and there was a big swing on the porch. You know, one of those big double swings? In the rain, when

we had a rainy day, I'd either make potholders with these kits that they had then or I'd be knitting or reading. Sometimes, my friend Michelle would come out and spend a week with us. I had a friend Judy who lived at the beach. We would hang out together all the time. That was kind of fun, and I've actually written about my experiences on the beach and in the sand. Looking at all the umbrellas and all the different colors and just running free and having a great time. People say, "You must've really had a terrible childhood growing up in the city in an apartment and having to share a room with your sister and not having a house and a backyard." But I had a really good childhood I feel. My parents were strict, they actually were very strict. And when my sister started dating, she was a good deal older than me. I guess she had a curfew to come in, and she'd break the curfew every time. My parents would get so angry with her. They'd be yelling at her, and I used to lie there and say, "It's not worth it. Why'd she come in so late like that? I'm never gonna do that." You know, I never did. [Laughs]

SM: Okay. All right. I was going to say, what happened? [Both laugh]

HK: So that was really — My sister was a rebel in lots of ways, but she was a great sister. When I think of her, I think of her every single day, and she was more like a mother to me than a sister. She would drag me around the room trying to teach me how to dance and be her partner, and we'd be playing teacher and student. Of course, she was the teacher and I was the student and stuff like that. On Sundays, my father used to take us for a drive up on — what was the name of that road? Before the interstate came in. I can't think of the name of the road, but we would go toward upstate. My sister and I would sit in the back with our dolls. She'd say to me, "Your doll isn't alive. My doll is." [Laughs] She'd get me so aggravated.

SM: That's such an older sister thing to say. It's like, "Why not? Just to bother you." As an older sister, I can say.

HL: One time, when we were still living on Monroe Avenue, we lived in this building that had a staircase going up into the building. There were two huge lions' heads on either side of the staircase. One day, we were going to go to the park, Elaine and I. She said to me, "You sit here and wait. I have to get something upstairs, but I'm giving you my comic books." She had all of these *Archie and Veronica*, *Tubby*. So she handed me, and she says, "Don't give these to anybody. Just wait here; I'll be right down." Wouldn't you know these big girls came down the street and they took the comic books away. That was... and I felt terrible, you know? She wasn't angry with me, my sister, and we just had a lot of clean fun then. What was the name? It was *Tubby* and I can't think of the girl's name in that comic book. But I remember *Archie and Veronica* and *Betty* and these other comic books and *Superman* and all of those. So those were fun times.

SM: So do you remember what were — because you had mentioned, right, that you had lived right where the Cross Bronx Expressway became — do you remember what people were saying about it at the time or were you unhappy to have to move? Is that why you moved originally up to Mount Eden?

HK: We had to move. I guess people were not happy about it. My friend Michelle, she lived on Weeks Avenue, which was a little bit higher up. She didn't have to move. So when I wanted to see her because we moved right near Claremont Park, it was a little bit of a hike to get to her apartment house. But I managed. It was just very, I guess, disruptive to have to move. When we moved, we moved into a new building that had just been built and it was right across the street from the park. So it was very nice. I could go downstairs and there were benches. I could just sit and read and that was kind of nice. Of course in the summertime, the ice cream trucks would come around and they'd be jingling. Good Humor man and that kind of thing. So I liked living there and, of course, when it was harder for me to get to the junior high — I went to Wade Junior High 117 — when the weather was really bad, I wouldn't walk it, I would take the bus. I can remember being very upset because the bus fare went up from 10 cents to 13 cents. I said, "It's very annoying having to fish around for 3 pennies. Why didn't they just do 15 cents?" But they went to 13 cents. So yes. But most of the time, I would walk home. Of course, Taft, the high school, was closer when we moved. So I would walk there. But I always used to have this dream of having to run back from school because I forgot to take my books. Not being able to get back before the bell rang. I don't know if anyone else ever had that kind of dream. [Laughs]

SM: I definitely did. It's so funny that you say that because I always — whenever I'm stressed out, my dreams always involve me having to get somewhere and I can't get there on time. It doesn't matter what the other circumstances are, but that's always what it is. [Laughs]

HK: You are probably an early person, too.

SM: Yes.

HK: Right? I'm an early person, too. And my friend Michelle was always a late person.

SM: Oh, I've got friends like that, too.

HK: So one time, I always called for her. She hardly ever came to call for me. One time, it was my birthday and I got the mumps on my birthday!

SM: Oh my God.

