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Oral History Interview with Lyn Hill

Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.057

**Interview conducted by Abigail Ettelman in the narrator's office on August 22nd, 2013 in
Park Slope, Brooklyn.**

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: OK, now we're recording, and it is August 22, 2013. I am Abigail Ettelman from BHS. We are doing this interview -- I'm interviewing Lyn Hill -- Lyn Steifel Hill at her office in Park Slope. This is for Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations. Now, if you would like to introduce yourself, please?

LYN HILL: My name is Lyn Hill.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: And tell me your birthday and just a quick memory about your childhood.

LYN HILL: [date redacted for privacy] I grew up in the Inwood section of Manhattan which is the northernmost section of Manhattan. I lived there for the first 11 years of my life.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Now, why were you interested in this project if you don't mind me asking?

LYN HILL: Well, I saw that it was a project that dealt with -- to some extent with interfaith families and I've always been very proud in the way in which our interfaith family operated, and I thought it would be fun to share the story.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: When you say "our interfaith family," who's that?

LYN HILL: My husband and myself and my children.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Fantastic. Well, we will get to them and we're going to start -- when you said you were growing up in Inwood. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents?

LYN HILL: My parents were both Holocaust refugees. They came from Germany separately in the late 30s. They met here and married and moved to Inwood which at that time was kind of an enclave for German Jewish refugees. The community was an interesting one because it was almost evenly divided between the Jews, mostly recent immigrants, mostly German but also from other places in Europe and Irish Catholics. And so growing up I went to public school. The public school was largely Jewish because the Catholics all went to Good Shepherd but I certainly knew many of them because they lived in my building. We lived in an apartment building and I would meet them also in the playground of the park that was near the house.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So what school was that that you went to?

LYN HILL: I went to PS 98 and I went there from kindergarten through sixth grade.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's a long time. Can we back up a little bit and can you tell me what your parents' names were?

LYN HILL: Sure, my father was Siegfried Stiefel, always known as Fred, and my mother was Erica Steifel. She later became Erica Gorin after my father died and she remarried. And my father died quite a number of years ago. My mother is now 90 and still going strong.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's amazing. Now you mentioned a park where you were growing up.

LYN HILL: Yeah, Inwood Park which is a very beautiful park. There was a playground that was about two blocks from our house and from the age of about seven I was able to walk there by myself and even bring my two younger sisters with me and, you know, we would -- if it was -- if there was no school we would, you know, play there for the morning and then come home and have lunch and then go back in the afternoon and play

there. I would meet my friends there sometimes and we would play in the park. It was considered perfectly safe. No adult supervision. The only thing was that I had to ask a grownup to help me cross the street that I needed to cross to get into the park and it was pretty much assumed that any grownup I asked was perfectly OK.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's very interesting. Was this any grownup that you knew or literally any --

LYN HILL: No, any grownup that happened to be around I could say, "Would you please cross me," and they would tell me it's OK to cross now. And I would take my two sisters, one in each hand, and we'd cross the street.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's great. So you also mentioned that there was a [00:05:00] combination of refugees like your parents and Irish Catholics. So can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to be growing up surrounded by these very different people?

LYN HILL: Well, I don't think I was that conscious of the fact that there was this division. We didn't have a great deal to do with the Irish Catholics. Each of the two groups kind of -- they were polite and neighborly but separate. My mother was very particular that on Sundays I had to dress nicely because otherwise that might be insulting to our Irish Catholic neighbors, you know, who dressed up on Sundays. I was very conscious of the fact that the Good Shepherd kids had uniforms and I was a little jealous of that. And we did occasionally, the children did occasionally play together in the playground and we were, you know, we had nice, polite, friendly conversations if we met in the elevator -- you know, my parents would talk to the Irish neighbors in the elevator and so on but there wasn't a lot of social interaction.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So none of those friends who you were playing with in the park, none of them were Irish Catholic?

LYN HILL: No, some of the ones in the park were.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: How did you meet them?

LYN HILL: In the park.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: What kind of games did you play?

LYN HILL: I think we -- well, when I was very young we played on the playground equipment and then I think we played -- we jumped rope. We played some girls' ballgames like bouncing ball games. I don't really remember what other games but I think there were -- maybe we played tag. We played a game called books a lot. I guess we played that mostly in the school yard but I think we also played it in the park and that involved placing -- it was sort of a hopscotch game but it involved placing books and pencils and other items at certain distances from each other and then you had to jump or hop or skip or whatever over the various items.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That sounds really fun. Did you ever go see the homes of these friends?

LYN HILL: No.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So strictly park friends.

LYN HILL: It was, yeah, they were park friends.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Did you also have friends in school then?

LYN HILL: Yeah, I had lots of friends in school. My school friends were mostly other children of refugees. And some of them were friends who had been friends before we went to school too, but then we all ended up going to the same school.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So those friends who were going to the same school and they were all -- you were all sort of from refugee families, can you tell me a little bit -- well, why do you -- do you feel there was a reason that you went towards these families or these children?

LYN HILL: Well, that was who -- that was who was there. That was who I was exposed to. The Irish children were at a different school. The ones that were in my school or that were children of my parents' friends were all from that background.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So do you have any interesting stories about school or your particular school, PS 98 that you would like to share?

LYN HILL: I'm not exactly sure how to answer that. I liked PS 98 very much. I actually went back a few years ago and was principal for a day there which was a lot of fun and it's quite a different place now, but the physical building is very similar. It was not a new building when I went there in the 50s and it's a lot older now, although there have been some renovations [00:10:00]. I think that judging by today's standards it was probably very old-fashioned. It was somewhat rigid. A couple of the teachers that I had I'm thinking back, were actually Irish and then later I had some who were, I guess, were Jewish. I think I got a pretty good education there although when I was -- when I started junior high school we moved to Forest Hills and I found myself very much behind my peers. They had clearly had a much more enriched kind of elementary school experience.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That's really interesting.

