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Braunstein, Beth

Sophia Maier Garcia

Transcriber: Sophia Maier

Sophia Maier (SM): All right, 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.

Beth Braunstein (BB): Okay, so my name is Beth Anshen Braunstein, I'm born in the Bronx in 1954. My two sets of grandparents both came over from basically parts of Russia. They made stopovers along the way. I actually just did a family book history this year, so as we're speaking, I actually have the exact dates that day, because part of what I did in this — I made the Shutterfly book history. I did some research on Ancestry to confirm some dates that I wasn't perfectly sure about. So for example, my mother's father, who was born in 1860, came to America in 1914 from Kyivberazanco, Russia. He came on a ship called the Arabic — I'm referring to my book because it's all written here — which sailed from England and docked in Boston in February 1914. His wife, my grandmother's Sarah Kamsan Wool, was born in Katashrinish — it's hard to pronounce — in Ekaterinoslav Russia in 1895. She is very interesting, on her voyage to America with her family she lived in Alexandria, Egypt for a few years, she was very little. The only evidence I have of that stay is a little math book she was given as a prize when she was in the first grade. I do remember that my grandmother spoke Italian, which was interesting as a storekeeper in the Bronx, she was able to converse with different kinds of customers, and that was picked up in this time in Egypt. She came to America in 1910. So my mother's parents, you know, these are pre Holocaust, early on Eastern European immigrants to America. And my grandparents were married in 1922, right here in New York. This is actually a photograph of their parents.

SM: Wow.

BB: My grandmother's parents, my great-grandparents, who are both buried here in New York. I know where their graves are. My sister is named after Ethel, Ethel and Solomon Kamzan. I don't know if it helps to do this along the way. This is my grandmother and her siblings. My grandmother is in the middle right here. I knew some of these people, especially my aunt Sylvia. So they all got here. To my knowledge, there were no siblings left behind, as opposed to other parts of the family where some people never came or made decisions not to come or weren't able. So now we're in the Bronx. This is all my mother's side of the family. My mother, Selma Wool Anshen, her brother Norman Wool, and my grandparents Mendel, also known as Max, and Sarah Wool. These photographs are taken at 1606 Bathgate Avenue in the Bronx, which, drive down that street now, there is nothing left of the world that existed here in the 50s and the 60s. It became basically an industrial area. The last house standing on that block was my grandparents' house because I remember, we took my sister and I, once in a blue moon, would take little rides down memory lane, and that building, I believe, was the last standing. But this actually, this little lady in the kerchief, is my great-grandmother who you saw on the earlier page, a very [indecipherable] lady. So that's like the only picture I had — people didn't have their iPhones around — so I'm lucky to have this. And this is my cousin Shirley. What fascinates me about these

pictures is the date 1944. The Jews were going — for me, my side of the family came early, so for me, the very powerful piece is Jews were being gassed and burned in the gas chambers. And I have the chills when I say this to you that I was blessed that my family came and here we are June, 1944 in the Bronx, and there they are. I didn't include in this book. There's a picture of my mother with her girlfriends in Coney Island in 1942-44, and I have it in my [indecipherable] because my son in law comes from Holocaust survivors, and of course we have many friends and many people we know, so it's so profound to me these pictures in the 40s taken in the Bronx. As unfancy as the Bronx might have been, it was a hell of a better place to be.

So, once again, here's my mom and her parents. This is the nuclear family of my mother, and we are blessed to have these couple of photographs. So this is my mom growing up, she went to Walton High School. My grandparents, I don't know what they did the second they got here, but what I know of is a children's clothing store on Bathgate Avenue and they lived above it, 1606 Bathgate [Avenue]. I have memories of the store as a very young child and being upstairs at my grandparents house and the lady who lived above them. It's the only time I saw someone *kashering* meat, she had that tilted metal, this piece of flat board and the meat was there and the blood was dripping down. And I'm probably about five, six years old, but somehow I remember that because I don't think I ever saw meat being *kashered* except for that moment. So my grandparents had a children's clothing store, and attached to that store was my father's store. And that's how my parents met. He was ahead of his time, it was coffee, tea, spices, and nuts. And then eventually it edged into a health food store in the late 60s, 70s. And that store moved from Bathgate avenue to Pelham Parkway in the Bronx on White Plains Road under the elevated train. I don't know how well you know the Bronx.

SM: I know about area pretty well.

BB: About 1962 the store — because already by the early 60s Bathgate Avenue, as a Jewish steaming community filled with synagogues, a live chicken market, the original Goldman's Yarns, Woolworths, delicatessens, Beberman's Bakery. I'm trying to give you a vision of what this block was like. It was very live and it wasn't just Jewish. There were other ethnic groups there as well. I guess I connected to the Jewish piece. So by '62, my father moved the store to Pelham Parkway. My grandfather had passed away and his store was liquidated. My grandfather was the machah in Beis Medrash Hagadol, which was around the corner on Washington Avenue. A couple of years ago for my sisters, my older sister's 70th birthday, the family rented a little van and we actually tracked my sister's life in the Bronx. Went to the first building we lived, which was like I don't even know the address, but it's like a housing project on the way to Washington Heights, Featherbed Lane. I don't know if you know any of these words. So we started there, went to — we grew up and lived — I lived except for three years on Thieriot Avenue, which is off the Cross Bronx Expressway right outside of Parkchester. 1425 Thieriot. We went there, and then we tracked the synagogues.

Now, the synagogues of the Bronx is a way of kind of tracking how the Jewish community shifted around. So the synagogue that my grandfather [attended], the Beis Medrash Hagadol is now a church and actually they were very welcoming when we came by. It was a Sunday, and we said why we were there and they said, please come in and look around and they were very lovely to us. When we went to Parkchester to the synagogue. We went to two different — my sister and I, now we're skipping forward to you know the 60s, 70s — my sister and I went to a Conservative synagogue called Temple Emanuel Parkchester, which was also sold off now. It might be a church, I'm not sure. I'd have to look that up. There was actually a closing, there was an event that my sister attended, you know, to kind of say goodbye to it as a synagogue. My sister and I went to Hebrew school there. Had a very lively Jewish life there in the 60s. There was an active sisterhood. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there were extra rows of seats set up, the house was pretty packed. In fact, there was an overflow downstairs, there was more than one *minyan*, to tell you that they were really people coming there. My uncle, who you saw in the picture, my uncle Norman, became an Orthodox rabbi through Yeshiva University. And my parents were not, what I call, halachically observant, but my sister and I kind of got the bug as teenagers and we switched to the Young Israel of Parkchester, which is a Modern Orthodox synagogue. And as a teenager, at the age of about 16, I decided to become a Sabbath observer, as well as my sister. My parents were pretty good sports about it, because my grandparents had been traditional Jews. So it was kind of like they came over and then my parents, the American born generation, kind of Americanized a little, and then in our family, which you may have heard from other people as well, we kind of went back to a little bit tightened up the reins on our roots. I am now the mother of three married children and eight grandchildren and everybody is basically Modern Orthodox, Sabbath observing Jews, as well as my sister. So from two little girls in the Bronx was built — from my little parents, which you didn't see my dad yet it all — was built a foundation for a very strongly identified Jewish life. One of my sons is a Modern Orthodox rabbi, one of my sister's sons is a Modern Orthodox rabbi. Other of my kids are involved in Jewish education and various other occupations. So just to try to give you a vision of where we came [from]. When I look at the picture of my parents, I see this unassuming hard working couple in the store getting by, and a little bit better. You know, they didn't just get by. The 70s was a good time for them because they hadn't built all these big health food stores yet so people actually came to them for vitamins and things like that. Then came GNC and all these big things, so they kind of preceded that so there was a need for there kind of — looking for a picture, a quick picture of the store to show you how Mom and Pop it was. This was on White Plains Road after they left Bathgate Avenue. Very Mom and Pop, very Mom and Pop.

SM: And what motivated him at that time to have a health food store? Were you eating very health conscious growing up too?