HK: I was supposed to be at her house and of course, I wasn't there. She thought I was just trying to get even with her and that she wanted me to have her come to me. But that wasn't the case. So she said, "I have a gift for Hilde," and she gave my mother this book *Eight Cousins* by Louisa May Alcott, and that kept me busy during the time of my mumps. I remember my grandparents, my bubbe, came over. She made me laugh and it hurt so bad that to this day, if I laugh too hard, it hurts right there right where I had the mumps. People say, "Did you have..." I had the measles, I had the chickenpox, I had the mumps, and we survived it all. I don't know about COVID now, this is different.

SM: Yeah, God willing. Yeah. So you mentioned that both of the neighborhoods were predominantly Jewish. Did you ever see or experience any kind of racial or ethnic tensions there in the neighborhood or in school?

HK: No. Never. I had this friend, Olive, and she was — I guess today, you would say she was Black. We had a really nice friendship. Nothing ever untoward happened. The only — it was — no. It was not racial... I just remember one incident when I was a teenager and I was in the park with my friend Lois at that time and we were on the swings. It was getting toward dinnertime but it wasn't quite there yet and these boys came and they started to harass us. We got scared and we ran. They ran after us and Lois and I agreed she would go one way, I would go another way. I ran as fast as I could to get away from them. But that's the closest I could say to maybe the beginnings of gangs. [Laughs] I don't know. I don't know, but no, most of my neighborhood, I think, was Jewish. Most of the teachers we had were Jewish. We had the Jewish holidays off and it was public school. We had them off because the teachers wouldn't teach. When I moved upstate and my kids were in the school system there, they didn't have any holidays off. They had to take that as not a sick day or a personal day, whatever. But they couldn't win an attendance award because of it. They used to complain about that. They'd get cheated out of that because of their religion. But no, I don't think so. Do you hear about that at all?

SM: No, I mean often, and that's — I mean, I like to ask it, but oftentimes, I get pretty much the same response that you did. I think part of the reason why that might be is just because there really were — it was just such a Jewish environment that there really weren't other people around so much for there to be any issues. But most people that I speak to kind of say the same thing. "I had friends who were Black, who were Puerto Rican, and it was predominantly Jewish but nobody really thought anything about it."

HK: Yeah, yeah. So you know, it's... today, it's such an issue. Everything's an issue today. [Both laugh] It's the time of issues, I guess. But that time just doesn't seem to exist anymore or maybe we just, as youngsters, we just weren't aware of a lot of these things and we took our lives for granted. Today, I don't know. I feel like when you go to college, you should be going on your merit, not because of anything else. Because when it's so open that they need remedial courses to

sort of catch kids up and they really never do if they — you're watering down the education system. As a consequence of that, you have professionals that are not up to standard and the whole country suffers because of that, I think. You know, it's like having a doctor who graduated at the bottom of his class and only just scraped through. Who wants a doctor like that? It's like I tell my friends, "Would you rather have a doctor who has a great bedside manner and is a horrible doctor or somebody who is very brusque, business-like but they know what they're doing?" Sometimes, that's your choice.

SM: No, it's very true. So more on education. Are there any other memories from public school or junior high school that really stand out to you?

HK: I had a music teacher in junior high. I don't remember his name now. It was an Italian name. We were doing a production and it was a musical about Rip Van Winkle, and I had a solo part in it. My grandmother was dying of cancer. There were no backups for any of these singers so I went up to my teacher and I said to him, "My grandmother's dying. I don't know how much longer she has. But if she dies, I need to go to the funeral and probably shiva." The production was coming up. He says, "If you're not going to be singing, I'm going to fail you." I went home and my parents went to school because that really got me upset. I am not used to being failed at anything [Laughs]. So... she died. I sang in the performance, she died I think a week, maybe a week after. But that made a big impression on me. The other thing that I remember from junior high is we used to have these drills. I don't know if it was a fire drill or what kind of drill it was, but we'd be in the hallway and somebody in front of me was talking. I was very good; I never got into any kind of trouble at all. I must've looked guilty because I got blamed for talking. Because of that, that semester I couldn't get into Arista. Arista was the National Honor Society then or Junior Arista because I was still in junior high school. I always detested that teacher for doing that because I had not been talking. It was the person in front of me. She got away with everything and I didn't. But then the next year, I was accepted into it.