LYN HILL: And there was much more than -- because I had done very well at PS 98 but I struggled in the first years of junior high school because it was clear that much more was expected of them.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That's -- we will definitely talk about that but I just wanted to before I forget, can you explain the principal for a day?

LYN HILL: Principal For a Day is a program that's run by the public schools in New York and it's a way of involving businesses and professionals in the public school system. Once a year -- well, I guess the fiction is that you go and you become principal of the school. What actually usually happens is you go and you meet the actual principal of the school and you get a little tour and sometimes it works out that you then actually develop a relationship with the school and you find ways to either provide programming or provide some kind of material assistance to the school. So in that particular case with PS 98, which is really pretty far from this hospital and when I go I go as a vice president at the hospital, that was pretty much a one -- well, it wasn't quite a one shot deal because they asked me to come back for graduation to be the graduation speaker that year which I did which was another story. After that I actually became principal for a day at one of the schools nearby and we've had an ongoing relationship that I could not have had really with PS 98.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That's really great. So that's --

LYN HILL: That picture there came from my PS 98 experience. And that particular day the other person -- they had two principals for a day. The other one was Governor Pataki happened who came -- didn't come at the same time as me but when I walked in the school there was a great big sign and it said, "Welcome Governor Pataki and Lyn Hill."

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That's very funny. Who gave that to you?

LYN HILL: The school gave it to me. I guess one of the kids painted it.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: For the record would you describe it?

LYN HILL: It's a child's watercolor painting with a rainbow and I guess there's a child in a boat underneath it, I think that's what it is.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: It looks like there's an "M" on it. And there might be a horse in the boat.

LYN HILL: That's possible, yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's very funny.

LYN HILL: It might be a dog. I think it's a dog in the boat.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That would make more sense. Anyways, moving on. So that's a great story of how -- of getting back and meeting them.

LYN HILL: That was a very nice experience. Now I went back for this graduation ceremony and that was not such a great experience. First of all, it was an incredibly hot day and they didn't have air conditioning and I had -- I think they told me to talk for about 10 minutes and I had prepared a speech that was maybe 12 minutes. It was not much longer than 10 minutes and I think it was a nicely structured speech about the differences and the similarities between when I went to PS 98 [00:15:00] and what it was like now. And it was directed both at the children and at the parents who I knew would be there. When I got there they informed me that it was going to be translated into Spanish and so what actually happened was every sentence that I said I had to then stop and wait for it to be translated into Spanish. And remember, this is really hot and now my speech is not 10 or 12 minutes anymore, it's 20 or 25 minutes by the time somebody is thinking about what I'm saying and translating it. And therefore it was much too long.

I mean I basically should have said congratulations and maybe two or three other sentences and sat down, but that was not -- that was not how I had envisioned it but by

the end of it I could see that nobody really wanted to hear this anymore. They just wanted it to be over, as did I because it was hot and it was miserable. And really, I mean the whole -- the ceremony was about the kids and the fact that they were finishing sixth grade so by the end of it I was sort of glad to finish and glad to get out and it was not the greatest experience for anybody, I think. It was just a misperception on my part of what - - I think when I realized how hot it was, I should have scrapped the whole speech and done almost nothing.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: It sounds like a really interesting speech though. You can tell me a few of the differences that you noticed.

LYN HILL: Well, I think what I -- one of the things that I talked about was how safe the neighborhood had seemed when I was a child and how that had been so different from the experience that I had as a mother raising children in the city later on. But I also talked about the fact -- and this was kind of ironic because it was the year 2000 -- no, it was the year 2001 but June of 2001 and I talked about how safe the city was now. How it had gone back to being a much safer place and then, of course, a few months later after September 11th it didn't seem safe at all anymore and looking back on that speech it seemed as though we had a whole other kind of challenge growing up in New York.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Could you talk a little bit more about that challenge?

LYN HILL: Well, I think we've all started to relax again but if -- were you in the city in 2000? After 9/11 we were all on such a heightened sense of alert that at every minute it seemed as though something horrible and dramatic and tragic could happen and all you had to do was hear a little noise and you were looking around and wondering what was going on

so, you know, it was -- it became very different for a while. We're now 12 years away from that.

I actually have a grandson who was born on 9/11/06 and has grown up in Battery Park City in an apartment that directly overlooks the World Trade Center site. So all of his life he has known about what happened and yet his, you know, his thing is, well, there were bad guys who broke buildings and now we're building a new building and I don't think -- I mean he is growing up in a city that's pretty crime free or has a very low crime rate right now. Knock on wood. And I don't think he worries much about these things, so it's kind of gone back I think to a place where there's not a great deal of worry but it could change very quickly again.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Could you tell me a little bit more about how safe you felt as a child?

LYN HILL: I felt safe walking around my neighborhood. I didn't necessarily feel safe -- I also grew up knowing that my parents had left Germany because they were threatened [00:20:00] and so I didn't necessarily feel that -- I think I always was frightened of robbers and of people who might commit crimes and at one point when I was in fifth or sixth grade there were a tremendous number of rumors going around the school about a gang called the Fordham Baldies and there were all of these stories about the Fordham Baldies would come and they would slit your throat and they would -- I mean there were terrible things that the Fordham Baldies would do. And at first everybody was laughing about it but then I remember getting very, very scared that the Fordham Baldies were coming to get us. And I guess for a little while I was scared of walking to and from school because I thought the Fordham Baldies might come and get me. And my mother actually called the police and -- not 911 but the precinct and asked them, you know, what

was the real story on the Fordham Baldies, and they told her that these were very exaggerated rumors and there was nothing to be worried about and she told me that and then I stopped worrying.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: It's amazing how little kids can get so scared, because you don't know. You mentioned walking around your neighborhood and you said which neighborhood that was but do you remember what streets you lived on?