BB: You can see here the sign. My parents in the store. That was actually when they were closing the store at the end. My father wasn't so well and they knew it was time. Here's my dad with my oldest son who's 46. You see the little boy? Exactly behind him, see all those little handwritten signs and little drawers? That was a wall of spices, you bought them loose. But that piece of furniture — this is really

trivial, but to me, it's cute — there was an eyeglass store around the corner on Bathgate Avenue and they went out of business my father took that piece of furniture which had eyeglasses for a display and made it the spice rack. So it was very Mom and Pop. There's my dad in front with my son Ari, who's going to be 42 this week. You see their apron. It's really Mom and Pop. Okay, you asked me a question. What motivated? What was that question again?

SM: Yeah, what motivated them to get into health food? Did you also grow up eating a lot of the very health conscious food?

BB: Okay. Really a mixture. I think my father had been in different kinds of food connected businesses, and he had already the coffee, tea, spices piece, and I think it was a piece of the time. Growing up we had nice food, but we also had the 60s food of the canned vegetables and meat, hamburger or lamb chops at night. You know, it wasn't like we were eating fish and kale, that kind of thing. But there was the interest in foods and the coffee. Listen, my father was grinding fresh coffee long before Starbucks and that was a big drop in his store. He had the machine, he ground the coffee and people got fresh coffee. So he had an itch there for his time. I think there was just an interest in food. I mean, my father's smoked lucky strikes, on the other hand, he smoked cigarettes. By the way, in this store that I described as a health food specialty store, in the 60s he sold cigarettes. And then they put an end to it. So he evolved in his own little Mom and Pop way with what was going on at the time. He made peanut butter, he had a peanut butter machine, my sister has it on her counter in her house. So ground fresh peanut butter. So there was this. It was very *hamish*. My father was — someone once wrote an article about him in the local Pelham Parkway newspaper, and they described him as the Henry Youngman of Pelham Parkway. Henny Youngman was a comedian big on one liners. People would walk in the store and he'd say, “I thank you and your friend too,” he'd say, “it's in the bag.” You know, there was a lot of that one liner, jovial, friendly, knew the customers. He had a variety of characters, he sold gluten free bread when people did it for allergies. Now people do it for all sorts of reasons. So like he had people come in who had different allergies, different needs. There was an old guy who used to do the marathon or something then, I would see all these characters growing up, because his story attracted various characters. Some Jews, not Jews, neighborhood people, all kinds. What indicated that he was a Jewish storekeeper? I'd say the store was closed Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the first two days of Pesach. That's about it. On Tu BiShvat, I think he was probably one of the only places in the Bronx where people could get a carob buxar, you know, that black thing that grows in Israel or whatever. People call it carob or St John's Bread. The rabbis in the neighborhood would come in, they'd want two pieces of that for Tu BiShvat. Am I assuming you know what Tu BiShvat is?

SM: [laughs] Yes, I'm also a Jewish educator.

BB: Right. Okay. I just didn't want to make assumptions.

SM: No, no, don't worry.

BB: Okay, so he would frustrate him, because he'd say, "Look around the store, there's other things to buy." But that was their thing that they wanted to come to my dad's store for there was a point in history where the rabbi came in the neighborhood and had him sell his *chametz*. I'm going to show you something cute. Hanging on my wall… I don't see it now. But I have framed — the rabbi came in with this fancy certificate so my father would sell his *chametz*. And I actually did frame it, it's upstairs in my house. So, you know, there was a Jewish piece, not a profoundly Jewish piece, but there was an aspect to it. So, Pop's store was in Pelham Parkway from '62 to '92, and by then he had already had a stroke in the store and it was time to pack it up. Pelham Parkway was still quite Jewish then.

I mean, let's go back to Bathgate Avenue for a minute. I'm skipping around a little. There were a lot of synagogues there. It was a very Jewish neighborhood. I don't have a remembrance of anything Sephardic Jewish, I don't think I even knew growing up what a Sephardic Jew was. It seemed to be profoundly Ashkenazic, Eastern European. If there was, as a child, I was not aware of it. My grandparents were very traditional. I'm going to switch to my father's side for a minute. My father's side came also very early from Russia. Actually, I have these two photographs taken in Russia. That's my grandfather. We estimate this photograph at about 1890. He was born in Chalav, Russia. I kind of learned that because where they're buried there's like the Chalav section of the cemetery. Sometimes when you're doing research, one of the ways of helping you finding out about a person is through these burial societies. And they were part of the Chalavers, we used to hear about the Chalavers. And my sister and I actually took a road trip to Queens last year, we hadn't been to my grandparents' graves in a long time. And we walked around, and we actually made a couple of discoveries about an uncle, there was a photograph on the grave. It was interesting to connect in that way. And you could also confirm dates there, because you want to assume that the family put the dates on this stone is pretty accurate or name things. I'm just gonna throw this in as a commercial, in case it comes up. What I've learned in going to cemeteries is that it's very rare that people put — they put the name of the deceased, and they put the name of their father, and it's very rare to see the name of their mother. And if I could do one campaign in Jewish law it would be put the name of the mother. Because people sometimes that's the only way they know it. There's no halakhah, I've asked rabbis, it's just the way it's been. So my mother passed away and my mother in law, we were very careful to put both names, but if you have occasion to go to a cemetery, you will see it is very rare to see the mother's name and I think it's really remiss that people don't do that. So this picture is a fabulous picture of my grandmother went to sort of a midwife, nursing school in Russia. Her desire was to be a physician, but of course a Jewish woman in Russia in around 1903 that wasn't happening. The only reason I know which person was my grandmother is because somebody along the line wrote the word Mama (?) next to the picture. My son in law's father is a photographer, and when I did this book, he did a lot of the scanning. This picture was ripped in half, so he restored the best he could, he did wonderful work for me. So here's Lewis Anshen and Sophie Rabinovich already here in America as a married couple. This is my father's parents. Her name Rabinovich, if you know Sholem Aleichem's name was Rabinovitch, so the thought is my family might have a connection, but I don't know for sure, but I like thinking, to think that I'm connected to Sholem Aleichem. Here's my dad's nuclear family. This

is my dad, his twin sister Gertrude, who lived out her life she was an avant garde artist, writer, poet, who lived mostly in California. But when she died, we brought her remains back to New York and buried her not too far from my dad. Oh, that's her. That's Gertrude Jones. I'm named for Blanche, who died at 18, from tuberculosis. And my uncle Wally also lived his life in LA. And here again is Sophie and Lewis Anshen. Very distinguished, carried themselves beautifully. He was in the business of lining fur coats down in the 20s. This is my dad and his twin sister in the carriage. And it's very important, this is probably — I would say for you as a Bronx Jewish historian, this is probably the page in the book that may be of most interest to you. I actually, this document here, I have the actual document. So let me tell you about this because it's pretty cool. Max and Gertrude were twins, my father and his sister. So now you're in 1927 in the Bronx. The boy couldn't be shorter than the girl because the boy had to be taller. If you could see this picture up close, I have the original here, it was mounted on metal, there's a split down the middle because they made Max shorter and they pushed up Gertrude and made her higher so it looked better in the picture. Gertrude was the more studious of the two. My father was the more playful. They allowed her to make a speech at the bar mitzvah. I may have a copy of it or my sister may. But this document, which I think is really archive worthy, was a menu that my grandparents made in honor of the occasion. I have the actual one so you could see that it was printed on this nice paper. They were pretty big shots the Bronx Jewish Center. Okay, so look how fancy it is. Bar Mitzvah of Max and Gertrude — LS is Louis and Sophie Anshen, my grandparents. In the Bronx Jewish Center, it was a Yinglish [Yiddish and English] kind of thing. August, 1927. The menu is very funny because each piece of the food was named after a guest. So my 15 year old granddaughter was going through it, she said, “Oh, it must have been a potluck grandma and everybody brought food.” I said, “No. They were honoring their guests.” Kashka alla Segal, Gefilte Kiska alla Lewis. There's one alla Max, my father. Oh, Peaches alla Mrs. Anshen, who's my grandmother, and so on and so forth. Kereblach, which I looked up one day, I'm not sure what it means. Goodin Zafran alla Mr. And Mrs. Levine. So this is Yiddish inflected into the English here. Soup is zoop. I find this to be one of the best archives that I have, and it's amazing that we just have it. It sat in my mother's drawer, I guess that's why we have it. So I have this and this is that original photograph, it was starting to fall apart but this photographer relative of mine kind of gently glued it down together. So this is really a really a gift to have this.