Junior high was a painful time and a good time because I was very shy. My mother wasn't feeling well at the beginning of the school year. She'd usually take me shopping for clothing and that particular year, she couldn't. When I went to school, the girls were making fun of me. I don't remember whether the hems had gone down or had risen in the skirts, but whatever it was, I didn't have the right thing. So that was a painful memory. The other thing was my girlfriend's name was Lois at that time and she was in my class. Then we were allowed to go home to eat. So one day, she said, "I'm going to go have pizza." She said, "Come with me." She couldn't find anybody to go with her so I said, "Alright." I had my lunch with me or whatever but I just went with her. That was my first experience having pizza and oh my gosh, that was so good [Both laugh]. And after that, she really became a really good friend of mine in school. Michelle was always there, but she was a year ahead of me because she was I think nine months my senior. So

at certain points in time, we sort of drifted because she was way ahead of me or in a different school.

But junior high was really interesting because I think you first become aware of boys then and the boys become aware of you. The boys liked to make really good impressions and show that they were really in, they'd wear these black leather jackets and have this stride going down the street. They'd have a cigarette and that made them feel really cool. I didn't — I think I went out the first time when I was maybe 14, 14 and a half, something like that. I always felt very awkward because I didn't know what to say. I always thought, "What do you talk about?" You know? It was kind of awkward especially I was from a very, I guess, sheltered family and I told you my parents were very strict. "Where are you going?" "What time are you coming back?" They really were strict. They were good, they loved us, but I think, with my sister and I, my parents loved each other so much, it was almost to the exclusion of everyone else. So as a result of that, I was really close to my sister and she was really close to me. And then I married young. I was 18. I moved to Virginia because that's where my first husband lived. So I really got separated from the family and from my friends, old friends. So I had to kind of make a new life, and then I moved back in 19 — was in '73 or 1974? My sister was living in Co-op City in the Bronx. I had been gone for 10 years, and so she said, "Come live near me." So I moved there, I had my two kids, I was divorced, but my husband died a few years later in a fire in Virginia. So we lived on the 14th floor of this huge apartment building which had 33 stories to it and we had come from Virginia Beach and a house, a house with a backyard and the whole thing. So it was a big change, and the atmosphere had already changed. It was scary. There were five sections to Co-op City in those days and I was in Section 5 with my sister. There were already gangs, and you just didn't realize it until you were living there that it was getting to be a very dangerous place to live. So after that, my sister moved away first and then I found a two-family house right off Pelham Parkway in the Bronx and we moved there. My daughter was in the yeshiva there, an Orthodox yeshiva. My son, because he was older, he started the High School of Science. Then Susan took the test for the High School of Science and she made it. However, Jeffrey went there I guess for three years — I met Steven, my husband of 41 years, he lived upstate and so we moved there — Jeffrey would've been valedictorian of the High School of Science but he didn't get a chance to go through his senior year. Susan was very religious, more so than I would've wanted her to be. But I wanted her out of the public schools and the rabbi said, "I have connections, I'll get her in." So she was reading when she was two years old. She was reading fluently *Charlotte's Web*, books like that. She had a lot of potential, my daughter. But anyway, they're all grown up [Laughs] and that has really nothing to do with my growing up in the Bronx.

SM: Was it a really big kind of culture shock for you when you moved down to Virginia?

HK: Yes. In a way, it was. We'd go into a restaurant and my father-in-law — they would call people “boy” like they were — I found that there was a lot of racism. I don't know. The Southern accent, you know? I remember my father-in-law calling a Black person a “*schvartze*” because he had the Southern accent and it just sounded really, really strange. It was kind of a culture shock, but again, I wasn't in the environment. I wasn't thrown into an environment that was interracial. So I know that there was a fight going on at that time with bussing, bussing the kids. But my children weren't in school yet so it didn't really affect me. It was more in Norfolk than it was in Virginia Beach, and I was living in Virginia Beach then. Today, Virginia Beach is unrecognizable from when I lived there in the '60s. It just is unrecognizable. Just like today here on the West Coast of Florida, you can't go out for a drive without seeing buildings springing up all over the place. Now there are apartments, condos, and they're going a little bit higher each time. Now, you can see one that's maybe four stories high. On the East Coast near Miami, they have the skyscrapers. The skyscrapers are not here yet, I don't think, unless St. Pete might have a couple of them but I don't know. But Virginia Beach in the '60s, you couldn't go out without seeing new construction everywhere you went. So in a way, it's good and in a way, it isn't good because we moved to the West Coast here because of the congestion on the East Coast. Now it's the same, or becoming the same, here. So the Bronx — do you go back to the Bronx at all?