LYN HILL: Yeah, I lived on Seaman Avenue and I think on 204th Street was the cross street, I think.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Is there anything else about your life when you were at PS 98 that you want to talk about a little bit more?

LYN HILL: Well, I had two best friends and I am still close with them. One I have consistently -- I wasn't -- I didn't have that much to do with them in junior high school and high school and college but since then one of them has been a close friend and she and her husband were good friends of my husband and myself all through our married lives. The other one it's a more intermittent friendship, but lately we have seen each other a number of times, and that's the one that I actually have known since we were literally babies in the carriages and our mothers walked around the park with us in the carriages. And, yeah, there's something very nice about having had that continuity with those two friends.

ABIGAIL ETTelton: That's true. That's a very long time. Did you continue having the same friends when you went to a different -- when you went to junior high?

LYN HILL: No, I really had to make new friends. I think I spoke to these two friends probably pretty frequently at the beginning and then less frequently on the phone afterwards but I

had to make new friends. And I never did make friends in junior high school or high school that were as close or long lasting. I'm no longer friends with anybody that I met in junior high school or high school or, for that matter, even college.

ABIGAIL ETTTELTON: Wow, so what do you think it is about those friends that you made then that has lasted?

LYN HILL: I'm not sure. I mean I think -- I guess the shared memories, the shared background. I think that in my mind even though I only lived in Inwood for 11 years that's always in my mind the place where I grew up. And Forest Hills has -- I actually lived there about the same amount of time, I think, from about 11 to 22 and then my husband and I lived there for two or three years after we got married but it never seemed like the place I was from. I never felt as comfortable there and I never felt -- I mean until we moved to Brooklyn and then I became very comfortable that this was my place again. We also lived in Long Island City for a little while and I liked that very much too and that sort of led to our moving to Brooklyn.

ABIGAIL ETTTELTON: So was it something about the places that made you feel at home?

LYN HILL: I don't know. I mean there was -- the library in Inwood was very important [00:25:00] in my life. I remember from the age of about three or four watching the library being built. I remember walking by the library with my great aunt -- I'm not quite sure why I was with her, but she pointed it out and she said to me, "Look at that big building that they're building here," and I said to her, "That's not a building, that's a library." I was very conscious of the fact that that was going to be a library. I remember going to the little storefront that was the library for the neighborhood before then that had, I think, just maybe a bookcase or a shelf of books for children that my

father took me to on Saturdays and I remember the day the big building opened and the library opened and there was a whole floor just for children. They didn't have that many books on the shelves yet and you could only take out two books at the time, but I remember the day that we went and I don't know if I got a library -- I probably didn't get a library card at that time because you had to be able to write your name to get a library card and I'm not sure whether I could do that at the age of four or not. I'm sure I got one by the time I was five but I do remember getting two books. Maybe they were taken out on my mother's card and taking them home from the new library and they were brand new books.

And after that, you know, we went to the library at least once a week and by the time I was in grade school that was another place I could walk to by myself and did and probably took out six books every week and then brought them back and knew the librarians very well. They knew me. I guess that was -- for me that was an even more important place than Inwood Park. If you ask me where I would want to go, the library or the park, it would definitely have always been the library. My friend Sylvia had the sense to say if the sun was shining it's a beautiful day we should go to the park. I had no sense of whether the day was beautiful or not, I wanted to be in the library.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That's really great.

LYN HILL: There was also a movie theater that I sometimes went to on weekends. I think my father would take me and I guess give me the money. I think it cost a quarter for the children to go in, and the children sat in the children's section. There was a matron who was there to keep things orderly, and you sat and there would be a main feature, and a second feature, and a cartoon, and a newsreel. I think -- I don't think I walked all the

way to the movie theater by myself. I think my father walked me there and also probably picked me up until maybe I was older.

And I do remember going with a friend to see the Wizard of Oz and getting separated and being scared out of my mind when that witch came and I was all alone and I was afraid to move or do anything because the matron was really mean. I was very easily intimidated as a child. That matron scared me. Very strict teachers scared me. I was pretty easy to scare.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: I'm sure your parents appreciated that.

LYN HILL: Well, they -- I mean my parents never tried to scare me. My mother was exceedingly reassuring and, you know, she had, I think, read a lot of psychology books and she didn't -- she tried to not have me be scared but there were a lot of things that scared me.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Speaking of your parents and scary things, how old were they when they came over, if you know.

LYN HILL: Yeah, my mother was I think 14 when she left Germany and went to England. She and her [00:30:00] – [I'm going to tell them to go away.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Oh, can you?

LYN HILL: Yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Would that be a problem?

LYN HILL: No.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That would be great, thank you.]¹

¹ This is referring to cleaning people working near the office and making noise

LYN HILL: So my mother was 14. She left on the Kindertransport with her brother and they went to England where they stayed first with relatives and eventually her parents made it to England as well. And while she was in England she was sent to a vocational school where she learned typing and shorthand. She got -- I think she was 16 when she came to the United States. Again, she came with her younger brother on a ship. Her parents stayed in England. Her father was very sick and she knew that he would die there and that her mother would then come and join them in America. So she -- pretty soon after she came here she got a job as a nursemaid and I think she had two separate jobs as a nursemaid until she was old enough to get a job doing typing and shorthand which she then, I guess, kept that job until she got married and I guess she left it when I was born. My father was older. My father was significantly older than my mother. He was in his late 20s when he left Germany. He left a little bit earlier than she did, I think about a year before and he came here. He had found distant relatives who were willing to sponsor him and they -- he came, they found him an apartment and they found him a job and then they pretty much left him on his own. And they met at a -- some kind of a young peoples' group that was a group for German Jewish refugees.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So since they met in this context of being German Jewish refugees, did that -- if that did, how did it influence the way they raised you?