My parents were not ones to be particularly nostalgic. My mother once got a letter from Russia years ago, of someone looking for a relative. My mother paid no mind to it. She always thought like, maybe they're looking for money or something. She didn't have that piece of wanting to feel like I'm a piece of history. I guess I did not inherit that. And I think I feel a different way, which is why I would take on such a project to do. This project was done — I have a granddaughter who had a bat mitzvah on Purim, and she read the whole megillah, and it was a big thing. My goal was to do this in honor of that occasion. So I had a goal, and I started it the summer before, and I thought this was a gift. You know, my grandchildren range from four months to 15. So they're not all ready to dive into this yet. In fact, one of my grandchildren looked he says, “What's all this black and white? Let's get to the colored part.” But that's okay, because now they have this as a gift to the family, you know, as they get older and ask questions about the family.

SM: Yeah. Just a little excerpt, you just made me think, my brother used to think that people actually used to see in black and white and that's why the movies and the pictures are in black and white. So he asked my grandmother, when she started to see in color.

BB: Really? That's very funny. That's a great, great story. The world must have been black and white, then.

SM: Of course,why were the pictures in black and white?

BB: It's funny, because you see in this book, the transition, like in the 70s when they become color. But the early colored pictures are not good quality. We got married around that time in 1975, and our wedding album is a drop faded. But the black and whites from 1920 are perfectly fine. That's history of photography, which is a whole other story.

SM: A whole other thing. So tell me a little bit more. So you moved, I guess the center of your life moved, from Bathgate over to Thieriot Avenue. So tell me a little bit more about that neighborhood. Was it dominantly Jewish area at that time?

BB: Okay. See, there were four co-op buildings that were built around 1957. We moved there. I think my parents picked it because there was a school. My mother was very practical. The elementary school was on the corner, PS 102. They was shopping. My father had the store short bus ride away in Pelham Parkway. There was a Hebrew school for us to go to. My mother did care about that. So there was this conservative synagogue, which was seven blocks away. My sister and I used to walk home from Hebrew school. We went to junior congregation. My sister and I were very involved, more involved than my parents, because my parents' door was open on Shabbos, and my sister and I would go to junior congregation. We were like the queens of junior congregation, and we liked it. And we enjoyed the Jewish life. I think, for me, it was not only the Jewish piece, but the social piece. I got dressed, I went, there were people, there was a kiddish. There was a late — what we called — a late Friday night service, which still exists in conservative synagogues, because the assumption is that not everyone's coming home in time for Shabbat. So there was like this 8:30, Friday night synagogue that was a social event. And then when it was over, you went down for the correlation, which was tea and cake. My sister is four years older than me, so at one point, we could walk home ourselves. Before that one of the older guys, somebody would walk us home or halfway home. My parents never went to that. We did that ourselves, and we wanted to be there. It was a social event. Now, here's an American Jewish piece of history. On November 22 1963, which in my life is a profound day, the assassination of John F. Kennedy was a Friday. That night, I still remember what girl's bat mitzvah was supposed to be that night, and it happened. But like, who thought about Eleanor's bat mitzvah? Everyone was crying over JFK. So you know, I remember going to shul, and being part of that life. In the conservative movement at that time, somebody came up with the idea of a bat mitzvah being Friday night where the girl read the Haftorah.

Somebody had that notion, I guess it was a little bit more removed from the Bema Shabbat morning. My sister and I did not have bat mitzvahs, which you might be surprised at because we seem so Jewishly involved. I asked my sister recently, why do you think we didn't have a bat mitzvah? And she thinks because my grandparents were shomer Shabbos, and my mother didn't know how to handle where would she put them? We lived in a small two bedroom apartment, like now, you know, you'd find people to put you up or whatever. It didn't work that way. Everybody was in an apartment. So I think my mother just couldn't deal with the whole thing, and she let it go. And we each had a sweet 16. And that's what it was. And that was my big party, in the recreation room on Thieriot Avenue.

So Thieriot Avenue was a mixture of different ethnic groups. Mainly Jews, maybe a little Italian, Irish Armenian, but I'd say Jews were the majority. Most were going to New York City public school. There were a couple who went to yeshiva, SAR, Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy, which is in Riverdale. I was the librarian there for 20 years. I left during COVID. There was originally three yeshivas in the Bronx, Salanter, Akiba, and Riverdale. So Salanter, at that time, was a popular yeshiva that kids went to. It was coed, even at that time. And then there was some other places. So there was a small contingent of kids on my block who went to those, mostly boys by the way. And, as an aside, I believe till this day, if my sister and I had been boys, we might have gone to that school. But the girls they didn't do it with, and I have spoken to other contemporaries who kind of hear that. You know, whose parents were on the fence, but maybe paying for it was a bit much, so the boy would they would have done it, but the girl we went to Hebrew school. I consider my Hebrew school education actually, when I compare it to other friends who thought theirs was a horrible experience, to have been pretty good as those things go. I have memories of my teacher, I remember learning early about Israel, JNF, Yom HaAtzmaut, Yom HaShoah. I'm pretty sure that my teacher was a survivor, which I didn't know at the time. That might be an interesting piece for you to find out when I discovered that there was such a thing as the Holocaust. Here's a girl growing up from 1954 in America to American born parents at a time when the Holocaust wasn't splattered all over with museums in Washington, in textbooks and curriculums, and survivors going around telling their story. Now we're in a different era: now we're clutching to survivors that are 97 years old, which is totally a different thing. So there were people who lived on my floor who had accents. My mother called them the refugees, but I didn't really know what they were refugees from, and I'm not sure I knew what a refugee was. I just heard that term. It was my mother's way of saying we got here first. We're Yankee Doodle Dandies. My mother was a very proud New Yorker, American. We used to joke because my parents were married on Washington's birthday, they got engaged on Columbus Day. My father died on Veterans Day, my mother died a Labor Day. I said this at my mother's funeral, there was a very American loyal piece to them. The refugees were a different category, so to speak. She was a mean about it, but she just stated the fact. I found out what the Holocaust was, I had a very good friend who lived in Parkchester. And one Saturday afternoon, we were hanging out and she started to tell me about her parents and her father's first wife and sneaking out under some haystack or this or that. And at the age of about 12, 13, I found out what the Holocaust was. So it's hard for you to perceive that now that I didn't know what it was. And I'm still friendly with this person, I say, "Elise, you taught me

what the Holocaust was. I didn't know." I didn't know. We didn't talk about it in my house. It wasn't part of the curriculum.

When I think back, so I went to public school. PS 102, Junior High School 127. Also very ethnically mixed. If you look I have the yearbooks. Still mostly white, some Hispanic, some African American. This is kind of weird. I was always in the SP class, the classes, I could do a whole — you could do a doctoral dissertation on this. The classes were extremely homogeneous. You're in the — I was always, luckily, like in elementary school, the classes went two-one, two-two, two-three. I was always in the one class. So my class ethnically had maybe two African American kids, one Hispanic kid, the rest were Caucasian, varying from Jewish to Irish, maybe a little Armenian, maybe a little Italian. That's just what it was, for better or worse. Was it racism? Was it that those kids passed the test to get in? There were IQ tests and they were reading scores, that's how I think they did it. So I don't really think it was racist. I think it was kind of how it worked out, because of the opportunities that those ethnic groups had for education. This came up by the way that day at that conference.

SM: Yes, I remember. And I think that's especially because so many people that I've spoken to have been in the SP program, I think that coming up and saying that well, like, in part, there was a role of racism, really hit for a lot of people, because, of course, it wasn't like they didn't earn being there. Of course, you passed all the tests and whatever. So it was like, none of the kids would have ever been thinking in that sort of way. But it was exactly like you were saying, it was the larger systems at work that prevented African Americans or Hispanic kids from having the education up to that point. It's exactly what it is.