SM: Yeah, I was a — I still am a Fordham student. So I was living in the Bronx for the last four years. The first two years on Fordham's campus and then the second two years, I lived on Arthur Avenue and 188th Street. I loved being there and this year, I'm a graduate student now so I'll be teaching at Roosevelt High School across the street from Fordham's campus there on East Fordham Road, so I'll be there four days a week even though I'm now living in Manhattan.

HK: Yeah, that's an old school, Roosevelt. I know. But did it used to be an all-boys school or an all-girls school? Walton?

SM: Yes. It was an all-boys school. Walton was an all girl's school —

HK: — went to Walton —

SM: Yes. My grandmother went to Walton.

HK: Is Walton still there? I mean, is it —

SM: Yeah. It's like a lot of the schools in the Bronx are — I'm at Roosevelt which is just a building now. But it's now broken up so that each floor is its own small high school. So like I'm technically at Belmont Preparatory High School which is a — they're all public schools. But they broke them up in the hope that I guess the education would improve or it would solve problems. But I don't know. As someone who's an educator, I don't — I've never been in an

experience where more administration solves all the problems. But yeah, it's interesting. I'm interested to see how it goes; I'm excited.

HK: Yeah. Yeah. I remember when I was in Clifton Park, I was substituting. I was going on for my master's at the same time and I was teaching. This one girl, or maybe it was a boy, asked me if I was Jewish. That was the only time that I can remember and I don't remember what I answered. It could've been, "Why?" [Laughs] But when I was there, Jews were in the minority and we had a little synagogue that we went to. We used to call it "the synagogue on the prairie" after *Little House on the Prairie* [Laughs], and it was a close-knit synagogue. Actually, the one here in Sun City Center reminds me a lot of the one up there. But it's very strange because there are a lot more Jewish people here than I knew up there.

SM: So how did you feel about leaving the Bronx at that time when you moved upstate?

HK: When I moved to Virginia or when I moved here?

SM: I guess, the time when you finally moved permanently out of the Bronx so I guess when you moved upstate with your second husband.

HK: I don't know if my kids were happy about it, because their friends were in the Bronx and their schools. They had to change schools. I know my daughter was definitely not happy when she went into the public school upstate. In yeshiva, it really didn't matter if your hair was curly or straight or how long it was or what kind of clothes you wore. But in Clifton Park, you had to have the right kind of bag that you carried around, your handbag. It had to be a certain maker who made it. It was very hard for her to fit in. My son did better, he made a friend there and he did a lot better. Of course, he was older, he only had one year to go. But it was the most difficult for Susan. Then of course, I became pregnant and then we had a baby which was born on the second day of the school term. So that was kind of hard because my daughter's birthday is on September 6th and she didn't want me to have the baby on her birthday. My husband didn't want me to have the baby on the first day of school, which was the 8th. So I had him on the 9th [Laughs].

SM: You pleased everybody.

HK: It pleased everybody, yeah. I guess it did. So you know, but that's it, I guess. Do you have any other questions you have for me?

SM: I always like to end by asking, when you think back about your time growing up in the Bronx, what kind of emotions or memories do you associate with it?

HK: Oh, gosh. I think of Good Humor bells ringing on the truck. I think of playing outside on the sidewalks. I think of my friends and the first club we made together, and of the library, and just my grandparents and family. My sister and my parents. Just of the things that gave me my foundation and built the kind of person that I guess I am today. So you can leave a place and you can leave people, but they are a part of you and they remain in your heart. I just really hope that the young people today can raise their kids to have the kind of values that we grew up with. Not so much money, because my sister and I didn't know whether we were rich or whether we were poor. I wore her hand-me-downs, you know? Nobody complained. We never complained.

But we had a value system and I think that's the main thing. How you treat people, how you want to be treated. I often say I never heard my father or my mother use any foul language at all. The harshest thing my father ever said to me was when I came in — I was a kid and my parents were talking in the kitchen. I interrupted something probably important that they were talking about. I just burst in and my father said, "Don't interrupt." That stuck with me; it was like somebody struck me. The other memory of my father was when his mother passed away. I came into the kitchen and he was leaning against the refrigerator and he was crying. I'd never seen my father cry. So those are the kind of things where you care about your family, your parents. I think today, kids need to look around them and see some of the sacrifices that their parents make for them so that they're well, they're not sick, so that they're learning the right things in school. So that they have values and they care about each other instead of sniping at each other. Just to care about the world that they live in today, whether it be in the Bronx or anywhere else. This world needs a lot of help.

SM: Yeah, it does. That's wonderful, thank you!