LYN HILL: It didn't very much. I had many friends who were -- whose parents were more rigid and certainly whose grandparents were more rigid. My mother was, I think, the more influential of the two in the way I was raised. And as I said, she had read a lot of child psychology books and she -- I think also, she basically lost her childhood because from the time she was 10, Hitler was in power, and it completely changed the way her

family dynamic worked, and the way that she was educated, and she was extremely conscious from that time that she was 10 that she was in a persecuted minority.

But I think she always wanted me to feel very secure and she was not at all rigid. I was a terrible eater. That worried her tremendously but she was never -- like some of my friends, you know, the parents would insist that they had to eat everything on their plates or they had to at least try everything. Once the doctor had told her that it really didn't matter, she basically would -- did not concern herself with whether I was eating something or not eating something and she never forced me to eat anything I didn't want to eat. That's just sort of one example.

She tried to encourage me to pursue whatever I was interested in but she never forced me to take music lessons or any other -- you know, if I wanted to do it, she would advocate with my father for the money to do it because that was always the issue, but if, you know, if I wanted to stop, that was OK too. She [00:35:00] never rewarded me for doing well in school because she always said I just assumed you'd do the best you can. And I wouldn't punish you for not being able to do it and if you, you know, if you do it, that's -- I'm sure that you just do it because of the satisfaction of it. It was not at all a Germanic upbringing.

They did make sure that I got, you know, religious education and I went to a Hebrew school that was -- the congregation they belonged to was a congregation that had been founded by German Jewish refugees in the late 30s, and I would say it was probably one of the worst Hebrew schools in the city or maybe in the country. And that was partly because I think the people who ran it had no idea of what children were like or interested

in, you know, really reaching them at all. Some of the teachers were not bad but it was not a particularly good experience.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: In what way was the Hebrew school terrible?

LYN HILL: Well, for one thing it was only once a week for like an hour and a half and there's not a whole lot you can do in that amount of time. I think that was probably the worst aspect of it. The teaching itself really depended on the individual teacher and I don't know that they got the best teachers. I actually remember liking my first grade teacher very much. He was a young man and I liked him tremendously. He got drafted so that was the end of him. The second one was another young man who was kind of indifferent. Then we had a very young woman who was very pretty and very arbitrary. And that was an interesting time because I think I had her in fourth or fifth grade and I had been sick for a significant amount of time and actually missed some of the work and so when I came back the next year and I had this teacher I was really behind the rest of the class. I wasn't used to that. I was used to being one of the best students and so I was unhappy and I don't remember what it was she did that made me feel really bad but -- and, you know, as I say I was easily scared and easily intimidated and I was a little goody, goody always in public school, but I became a teacher's nightmare in that religious school, and I think I answered her back and I was disobedient and I was -- and she did not handle it well.

I forget what she did. Did she slap me? I'm not sure. At least one of the things she did was she put me on a bus -- she held me in after school and the point was that we had a guy who came and picked us up after school and he would pick up five or six of us and take us back to Inwood because the school was in a business -- they held the classes in a

business school that was in Washington Heights. So this guy was a guy who had a nursery school and he had a car that he used to transport the nursery school kids around and he would come and pick us up after public school, take us to this place and then come back and bring us back to our house. Well he came and she was holding me in. She was keeping me in and so he didn't pick me up. And so she put me on a bus by myself -- well, I think she called -- she called my mother then and said I'm holding her because I kept her in. And my mother said, well, how is she getting home. I have two children here. I can't come and get her and so then she finally put me on a bus which made my mother crazy because for some reason the idea of putting me on a bus in Washington Heights and [00:40:00] sending me back on the bus by myself at the age of about nine really -- that was scary for her.

And I don't remember what she said to me but I do remember that the bus driver said to me is that your big sister being so mean to you? Anyway, I think there was an agreement at the end of this whole thing that I would not come back to school that year and -- to Hebrew school and I think -- I assume that I was expelled but I eventually did get confirmed.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Expelled for missing the transport home?

LYN HILL: No, expelled for misbehavior in the classroom.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's a very funny story.

LYN HILL: You know, I mean, and I will say that I wasn't punished at home for this at all. I think my mother basically sided with me and thought that I -- I guess she was -- ultimately she -- at one point she got angry about the fact that I had really misbehaved but I don't think I had any really bad consequences.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So what congregation did your parents go to?

LYN HILL: Congregation Habonim.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So how -- did you go every week or...

LYN HILL: We did not go every week. We kind of went for the high holidays and for the other holidays as well, for Sukkoth and Simchat Torah and Hanukkah and then my parents very often went on Friday nights and I did go through a period when I was maybe 13, 14, 15 years where I actually went every Saturday morning by myself on the subway because it was -- by that time we lived in Queens and the synagogue is near the Lincoln Center area. And then I went less often until -- maybe mostly just for high holidays until I got married at which time nobody from Habonim would marry us because I was marrying a non-Jew and for many, many years that was the end of my relationship with Congregation Habonim. I was very angry, very angry.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Understandably so. But can -- we will get to that later --

LYN HILL: Yes, there's a coda for that. That is very ironic and very funny.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: It sounds like a really interesting story though. Just even how you met, so we will get there, but I don't want to skip over the important parts of -- so that's really interesting that when you were a teenager you went by yourself on Saturday mornings. Can you talk a little bit about the -- why you did that?