BB: I mean, that's the way I see it. But I think, even at the time I was in junior high school, felt — I'm going to describe a physical scenario. So I was in the SP class. I was in the — there was two year SP and three year SP. There was French and Spanish. I was not in the two year SP because I think I was part of every experimental thing in the 60s in New York public school. I was in a class where I skipped third grade. I went from first grade and then second and third grade was in one year. Personally, looking back, I think it was a disaster, as an adult educator. Then my fourth grade class, the room was divided in half. Half the kids were third grade, half the kids were fourth grade. I don't know what they were thinking. The fourth graders spent the year teasing the third graders because they were little. I was struggling in long division in the back of the classroom. And then the third graders would tease me, I still remember the name that a kid called me in the class. Like they took my name and twisted it around to a mean name. Because everyone was trying to decide who was the big shot in this class.

SM: Third and fourth graders.

BB: One thing that was beautiful in my elementary school life, I made the music class. So fifth and sixth grade — had I been in yeshiva half the day would have been doing *chumash* and learning about Jewish Studies — I spent that time in music. I think it was a great gift. I played the flute, I played the piccolo. I

was in the orchestra, I was in the band. It gave me poise, it taught me culture. My sixth grade teacher got us season tickets for the young people's concert at Lincoln Center, which was the great Leonard Bernstein. And we probably paid $5 for the tickets or whatever it was. And for me, it was a profound experience. I feel blessed that I went. Of course, what's the side thing of this? Those concerts were Saturday. So what did little Beth Anshen do? I was loyal to junior congregation. I went to junior congregation in the morning. I don't know if I went alone or I met two other girlfriends. I mean, I'm pretty young for this. I got on the sixth train near my house. You know what the six train is?

SM: Yes.

BB: Okay, I got on the six train, and we went downtown to get there in time for the young people's concerts, which I'm guessing started at one o'clock. I don't know. By the way, I've watched Leonard Bernstein on YouTube to relive how fabulous it was. He would stop and explain a symphony, the different groups, the woodwinds, the strings, it was really — in the background is my daughter in law, just for the record. Her and my son and three kids are living with us right now. So I combined my Jewish life on Saturday mornings when I was in the sixth grade with going to hear Leonard Bernstein. So I always say to people, I'm glad I wasn't shomer Shabbos yet because I got to go to those concerts. And also what's interesting is we went on the train ourselves, got on the six train and didn't think anything of it. Went for lunch at this place O'Neill's across the street, which of course is the other piece that came up recently with somebody. I always think of it as my last non-kosher hamburger. There was a place called O'Neill's, right across from Lincoln Center. The other kids got a cheeseburger, I only got a hamburger. I thought that was a better step. This was me developing as a Jew. So I always think of that as my last non-kosher hamburger. And then we took the train home. So that was really a combination of that life. That all came from the music experience in junior high and high school, which, for me, was a great cultural experience. I still regret — I always think I should go back to flute lessons. I still have my flute. I took piano lessons from a private teacher on Thieriot Avenue who, by the way, my sister and I figured out must have been a Holocaust survivor, too. She was Hungarian. And eventually we heard she committed suicide. So there must have been a big piece of her life that we as children could not understand. So we were surrounded by different kinds of people who, only looking back as an adult, I can begin to perceive what might have been going on in their life.

By the time I got to high school, I was at James Monroe High School from 1968. I graduated in ‘71. High school was three years, 10th, 11th, and 12. My Jewish identity was developing further and the Bronx was changing. My sister was in Monroe four years before me. It was very Caucasian, and still pretty Jewish. If you look in my yearbook, somewhere between then — and, of course, you have to throw in the building of Co-op City, which, if you’re a student of Bronx Jewish history, you know they say, “Co-op City destroyed the Jewish Bronx.” In many ways, it did. They all went flowing out. There was a rabbi who lived in my building, Rabbi Burl. He was a rabbi in the Bronx. He became the Rabbi of Young Israel of Co-op City. And that was going to be the Messiah. Of course, prior to Co-op City, it was a place called Freedomland, which was the Disneyland of the Bronx. I still complain to my sister

that our parents never took us once to Freedomland, this ride park, and that became Co-op City. So, in James Monroe High School, Hebrew was a language, that I took as a language. So there was enough of a group of Jewish kids. Once again, I'm in the honors classes. So my exposure to different ethnicities ends up being mostly in gym class. That's when I met the tough girls, and the fast crowd. If you know, that's what they called it, the girls with the ankle bracelets. So that happened mostly in gym class, because my regular classes were the honors classes. So from an ethnic point of view, from a cultural point of view, it was a little more limited, shall we say. I don't know how else I would describe that.

SM: And did you ever witness any sort of like ethnic or racial tensions in school or in the neighborhood as you started getting older?

BB: Interesting question. I don't think it was for me as a Jew, I think it was me it was more as a white girl. Coming into high school, I had a bus pass. I always came late to school, and there would be kids hanging outside who were cutting classes. And I remember someone came over and said, “You got money to give me?” And I said, “No.” And they said, “But of course you have money. Today's the day you buy a bus pass,” which was probably like 50 cents. So I remember answering, “Oh, no, I walk to school.” And that's how I got out of that. I don't think that was a Jewish piece, I think that was more of just looks like a law abiding white girl who maybe had money on her. Going back to my Hebrew school, it was in Parkchester. Parkchester, as you might have read in Jeffrey Gurock’s book, was very strong Irish. When we got out of Hebrew school, there were Irish kids who would tease the Jewish kids, mostly the boys, and there were incidents of kids getting beat up. And the boys didn't always like walking home. My mother used to pick me up from Hebrew school in the car. My mother drove, which was more hip at the time that my mother was the driver. And there was this boy who used to get a ride home and I think he didn't want to walk. I think he felt better getting the ride home with my mother. Jeffrey definitely talks about it in his book, The Irish and the Jews. You know that stuff. He's really the expert on that and Parkchester. On our block I really never felt racial tension. It was just like different kinds of kids. I went to Hebrew school, most of the girls went to the Girl Scouts. I was the only Jewish girl on the block who went to Hebrew school, from my recollection, my sister and I. The other kids went to Girl Scouts. I don't know how they equated each other, but I guess they were after school activities. So I guess I was pretty lucky like that. And in junior high school, nothing ever hit me directly. If it existed, I you know, I was sheltered. It was more, the scary part in high school was I don't think I went to the bathroom for three years because the girls were smoking in the bathroom. And whatever else was going on. So I didn't really go to the bathroom. I went to the teachers’ room. I knew a teacher from this camp I was going to and I — so it was more like the goodie goodies for me versus like the tough crowd more than what ethnicity you were. I became president of the Hebrew culture club at James Monroe High School. There is the evolution of my Jewish life. I was ready tottering on being shomer Shabbos. I was a majorette, you know, with the baton.

And between 10th and 11th grade that summer I went to a camp called Seguin Camps, which is not part of this Bronx history, but a deep, profound part of my life. Anybody who knows my husband and I

knows that within 10 minutes of meeting us, you'll hear about Seguin. So I think it's pretty amazing that you and I have been going for a while, and I haven't talked about it, I know your focus is not that. It was a sleepaway camp, which is something very deep in my husband and I, in our world, in our relationship and our evolution as a Jew and as a couple. So when I went to Seguin Camps in the summer of '69. I totted with being Shomer Shabbat and the following summer I made a decision to become Shomer Shabbat. So I'm in 10th grade going into 11th grade. I'm on the majorettes. And I'm supposed to be going to football games on Saturday morning. I quit majorettes and I told these Hispanic, Jewish, Italian girls that I can't be it anymore because I can't come on Saturday. To this day, I'm not sure they understood why, what exactly that was, but that was a big decision for a 16 year old girl. And then I started dating my husband who I met in camp that summer. And I decided to become Shomer Shabbat, he was not quite there yet. He was a Brooklyn boy from Flatbush Jewish Center. But 47 years later, we are married and we made the decision to be Shomer Shabbat, which was a big deal because our parents weren't. So what part of it came from the Bronx? The strong Hebrew school, my uncle who was an Orthodox rabbi, this sociological connection to Jewish life, traditional grandparents, and most of all, the period at the end of the sentence is my experiential Jewish life in camp. That all clumped together to develop this Jewish teenage girl who took it really seriously. I also went to a Jewish Hebrew High School. Have you ever heard the word Marshalea Hebrew High School?