LYN HILL: I'm not quite sure why I did that but I did it for -- I think for a year or more and I really wanted to go. I'm not -- I am not sure what exactly I thought I was doing. I think at the time I had a very close friend who was Catholic and she went to church regularly. I don't know if that was part of it. I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I mean subsequently I went to -- you know, they didn't have Bat Mitzvah for girls at that time but they had a

confirmation that was only for girls so boys got Bar Mitzvahed but girls at the age of 14, which I guess was the end of -- the equivalent of eighth grade, got confirmed. The whole group of us got confirmed together and it was at Town Hall² and it was -- after Shavuot, I think, or part of the Shavuot ceremony we all -- each of us had a little part in the prayer service and we each made a short speech, as well. But I think -- I'm trying to think if the time that I went regularly was right before confirmation or right [00:45:00] after, and I really don't remember for sure. But I didn't go with a friend. As I remember it I sat by myself -- I don't know what the deal was.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: You just wanted to.

LYN HILL: Yeah, I guess I just wanted to, yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Did you -- was your family -- you went on the holidays to the synagogue but at home were you very faithful and observant or...

LYN HILL: We usually made Kiddush on Friday nights. We weren't kosher. On the other hand, we didn't eat shellfish or pork products. You know, I mean Habonim was a Reform³ congregation. It was a liberal reform congregation which is about as far toward conservatism as, at that time, you got if you were reform. But, you know, I think we were a little more observant than some of my friends but not -- we certainly weren't -- I didn't see us as being particularly observant.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Could you explain Kiddush?

LYN HILL: Kiddush is the ceremony that is done usually in the family before the Friday night meal. It involves blessings over lighting of the candles and over wine and bread. It also

² Town Hall is a large theatre/concert hall located at 123 West 43rd Street in Manhattan

³ Reform is one of the major Jewish denominations

may involve blessings over children. It's a ceremony that lasts under 10 minutes and is usually followed by the Friday night meal. It may also take place in synagogue if you have a Friday night service usually at the end of the service but it's basically a home ceremony.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: What does that -- how do you feel about that? Do you still do it? Did you stop?

LYN HILL: My husband actually learned to make Kiddush so that we could have it for our children. I wouldn't say that we did every single Friday night but he initiated it and we often did it and he certainly always did it at our Seders and many other occasions. These days I don't do it very often.

We did do it -- my son got married a few weeks ago and we had a kind of a welcome dinner on the Friday before his wedding and actually what I think he didn't want was to have a Kiddush at the wedding itself so he suggested that we do it on the Friday night, which actually when I consulted with our rabbi was a more organic thing to do because it was a Friday night. And I asked a cousin of mine to make Kiddush and he did. I actually asked him just to do the blessings over the wine and the challah because I was thinking that that might be enough for the group we were having which was a very interfaith group, but he did the whole Kiddush which was fine, except we didn't have, I think, the lighting of the candles. Well, we usually do a kind of an abbreviated Kiddush. We'll certainly light candles and do blessings over the wine and the challah on Rosh Hashanah when the family gathers for dinner and we'll do it. Passover we'll do it before Yom Kipper and so we continue to do it some of the time.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So I'm going to ask you something that I should have asked a long time ago. When you mentioned in your story about your terrible Hebrew school teacher, your mother mentioned that she had two children. Were those your siblings or were they --

LYN HILL: Yeah, my two younger sisters.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Will you sort of tell me a little bit about them?

LYN HILL: My sister Amy was three and a half years younger than me and then my sister Jane was four and a half years younger than me so they grew [00:50:00] up almost as twins. They had a very close relationship, and I was very much the big sister to both of them.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So another thing that kind of got away from us in our very wonderful conversations that I'm glad that we talked about, we started talking about your life at Forest Hills and how you made friends, but if you could just maybe talk a little bit more about what Forest Hills was like when you were there and you were settled?

LYN HILL: Well, Forest Hills was -- it was exciting for us to move there because first of all, nearly all of my friends were moving that year. The Inwood neighborhood was deteriorating a little bit and there was a general feeling that people wanted to get out. But the great thing about moving to Forest Hills was our family of five was living in a three room, one bedroom apartment, so my sisters and I shared a room and my parents actually slept in the living room and I was not really that aware that this was a very cramped situation. But I guess I was starting to become aware and the great thing about Forest Hills is we moved to a small attached house with three bedrooms, one of them very small, but that very small bedroom was my bedroom, my own bedroom. My two sisters shared the larger room -- the larger bedroom and then my parents had the other bedroom. So we

had all of this space all of a sudden. We had the three bedrooms and then downstairs there was a living room that nobody slept in and a dining room and a kitchen and below that was a finished basement that -- which was kind of a playroom, television room. So there was a whole lot more space for everybody and that was, I think, the great advantage and the great excitement about Forest Hills.

On the downside, you know, I didn't know anybody. And it was hard to make friends the first year. It was really hard. And it was especially hard because I was really behind many of the kids in terms of my academic -- I think not so much ability but my -- you know, I mean the teachers would assign a report and I would turn in something that would have been completely acceptable and maybe even considered excellent at PS 98 and it would be mediocre or less for Junior High School 157. And looking back on it I think a lot of it was the packaging. I didn't necessarily think you had to do a spiffy report cover and nobody had told me that it was important to have beautiful handwriting. Some of those things, you know, I think probably at 98 they were more -- the teachers that I had were actually more concerned with substance, but there were also a lot of things that I didn't know that these kids did know and it took a long time for me to catch up. So I think it wasn't until ninth grade that I started to really make some closer friends. I think by the end of ninth grade I did. I didn't go to eighth grade. I had that SP program where I skipped so by the time -- and I had one very good friend and some other friends in high school.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So who were these friends and how did you meet?

LYN HILL: We met at school in class. And then we would get together after school and do various -- go to each other's houses, talk on the telephone, go to the movies, whatever.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So were these friends Jewish or...