SM: No.

BB: Okay, so Marshalea was in the Bronx, but my sister went when it was in Manhattan. It also existed in Brooklyn, in the heyday. So kids graduated Hebrew school, you had a bar mitzvah, that was the end of most kids' Jewish life who were on the public school track. I went to Marshalea.That was a pretty big deal to do that. It was Sunday morning and two days during the week. I was ready to dating my husband, he'd come sleepover, he'd hang out with my parents while I was going to Hebrew school. It was not overly religious. It was very cultural. We studied Mishnah, we studied chumash, we studied Jewish Hebrew poetry, which kids don't even always do in yeshiva these days. You know, we did Peret stories, Sholem Aleichem stories. So that was a very Jewish Hebrew cultural experience. Marshalea was housed in the Bronx Y, which was not too far from Yankee Stadium, and also a place called Schiff Center, which is now like El Mundo something or other store. That was a big synagogue off Fordham Road, about a block in from the [Grand] Concourse. So those were the places where I went to Marshalea Hebrew school, which I graduated in 1971. I have a picture of that graduation. There were a bunch of kids there. I think some of them were from Holocaust survivor parents, some were more observant, some were less observant. That wasn't such a big concern there. And it was a pretty nice experience. I think, as an observant Jew now, going there kind of kept me in the tech Jewish textual loop, so I was less ignorant as a person who didn't go to yeshiva. It gave me more of a strong background and a little bit more of the Hebrew background.And then when I got to college, I went to Queens College, I was a Hebrew minor. I took Hebrew classes, I took Judaic Studies classes, so I continued getting that Jewish background to strengthen what I might have missed not going to yeshiva.

SM: And do you have any memories of the 1967-68 Teachers' Strikes? You would be in Junior High School, High School?

BB: Oh yeah. First of all, we didn't hit that piece, but of course,the Six Day War is a big changing piece. I remember being in Hebrew school with the kid who had the transistor radio. I was not so connected to Israel yet, but I knew something big was happening. So that was a big thing, you know, and they always say, till '67, people who wear a yarmulkes wore a Yankee hat. And it was after '67 that they felt that they could walk around with a yarmulke. That's not for a girl, but for the boys, if you speak to people my age, they may talk about that if they were yarmulke wearing people. Okay, so then you said '67. Why did you say '67, '68?

SM: Teachers' strike.

BB: Oh, okay. I'm in junior high school. And in junior high there were two strikes. There was like '66, '67?

SM: It kind of goes all through that time period.

BB: I know what I'm mixing up. There was the transit strike, then there was the teachers' strike. So the transit strike, I'm in junior high school. So there was this walking to school, which was a little far from me, but we got to school. And somehow the show went on with school. The teachers strike, I'm in high school. I am now in James Monroe High School, I was in ninth or tenth grade, and school shuts down. I have a few memories. One is, until they regrouped — what happened was there were teachers who crossed the line who were willing to teach. So they would take spaces, for example, a local movie theater, a local church, a local community center. And you would say, "I'm in 10th grade," and they'd say, "Go to this social studies class and go to this teacher." So there was an ad hoc thing, which, by the way, happened at SAR during Hurricane Sandy, they had a blackout and they kind of did — it reminded me of that. They took a few of the synagogues and places in the neighborhood and they kind of set up an ad hoc school until it reopened, so it reminded me of that. So what happened was, we were going to these ad hoc classes. It was a while, I looked up not long ago how long it was. It could have been two months. In my mind, it was weeks, it was not days. The other fun thing I remember is I went with my girlfriend to Manhattan to the movies, because we were like off school. And I went to see the movie The Graduate. I was not old enough to see that movie, because I was like 13. We got to the movie theater and the woman didn't say how old you are, she said to me, "What year were you born?" So I couldn't lie fast enough. They didn't let us into the theater. I called my mother and said, "Mama, they wouldn't let us in the theater." So my mother, instead of saying maybe that movie isn't for your age looked up, and we went from the West side of town to one that was playing on the East side near Bloomingdale's. And I went to see it there. So I always used to tease my mother later on, like, Mom, maybe I shouldn't have been to see that movie. But maybe it wasn't for me at that age, this young kid having an affair with the older lady. That was another memory I have of the transit transit strike and the teacher strike.

SM: And where you kind of I mean, especially in high school, and then going into college, obviously, it was a very turbulent period of time with Vietnam and everything going on. Were you aware of that? Involved in any sort of the movements that were going on during that time period?

BB: Okay, I was aware. I think teachers in high school, we're making us aware, like the social studies, history teachers. Kent State. We knew the world was turbulent. 1968, I'm in junior high school. So we have the Martin Luther King assassination. We start with Kennedy, I'm in fifth grade. Then, you know, I'm right through that whole thing. Junior High School is Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy. So the world feels turbulent. Then comes Woodstock. And I'm in my first year at Seguin Camps. I'm 15 years old and we are hearing about this thing happening. Of course, I was a camper. I didn't go to it. It was a very rainy summer. I remember that there was a lot of mud. And if you look at pictures of Woodstock, they said it was pouring there. I don't remember knowing anyone who went. That was so beyond my kin. I was more of the goody goody kid and it didn't sound like I was — and I was a drop young to be the age to have gone off to do it because I was 15 that summer. But you knew it was there. There were kids talking about the music. There were, you know, do you know what the word Fillmore East is? That was like a rock Mecca in Manhattan. A lot of these rock groups played. I never went there. I was asked to go, and I thought that if I went there, and I'd smell all that pot, that I would get high by virtue of being there, and I was kind of a straight shooter that way. So I never went to the Fillmore East, and I was never at Woodstock. But yes, I was aware that the world was turbulent.

It was changing. Martin Luther King was trying to accomplish something. Really, in my adult life, the understanding of that is much more profound. To skip a few decades. I became the librarian at the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in Manhattan. If you know who Abraham Joshua Heschel was, he was a rabbi and philosopher who very much aligned himself with social justice, who marched with Martin Luther King in Selma. So when I came to the Heschel School as a librarian, I was personally educated, because it was a profound part of the philosophy of the school. And as the librarian, part of it was the collection around that history, and sharing it with the children. So my understanding of that, some came from that exact time period and some came as an educator and as an adult at the Abraham Joshua Heschel school. I knew Mrs. Heschel as an older woman. She was part of the culture of the school. And Martin Luther King Day was a major, major event in the school. So I learned a lot more about it. I've read books since and, just being part of that culture — I was at the Heschel School for about 14 years — so it was very much part of that culture of social justice, an open Judaism that welcomes different understandings. The kids at Heschel range from Reformed, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist. It was really a fabulous experience in that way. And then when I came to work at SAR Academy — I switched in 2001, there was a job opportunity that became open. I was living in Riverdale, it seemed like a great idea to be local. I brought that piece with me. And, you know, in my curriculum as librarian, I did Ruby Bridges and different things that I felt that was still due to develop in the curriculum and in that school, which of course, has come light years as an Orthodox school in that understanding. I consider SAR to be, as an Orthodox school, very open in their understandings of social justice and

ethical values, but I brought that strong piece with me from the Heschel School. So I lived it, and then as an adult, I brought it into my understanding. And we are members of Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, which was Rabbi Avi Weiss, who's now really the rabbi in residence and kind of semi-retired. I don't know if you know his name, but he has had a profound effect in the Jewish world in his understandings of social justice, of embracing not only being an activist in Jewish life, but in the world at large. So we moved to Riverdale from our home in Pelham Parkway to be part of this shul and this community. My son, is a graduate of his yeshiva, which is called Chovevei Torah, and we are very comfortable at an Orthodox shul which welcomes all. Wow, that's like a whole speech, but it's from my heart and from my soul.

SM: Yeah! It's evident that you really care about it. I think it's fantastic. Like I said, I work at Temple Emanu El in Manhattan.

BB: Oh, wow.

SM: It's a Reform synagogue. And I'm actually, this past year, I was a fifth grade teacher. I was history.

BB: So this is in their afternoon school program?

SM: Yes, I do Sunday mornings, and they have a Monday afternoon class. So this past year, I did fifth grade Jewish history, which was supposed to cover from the biblical period to about, you know, coming to America.Which is everything.

BB: That's crazy!

SM: We had to do the ultimate run through with that, but it was wonderful. But this year, they have me moving up with my students who are now sixth graders, which is half Holocaust, half Israel.

BB: It's interesting. The Reform Movement is, I would say, the movement I've had in my life the least exposure to. Even Reconstructionist, I have a lot of experience. And of course, the Mordecai Kaplan was the scholar in residence at Seguin Camps. We sat at his feet the summer of 1969 and '70. He gave lectures. So I really have exposure to that. I once had an interview at Temple Emanu El some years ago to be a librarian. You know, it's interesting how you say this curriculum you have. If you would ask me, if you would get kids who are not seriously Jewishly committed, but for some reason their parents choose to do that, I would never think to do a curriculum like that. Like my curriculum would be so exposing them to the positive beauties of Jewish life. I wouldn't even touch the Holocaust, because I would want them to feel the positive pieces of Jewish life and the living vibrant live pieces. I would have such a different perspective. I would sooner do Israeli dancing than teach the Holocaust. I kind of felt that at the time in that interview, that there was like this traditional structure. By the way, our synagogue, it doesn't have it really anymore, but there was something — they never had a traditional

Hebrew school, it was called Jewish Youth Encounter Program. And they didn't sit them down and say, "We're going to do this many *parshas* of *Chumash*," because they did it experiential, because they felt — and we had our young rabbis, because we always had a staff of rabbis, like more than one rabbi. Now, of course, we have women and men on our staff, but that it was really giving the kids an experience and not hounding them with information. So I don't know if you're ever at a faculty meeting there, I would put my thing in to not feel pressured about how much Jewish history they have, but some living experience. That's my side commercial as an educator. As a librarian in Jewish day schools for well over 30 years, I brought that Jewish piece alive through literature, through, you know, the kind of materials that I shared with the kids through visuals and illustrations. And I found many different ways to give them that piece of culture that was not what you'd call a traditional textbook kind of thing. Jewish values also. And that's really the gift of a Hebrew school where kids are not immersed in the Jewish Day School world. I don't know, I don't know who wants to hear that.

SM: We talk a lot about values based learning and things like that. And I think it's a good way to talk about it. And then as someone who's now in, you know, master's level education classes for secular education, it's like, that's all my background is Jewish education. So it's funny, bringing that bit into that, and vice versa.

BB: Yes. A lot of speaking and workshops that I've done in my career was based on something I developed. I developed a bibliography of, I'd say, ethical values and developing a sense of independence. It's really picture books from pre-K through five. All these books have some piece of a child developing, you know in the story, developing a sense of independence, individuality. It's a fabulous collection, and I've done a lot. I did a number of speaking mostly in Jewish settings, because that was my world, and I was invited. That's something I would love to share one time at Temple Emanu El. What's the youngest age they have in the Hebrew school setting there?

SM: When I'm there it's pre-K through one, so they have some four year olds, I think it's really the youngest. And of course they have their like, daily school, which is like two, three year olds, but when I'm there Sunday and Mondays, it's four, five, six.

BB: Well, I'd love to share some. I'd love to be the guest storyteller there.

SM: Well I know the pre-K through one teacher very well. So I can see about that.

BB: That might be a fun thing to connect to, because that's a very rich part of my knowledge, and that's professionally where I'm at.

SM: And so I guess going back a little bit, I mean, we've really covered a lot of the stuff that I usually ask about. But I know you talked a little bit about how you feel that if your sister or you had been boys that you would have attended yeshiva. Are there any other experiences that you had that made you feel

as though, growing up as a woman during this time period, that you had different expectations of you or things like that, then your male peers or relatives?

BB: There was a piece of my parents that were probably a little bit ahead of some of the other kids in the neighborhood. I think just going to the Hebrew school doesn't sound like women's liberation, but in a certain place it was giving me more knowledge and knowledge is power to develop who you are. So I'm very thankful for that. I feel like, you know, I didn't come off as an ignorant Jew and had to do everything as an adult. That was, I don't know if the word “liberating,” it gave me as a woman more opportunity. Not having the bar mitzvah, I guess was always a little bit of a loss. But the other piece is my mother was working. She was working in the store with my father, my mother drove a car. So the role model of a woman was not just the housekeeper, with the pearls and the apron thing. We were a little beyond that, and I'm grateful for that as well. On the other hand, would I have had a different profession had I been a boy at that time? I always still ask that question. You know, also the other piece of it, I was dating my husband, we were young, and we got married at 21. Did I maybe want to be a school psychologist and I would have had to be in school for five years? But we were already kind of set and I think I was scared to do that. You know what I'm saying? And my first child was born like minutes after I finished my master's. I have a master's in library science. My undergraduate and graduate is from Queens College. I got it in under the wire. I did get my master’s. I didn't work for a while and then I started working when he was older. So would I have not been a librarian, would I have been a psychologist? I don't think I would have been a doctor or a lawyer, that category, because I don’t think I was interested. I might have done something else. I don't have regrets about that. For me, raising my family was the most profound, important thing in my life. I did have a career. Sometimes I'm still you know, looking around for projects to do even though I left SAR in 2020 and that was really at a point where COVID didn't have — there were no vaccines yet. I was part time and things were crazy and I just felt, the writing on the wall, it was a good time for me to bail out. I might have worked a few more years, maybe I wouldn't have. So I gently kind of eased out. I was at a party last night and they said how are you doing? What are you doing? I said I'm very busy with my family. I have hobbies, I'm doing needlepoint, I go to classes, I have a very close sister who lives nearby. If the day is quiet we always find something to do together. I'm part of my shul. I am part of helping out with families, you know, different things. I have little old ladies that I check up on who are dear to me. So I have a deep community connection and most deep family connection. So I feel very fulfilled in my life. I have three grandchildren, a son and daughter-in- law living here now. Today's pretty quiet, two of them are in sleepaway camp, the other one’s day camp, and my kids working. But it's a very active life. Every day I thank God for good health and ability to do that. I have two children living in Jersey, I'd say I cross the bridge three, four times a week. I'm on the road, I'm busy. I'm actually, after I speak to you, I'm going to head over to my daughter in Jersey, who has a newborn baby and see what's up there. So back to your question, would have been a little different? Perhaps. Maybe it wouldn't have been. I have no regrets about the commitment, the primary commitment to family life for me. My husband is still working full time. He's been in sales his whole career. Worked for one company for 30 years, and now he's working at another place since 2005. He is on the road, he traveled a lot. And when he traveled, I was manning

the fort here. From 2008 to 2012, my mother-in-law lived in this home with us. She had gotten to a point in her health where she couldn't stay in Brooklyn anymore. We had 24 hour help with her in this home, she died in this home. And I feel it was a great gift to us that she could live here. Our fathers died earlier, and the two moms were here. Everybody in the neighborhood knew the grannies. We were invited for a Shabbat meal, the grannies came with us. My mother passed away in 2013, and we were very close. And I hope that that role model to my children will be profound, because caring for our parents was a great gift. It is not easy when people age and have physical problems and, whatever goes along with it, but for me, it was a great gift that my mother-in-law lived those years here, and died in my arms in the bed in this house. It's a little emotional. You know, our mothers were funny ladies, because they were not shomer Shabbos. And they used to get around and say, "Okay, we're playing along for the ride." Then my-mother-in law, at that moment when she died, I remembered she was a little bit worried about her son becoming religious, because she thought she was gonna lose — my husband's an only child — she thought she would lose him to like this religious thing. And in the end, really, it was the religion that built a family that deeply embraced grandma in every way. And even to the point where she would drive here from Brooklyn for Shabbat lunch, and we were shomer Shabbos, and she wasn't. The kids would walk down to the driveway, open the door and walk grandma into the house and thought absolutely nothing of it. Where does that open mindedness piece come from? It comes I guess from all that family and various observances, and my grandparents becoming religious, but not everybody was and I don't know. It all somehow meshed together that way. I think I've given you that picture.