LYN HILL: Well, I think in junior high school -- I mean Forest Hills was 98% Jewish at that time. It was not easy to meet people who weren't Jewish. So most of them were Jewish but in high school I had a good friend, really close friend who had, I guess, had a Jewish father and a Catholic mother [00:55:00] and had been raised Catholic and so I did have a close Catholic friend then.

I also went to -- when I was 13 -- my parents sent me to a camp that was run by German Jewish refugees and was pretty much only German Jewish kids between the ages of 10 and 13 but when I was 13 I went to a camp that was run by the YWCA and it was multi -- it was multi-religious and multiracial. And I guess that's where I met -- that must be where I first met this Catholic friend because she also went to that camp and I guess then we, you know, we reconnected once we were both at Forest Hills High School. I don't think I was that friendly with her in camp but that's how I -- that was where the connection came from.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Would you tell me a little bit more about the camp? Both the Jewish one and the non -- or the multi-faith one?

LYN HILL: The Jewish one was really quite extraordinary because it was very different from a lot of other camps. The food was superb and I had never been much of an eater, I think I mentioned that, but I was a tremendously good (picky) eater and I realized that part of the reason I wasn't such a good eater was my mother was a terrible cook. But this camp had wonderful food and I enjoyed it tremendously. The owners of the camp did not have children themselves. They were incredibly overprotective, as were many, many German Jews at that time, very overprotective of their children. I don't think my parents really

were in spite of the -- but the -- it was Camp Stadelman named after the Stadelmans who ran it and they were very overprotective, so the joke was that nobody who went to Camp Stadelman ever learned to swim and the reason was that if the -- if Mr. or Mrs. Stadelman saw a cloud in the sky they would decide that it really wasn't a good day to send the children to the swimming pool or the lake or whatever it was because, you know, they might get rained on and they might get a cold and they might -- you know that wouldn't be good. They actually went around and kissed every child in the camp goodnight every night.

I think we had to write letters home three times a week but my mother wrote me a letter every single day. There was not a day that went by that I didn't get a letter from my mother and usually a postscript from my father. So I guess in other ways it was like other camps but it had its own special flavor and I was a little bit -- I found it a little claustrophobic by the third -- end of the third year so I actually, you know, lobbied my parents to go to a different camp and they found this YWCA camp, which was just a more -- much more typical camp.

The food was terrible, you know, there was bologna and American cheese most of the time and bug juice and -- but the range of activities was much more varied. I don't think I learned to swim there either but they at least did have swimming every day. There was hiking and there were overnights, no overnights with Camp Stadelman, you know, you wouldn't want to send the children out into the woods. And it just seemed like a very much -- I think you got to choose your activities. You didn't necessarily do everything with your bunk.

It was a much freer atmosphere and then, of course, it was a much more varied demographic. So there were black children in my bunk and there were Catholic. I got very friendly with a Catholic girl in the bunk and there were Protestants and there were Jews and we did have -- I think at Stadelman we had a Shabbat service every week. At this camp I think there was some kind of a Sunday service every week but it was pretty nonsectarian and everybody was very tolerant of everybody [01:00:00] else and in the summers I used to get really, really dark and I realized, I guess, halfway through the summer that a lot of people thought I was black and when we had the -- this camp was an all girls' camp. I guess that was also different from Stadelman, so we had a dance with the boys' camp and only the black boys asked me to dance. But then I found out that even a lot of the black kids at the camp either thought I was black or were wondering about it because finally somebody asked me.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: What did you say?

LYN HILL: I said I'm not black and she said -- she started to touch my hair. She said, Really you're not?" And I said, "No, I'm not." "Not even half?" "No, I'm not. If you would see my parents you would know."

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's very funny. So what was it like to be in such a diverse area for you since the other areas have been -- I mean Forest Hills was so...

LYN HILL: Yeah, I liked it. I enjoyed it. I was very interested in learning about other cultures and finding out about other kinds of people. I mean Forest Hills was a little more diverse in that most of those children were American Jews. The refugee thing was not a big deal in Forest Hills, so -- but there were no Irish there either. It was very Jewish, whereas Camp Quannacut was really mixed.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: You mentioned that your parents did have the traditional -- or not traditional but typical over-protectiveness or at least your mother didn't --

LYN HILL: My father didn't either.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Where there anythings about them -- about --

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ABIGAIL ETTelman: -- your upbringing, your family life, your traditions that you saw as being sort of more German?

LYN HILL: I don't think so. Somebody told me when I was about seven or eight that mother had an accent. That was the first I knew it. It never even occurred to me. You know, I think my mother was pretty determined not to -- to do everything possible to make me an American. And that was really important. And among other things, they did not speak German to us. Now some of my friends had parents or grandparents, who did speak German to them, but my parents never did and they rarely spoke it to each other. They spoke it to each other if they didn't want us to understand, and they joked that that was the fourth room of the house because they could have privacy. So in contrast to my grandchildren who at the ages of three and six are completely bilingual, English, German, I did not learn German because my mother thought, you know, that might be confusing. I might not -- and she really wanted her children to be American as did my father.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Did you ever want to know German?

LYN HILL: Well, when I was in high school I found out that I could get out of taking a third year of math -- well, maybe it was a third year of science, I forget what. It was something that I didn't want if I took a second language, and so I took German. And the

first year was really easy for me and I guess, you know, just even having been around it and having heard it and having heard it in the synagogue and so many of the older people that we knew speaking it, something had penetrated and I had a tremendously easy first year, as did a number of the other people in that class who came from similar backgrounds. The teacher then decided that the right thing to do with this group of kids who were doing so well was to let them skip second year and go right to third year German and that worked for the kids who genuinely had grown up speaking German to their parents. It didn't work for me at all because I missed the second year which is the year when you learn most of the grammar, as well as whatever vocabulary you learn. So I completely screwed up third year German. I barely passed it and I think, you know, she was generous to kind of let me barely pass it.