SM: I think so too. And I think, something that I'm interested in is because most people — I mean, I think almost every single person that I've spoken to has left the Bronx. So I'm really interested to hear from you what kind of motivated you to stay when everybody else was leaving and what change you've seen in that way?

BB: Okay, so I'm living in the Bronx. I get married in 1975. And I'm attending Queens College, undergraduate, graduate, so it opens me up to the world of Queens, which seems like a fancy suburb to me. My husband was from Brooklyn, I'm from the Bronx. So where are we going to live when we get married? We decided to go in the middle and move to Forest Hills, Rego Park. So the first five years of our marriage was spent there in a nice little apartment. It was just then, in the history of Queens, that's when the co-ops were starting. So we were a rental, but our building became a co-op. That was when it was hot to do that. And we wanted to buy a house. So where are we going to go? We ended up buying the house in the Bronx, because my sister stayed there. And we wanted to be near them. We wanted to be near family. So my parents were there. My sister was there. His parents were in Brooklyn, and we bought this house on the north side of Pelham Parkway, opposite Einstein on Wilson Avenue. Lovely brick colonial and if we were in Queens, we would never have gotten a house as nice as that. At that time, that neighborhood was quite Jewish. And my sister was living a few blocks away. And there was this Young Israel, there were a lot of shuls. My parents still had the store on White Plains Road. So it felt, you know, like a good place for us. The shul began to deteriorate. So this is 1980. 1980, I had one three year old. The other two were born in that house. And we knew about SAR. So there was a draw

because I heard that, I thought it was better than those yeshivas in Queens. The information that came to me told me that SAR was a good school. So it appealed to me to stay there. I was with my sister. The Young Israel we were in was interesting, actually the building was just knocked down. It was called Young Israel of Astor Gardens. There were a bunch of shuls in Pelham Parkway at that time, every block had a *shtiebel*, and there was the Pelham Parkway Jewish Center. Our Young Israel was smaller, but just let me tell my daughter, [speaks off screen] I'm still on my wonderful zoom. It should be over in a little bit. Okay, great bye. That's my daughter checking up on me. Anyway, so we become part of this community. My husband takes a leadership role in the shul. But the shul is filled with Holocaust survivors. So if I didn't know what the Holocaust when I got there, my kids grew up with these people. It was a smaller shul. So my son who's 46, was like a *gabbai*, he sat with these guys and would spend his Shabbos afternoon hearing about the Holocaust. And why Mr. Koenigsberg could put his hand in the oven to pull out the food heating up because he had no feeling in his hands because he was standing outside in the cold. It was very, very concrete. And there were a bunch of characters. Some talked about the Holocaust, some didn't say a word. We used to have a code name like in Yiddish, *shushka* means like quiet. So there were the *shushkas* and the not *shushkas*. Mr. Kaufman took you to his basement showed you the striped pajamas from Auschwitz. The other ones wouldn't say a word. So we really had this piece and it was really amazing. And that was our children's house. We live there from 1980 to 1996. It got to a point where things were changing. Our kids were going to SAR and Heschel, because I got the job at Heschel in 1988, and I commuted with one of my sons went to Heschel. I was always big on teach your children — it's like a *Mishnah* — to teach your children according to their way. I thought Heschel was a better school for my middle son. So I always had kids in different schools. But then it got to the point on Pelham Parkway where I felt that the Jewish community was dwindling, and I didn't think it was strong enough for my kids. So we started looking for a house in Riverdale. Why didn't we go to the Five Towns? Why didn't we go to Forest Hills? Why didn't we go to Westchester? Or jersey, we looked for houses in Jersey. I didn't feel like a suburbanite. I don't know, it didn't strike me as me. I wanted my kids to grow up in a place where some people were paying rent, and some people had a mortgage. I wanted to kind of combine that in some way, so they weren't just with people who were on a certain socio-economic level. So I think Riverdale was really the answer to our dreams. It really really was. You're close to Manhattan, but I have a spot to park my car on the way. You could take a bus. You could take your car. And we loved Avi Weiss and what his shul stood for. So we looked for houses for a number of years. Moving from Pelham Parkway to here from an economic point of view is a little challenging, but we were blessed to find the home you see in the background here, which we moved into in 1996. You're seeing the kitchen I renovated five years ago, which I waited about 20 years to do. You know, there were a lot of yeshiva bills to pay and weddings to make and we finally got around to doing some of these things in our home. And it's been great because our kids come back, and they come for Rosh Hashanah. Because we're shomer Shabbos, people have to sleep over. So we're glad that we have our house and Sukkot the kids come, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and sometimes for Shabbat. So we're still making use of a house that some people say maybe you really don't need any more for the two of you. So the fact that we ended up staying in Riverdale is very intentional. And there were very philosophical reasons for it. Sometimes when I go shopping in Jersey, I say it's a little cleaner there, the

shopping is nicer. I go to Shoprite on Route 4 in New Jersey all the time. And you know, there are some drawbacks here. But the things that really count for me, I'm being served. Unfortunately, none of my kids are, except the kids who are living with me now. The other two went to Jersey because it's expensive. The irony is we're in the Bronx, but it's really expensive to buy a house in Riverdale. So a lot of young people who live in apartments end up moving to other communities, which is a challenge to our neighborhood. Not everybody wants to stay in an apartment, so some young people leave. When I bought this house 25 years ago, the price I paid for it is what people are buying a two bedroom apartment for in Riverdale now. So my guess I'm blessed that I was able to do what I did, and I sold that house in Pelham Parkway at that time, which I still pass and we look at it and we look at it nostalgically. It actually just turned over recently, I saw on Zillow, the people we sold it to in 1996 just sold it. And it went for almost a million dollars, so that was impressive, even in the Bronx. So here I am still in the Bronx. My mother was a proud Bronxite. My father was a proud Bronxite. My grandparents lived, I think, considering they were immigrants, and I guess you call them first generation? Or do you call my parents first generation?

SM: They're technically the first gen. The immigrant generation is the first generation, even though colloquially we don't really use it in that way.

BB: But yeah, I know with the Holocaust people have different reference levels with the first and second generation. So both my grandparents, my grandfathers had a business. They made a living here. They raised families. I really didn't get into my husband's side at all, because this interview was about me, but my grandfather had a car in the 1930s. They moved to Spring Valley in the 1930s because my grandfather had a heart attack and they thought it was like the country. And they thought it was calmer. But to show you — I really was lucky — to show you how Jewish, here's my grandmother lighting candles [shows photo book]. My grandfather, there's one of him. This is me at a Seder in my grandparents house. That little girl is me. Here's my grandfather wearing tefillin. So you see the candlesticks, this is their house in Spring Valley right off Route 59 (?). So you could see that they were traditional Jews, and I took that piece, but of course my father and my father-in-law were soldiers in World War Two. So that was a profound piece. Here’s Max the soldier. Oh, wow. Here's his discharge papers.

Just to digress for instance, I have to say this piece. My husband’s father is the only piece that gets closest to the Holocaust. My husband's father was born in Berlin, Germany. He left on the Queen Mary in 1938, two weeks before Kristallnacht. It was always a mystery how they got out. We didn't learn until my husband was sitting Shiva for his mother and his uncle said, “Well, you know how your father got out?” My husband's father's brother was married to a non-Jew whose father was a big shot in the Berlin police department and he said to them, “You guys gotta go. You guys gotta get out.” And somehow he must have gotten help to get them passage. This is my husband's grandfather, his name is David Braunstein, which is my husband’s name. This picture is 1937 in Berlin. He's walking like a dapper gentleman, like the world is fine. This my father-in-law on the Queen Mary, two weeks before

Kristallnacht. It kind of looks like Titanic with how dressed up and fancy they are. When we learned that, we realized that my husband's life here was a miracle. Of course, as I told you, my side came much, much earlier, and it was a different story. But the closest we get to the Holocaust was my husband's side, which is a whole other game. I would be remiss if I didn't show you, from this little couple, Max and Selma Anshen, my parents, this was taken at my granddaughter's bat mitzvah, prior to COVID in 2019. From that little couple comes this [shows photo of family filling two book pages].