I didn't do anything with it again. When I went to college I continued with Spanish which had been my first language. When I was getting my graduate degree I needed a second language to complete my PhD and so then I started working at German again but then it was a matter of being able to read German not being able to speak it, and so I took a summer course in reading German and I worked with my husband a little bit who had a little bit better grasp of it than I did, and barely, barely passed the reading exam that I needed to pass in order to get credit for that.

So would I have liked -- and now when I try to speak German with my grandchildren they either laugh at me or they tell me -- the three year old tells me I'm not allowed to speak German. The older one makes fun of me and also basically they want me to speak English with them. They have other grandparents who speak German to them but they

think I should speak English, and the older one makes fun of me and, you know, takes great pride in the fact that he can speak German and I can't.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Kids are funny that way. I think that's actually a really good point to take a break just because we've been doing this for about an hour.

LYN HILL: OK, sure.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Unless you want to keep going?

LYN HILL: Well, either [00:05:00] way, I'm fine.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: We are recording again. That was a nice break. Now I would just like to ask if there's anything else about the people that you met in Forest Hills that you'd like to tell me about?

LYN HILL: No.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Did you ever, except for that one summer at the second camp -- which name?

LYN HILL: Quannacut.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Quannacut, were you ever mistaken for another race again?

LYN HILL: I had been once when I was -- actually it happened to me when I was -- I don't know if I was in first or second grade, I think first or second grade. I went to an after school program at the local YMHA in Inwood and there was a girl in my group who decided I was black and she was horrible. She actually called me a dirty nigger and told me to get out of her sight. I mean it was real horrible racist stuff and I didn't even know what the heck she was talking about at the beginning. I had no idea what was even going on and eventually I did know what she was saying and I went home and told my mother about it and then for a while I thought maybe I was adopted but she kind of pointed out to

me that I look just like my father. And I have no idea what the heck was going on with that. Even to this day but that was the other time where this happened, and it also -- I also -- somebody told me quite a number of years ago that there was at least one person who I work with at the hospital who thought I was black. And I don't -- that was not that long ago. That was maybe 15 years ago.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Very interesting. So that was in Inwood?

LYN HILL: The --

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: The horrible girl?

LYN HILL: Yeah, the horrible girl was in Inwood.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Were there many African-Americans there?

LYN HILL: No, the only African-Americans in Inwood came, I think, when I was in sixth grade and there were some efforts to integrate schools and we got -- we had two children in our class who were black. That was the first two black children that were ever in -- that I ever had in my class.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Was there any tension that --

LYN HILL: You know, I don't think there was tension. I think they were -- they were significantly behind the other children. I mean they were really behind and I think they were supposed to be among the most -- the brightest of the kids they had gotten to go to this school. And one of them had -- was peculiar and had a really peculiar mother but I don't remember any of the details about it. I don't think I've thought about her in 50 years but the girl was very odd I think. They didn't fit terribly well but not because anybody, you know, bore them any ill will or didn't want to be nice to them. I think people probably bent over -- at least at the beginning bent over backwards to be -- to

make sure that they were -- felt welcomed and that people were nice to them. It was a pretty liberal -- I mean this was this group of German Jewish and other kinds of Jewish Holocaust refugees who understood about being discriminated against and they were politically pretty liberal. Eventually I think they got annoyed because I think the boy was somewhat disruptive and the girl was just weird.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So did your parents tell you about the Holocaust when you were young?

LYN HILL: Very slowly. My mother had stories about her childhood but it was a while before I knew it was Nazis. It was, you know, did you ever -- were you ever robbed? Yes, well, people came to our house and they took all our things and [00:10:00] they took my toys too, but she didn't explain at that time exactly why. Later she did.

I mean I knew that she had gone to school during the Nazi era. That she had been the only Jewish girl in her class. Her mother had pleaded and I think her father had some kind of a medal from World War One that got her the privilege of going to -- continuing to go to school, public school there, but she was the only child in her class who didn't belong to Hitler Youth, which was kind of like, I guess, being the only child in your class who doesn't belong to the Girl Scouts. She was very alienated. She was -- my mother knew nothing about math and she attributed that to the fact that her math teacher was a drunkard but she was the only child in the class who didn't make fun of him and who acted respectful because she was scared to do anything else, and therefore he excused her from all tests and since she didn't like math that worked out OK for her at the time.

Her whole notion of history was all skewed because she got the Nazi version of history and I remember my father once saying at the dinner table -- I mean I forget what it was

she said and he said to me, "Don't listen to your mother, she learned history under the wrong administration."

She told a story about her younger brother one time. She stopped to talk to a friend from school who was behind a booth and was doing some kind of Hitler Youth activity where she was selling little paper flowers and her brother got impatient and angry and knocked the booth down. The girl told her mother and the mother reported this or said she would report -- I think she did report it to somebody at the school or the teacher found out about it, and he decided he was going to inform the authorities and my mother remembers that her mother went to the school and just pleaded with him not to report this and tried to persuade him that this was a four-year-old child who had done this without understanding anything about what he had done, and I think finally was successful in persuading him.

She told us about -- I think I was quite a bit older when she told us about her remembrances of Kristallnacht and seeing her synagogue burn, and the uncles who slept under the beds in her house that night to hide. She remembered also going -- at one point getting -- finding herself at some kind of a rally that was so somehow encompassing that she suddenly didn't understand how it had happened but she was holding a baby and raising her hands and yelling Heil Hitler. So she -- yeah, she had many, many memories and she did share them with me.

My father, on the other hand, remembered nothing or affected to remember almost nothing. He hardly talked at all about anything that had happened before he came to the United States. And I never completely understood why that was that way, but I think when I was -- maybe when I was about 11 -- my parents had always told me that my father's -- I knew that my mother's father had died in England because he was very sick.