SM: Wow.

BB: I'm crying. My sister and I, we each have three children who are married. And the grandchildren. And this is what came from those people who got on that boat from Russia, and left the Tsar and took that ship and came here. Everybody is a Sabbath observing Jew, modern and open minded as can be, but religiously connected. And there's me, and my sister's wearing red. She's wearing a red jacket. So I think we're only missing [one], one more was born since this picture. I waited till she was born to add Sophie, after my grandmother Sophie, who you saw, and her middle name is Selma, who's my mother. I waited till she was born to complete this book. And I waited till my granddaughter's bat mitzvah on Purim. We're all in costume.

SM: Oh my goodness.

BB: There I am with my daughter-in-law. I read Torah that day. My granddaughter read the megillah that day. And I think my grandparents would have been really, really proud. And they wouldn't have thought it was weird that women were doing that. I was very involved in the women's tefillah, I was very involved in the Orthodox women's movement that really wanted to take on more. That was something that Rabbi Weiss supported. So I don't really call myself Orthodox. If someone asked what you are, I would call myself a traditional Jew. I don't love the word Orthodox. I find that people feel it's restrictive. I don't say it even though I am a Sabbath observing, kosher Jew. I put myself traditional. And I think from the line of my family, that really flowed through. I don't think it's a total coincidence that my sister and I came out the way we did. And I look forward to watching the next generation grow. All the children go to Jewish day schools. And we'll see how they turn out.

SM: That's great. So my last question for you, so you can get on the wonderful family portion of your day is — I like to end with — when you think back on your time growing up in the Bronx, or for you your whole life growing up in the Bronx, what kind of memories or sentiments do you associate with it?

BB: I associate very practical parents who were extremely loving and devoted to their children and did the best they could with the money that they had. They weren't poor, they weren't rich. I think they gave me cultural exposure, I think between music and Hebrew school. I think they did the best with everything they could, and the love we felt made us feel that that two bedroom apartment with the one bathroom — I think it's the one bathroom that was tough especially when we became teenagers and had

long hair that we had to wash — I think they gave me a sense of security and self esteem which could have happened anywhere, perhaps, but it happened in the Bronx. So to me, the Bronx was a good place. It's kind of funny that I'm still here at the age of 69. My mother was born and died in the Bronx. I talked about it at her funeral. And, as an aside, of course my mother and father they were all big lovers of Roosevelt. Of course, knowing as he could have stopped the Holocaust and all, we were always anti-Roosevelt and that would become heated conversations at the table. My mother loved the Bronx, and I guess I feel a little bit of that from her. But there was the famous trip after my father died in 2001 — my daddy died shortly after 9/11, which was a very profound time. The fact that we could bury him and had a body to bury was a big deal, it was so close after that horrendous, horrendous time for us. We took my mother, my sister and I and her two daughter and my daughter, went to Paris in February of 2002. And we're standing on top of the Eiffel Tower hearing languages from all over the world, and the lights are sparkling in Paris, and my mother looks out and says, "Why aren't they talking English? Why are they talking" — my mother was 75 and totally with it, and she says, "What is this?" And I looked at her and I pointed out the window and I said, "Mama, there's Co-op City!" And what I was saying to Mama was I know that the Bronx is home for you, you could be standing on the top of the Eiffel Tower hearing beautiful languages from all over the world and all you want to do is be back in the Bronx. And I guess there's a piece of that that I carry with me. When I go over the George Washington Bridge from Jersey, I look to the right and I see Manhattan and it feels good. When I land in a plane and I sometimes, if you're in a window seat — which I'm usually not because I'm an aisle seat person — I see New York, it feels good. And by the way, my house was robbed twice in Pelham Parkway, we've had many cars stolen. We live in Fieldston here in Riverdale where there's a private school, my car was broken into here. So I have not been a victim of serious crime, not personally, but I cannot even list how many cars in our family have been stolen. And people always say it's because you live in the Bronx, because if you lived in the suburbs they'd say it doesn't happen. So it's not like I haven't been a victim of kinds of crime here, but I don't know. I guess this is home. And I'm proud to say that except for five years of my life when we lived in Queens, I'm a Bronxite. And that's why I was attracted to connect with you and share whatever I can to help in your studies to know that there was this really Jewish neighborhood, which, at this point, is basically Riverdale. Pelham Parkway is on shaky ground. Oh, here is a person you should interview. I don't know if he's gotten in touch with you. His name is Rabbi Moshe Fuchs. Have you ever heard that name?

SM: No.

BB: Rabbi Fuchs' father had a little shul on Pelham Parkway off of — under the El — off of White Plains Road and Boston Post Road. No, off of Allerton Avenue. When his dad died, he made a vow to keep the shul going. Moshe and his wife Karen live in Far Rockaway. They raised their children on Pelham Parkway, and their very religious so they moved there. But he comes here to Pelham Parkway almost every Shabbos, keeps up the shul, which is basically Russians. He does incredible things for these people. My husband davens there sometimes on a fast day, he needs a minyan sometimes he'll ask

him to come. He was just there on Tisha B'Av. We saw Moshe on Saturday evening at a wedding of mutual friends. He has a lot to tell about Bronx Jewry, so I would love to connect you to him.

SM: Yeah, I think that would be great.

BB: I could do that, because I think that would be very worthwhile for you. The fact that he's still keeping a shul going in a neighborhood where the shuls are dwindling. Young Israel of Parkchester is a mosque. We went back to visit that day we went with my sister, they weren't too friendly. Temple Emanuel is finished. So I always say to people, if you want to do a history of the shuls of the Bronx, follow my path. Dominoes fall and here we are in Riverdale. I hope this community will stand some test of time.

SM: Well that's wonderful. Do you have anything else that we haven't touched on that you want to add before I end the recording.

BB: I don't know. I think the focus on the Bronx, I think we did a pretty good job of that. If we ever want to go back to my grandfather, if someone's doing a specific study of shuls, that's a whole other thing. People do that through studying what we call yizkor books. That's a whole other issue, when the shuls get folded up, there's always an issue of Torahs and siddurim and things like that. There's been some not so pretty things that have happened with shuls in the Bronx that I'm aware of where the stuff go, and how it falls through. I mean the same thing happened with my camp. The Torahs were just laying there when the camp closed. My husband and I went up and collected certain things, and we made sure — one of the Torahs is in my shul, one of the Torahs is at Jewish Theological Seminary. It's a very difficult issue when synagogues fold, it's another whole concern. So that's just an aside piece that I wanted to mention. I hope that you have a sense of me as a Jew from the Bronx. I'm proud of my grandparents, I married a Brooklyn boy. That was sort of our version of intermarriage, Brooklyn and the Bronx. We can kid around. My daughter is a Mets fan, married a Yankees fan. That's another. We're Bronxites but we're Mets fans, what about that [laughs]. I'd be happy, if there was another way I could be helpful in the future. I don't know what you're going to do with this thing, I would like to know if it's used anywhere or if there's something in it that somebody wants clarified, we can research further. I would be happy to be involved in that way. And I would like to connect with your Hebrew school people, use my knowledge there, I would like to connect you with Rabbi Fuchs. I think that would be — he's a lot of fun, and he has a certain kind of knowledge in a fun, loving, really he's very devoted to these people, so it's amazing what he accomplished. And he could just be sitting out in Long Island if he wanted to be, but he chooses not to be. So here I am in Riverdale in the Bronx. And I do call it the Bronx, I write Bronx New York on my return address.

SM: It counts.

BB: People from Riverdale pretend they're not in the Bronx, but I am.