And at one point she told me that this maybe had been aggravated and partly caused by what happened with Hitler, but it wasn't until I was 11 or 12 that my mother told me that my father's parents had died in the Holocaust. They had always told me that they died of old age and I -- and so what she said was they did die of old age but I didn't really tell you the whole truth [00:15:00]. The truth is that they were taken to an extermination camp and there was -- a selection was made and the old people were not allowed to stay alive so they -- that was how they died of old age.

Much later I actually noticed that my grandmother was 53 when she died and my grandfather in his early 60s, so I wouldn't consider that old age, but that was kind of the transition. I remember that I was not surprised when I heard that so there must have been a part of me that kind of had suspected it.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That had done the math or something?

LYN HILL: No, I don't think I had done the math because I think probably at 11 or 12. I would have thought -- that would have seemed like old age anyway, but, you know, somehow I -- it didn't surprise -- I don't think I had thought about it but it did not surprise me that much.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So we're getting a little bit of ahead of yourself because I'm going to ask you how -- obviously your mother -- your parents had to make the decision how are we going to tell them and when are we going to tell them these things. So when you had children how did you -- did you decide to tell them about these things or...

LYN HILL: I think -- I don't even remember how -- I mean I certainly talked about it with my children. I don't remember quite when. You know by that time they were also teaching it in religious school. They were even teaching it to some extent in public school. In the

50s and 60s this stuff was not in -- it was not part of history yet. It was not really discussed anyplace else but I think my daughter developed a very concentrated interest in Holocaust -- you know there were a lot of young adult books about the Holocaust that were published in the 70s and 80s, and she developed a very keen interest and read a lot of those books when she was maybe in fifth and sixth and seventh grade. And she certainly knew our family history, but I don't remember ever making any decision, you know, that I'm going to sit down and tell them about this now.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Those are amazing stories. Thank you for sharing them. I don't think I have any further questions on them, but I -- there's a lot there that I don't know about so if there's anything you want to tell me about it or the stories or the way your parents shared them with you. If there's not, that's fine.

LYN HILL: No, I mean I might think of something later but right now I can't think of anything else.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Sure, and if you think of it later, just bring it up. All right. So that was very heavy. We're going to, I think, maybe talk a little bit more about high school because I think we talked quite a bit about Forest Hills Junior High 157. So was it just Forest Hills High School that you went to?

LYN HILL: Uh-huh.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Can you tell me a little bit about maybe the end of high school when you were thinking about high school, you were thinking about what you wanted to do, what classes you liked. You said you didn't like -- you didn't do that well in German but what else were you doing?

LYN HILL: Well, I avoided math. I avoided -- I took as little math as I could and as little science as I could. I liked English. I very much liked a course called "Speech Arts" which I think -- I definitely took as a senior, maybe also as a junior, and by the end of high school I knew exactly what I wanted to do when I grew up and that was to be an actress. I didn't really share that with much of anybody in high school but I had persuaded my parents to send me to Saturday classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and I did that I think in my junior and senior year of high school. The summer after I graduated high school I think was the first summer that I spent in summer stock. I was an apprentice and, you know, that was a very exciting time for me.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: You probably met a lot of different people in doing theater than just in high school.

LYN HILL: Yes, absolutely. And it took a while, I think, before I understood all of the differences that I was encountering. But, yeah, it was -- you know I went to Queens College [00:20:00] after high school which was a commuter college and so I didn't have the out of town college experience, but instead I had every -- most of the summers of college I -- I guess one summer I stayed home and worked off Broadway but most of the summers I was doing summer stock of one kind or another and, yeah, it was very -- it was being on your own and managing by yourself and there was, you know, exposure to a lot of sex and to homosexuality and drinking and, you know, a whole bunch of different kinds of behaviors, as well as demands for a great deal of discipline and professionalism and very high expectations of relatively young people in that regard.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So now that you've moved into college, but when you were in high school -- and so you're more independent, but when you were in high school were you dating?

LYN HILL: A little bit, yeah. Yeah, I think I dated -- not a great deal and -- but I did have a boyfriend -- I had a boyfriend in my junior year who actually lived -- his backyard faced my backyard but we didn't meet that way but we -- and he was a nice boy. He went to college a year ahead of me and -- but he took me to his senior prom when I was a junior, and we dated I think the fall of my senior year and then I got asked out by a guy who I think must have graduated the year before me and I don't know whether he was -- maybe he was going to Queens College by that time, and I have no idea how I met him. And he was kind of a weird guy but I think I was somewhat taken with him because he had acted in the high school plays and been a star in the high school plays so I think that impressed me. And so I started dating him and kind of stopped dating the other guy who was a much -- really in retrospect -- a much nicer boy.

And I dated him for a while but he just got -- he got too obnoxious and too weird. I don't know what happened after that if I dated anybody else in high school or not. I mean I'm sure that I had the odd date here and there but that was -- those were the two that I remember from high school.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Were they Jewish?

LYN HILL: Yeah, I'm sure they -- yes, Ronnie was definitely Jewish and I think the other one was too. This was Forest Hills. There weren't a whole lot of others.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Then when you went to college and you were experiencing this "colorful" new world, were you still living at home?

LYN HILL: Yeah, I was still living at home in college. The summers I would go -- I did, I think, summer stock the year before I started college and then the second year. I'm trying to think whether the third -- the third year I might have been working at an opera company and maybe the fourth year I worked off Broadway or those two may have been reversed. I'm not exactly sure. But during the year I was in school and after the first year I think or maybe even by the end of the first year I found my -- I did act in one of the college productions my first year but by that time -- by the end of my first year of summer stock I had the idea that this acting thing was probably not going to work out for me but I got very interested in costume design [00:25:00] and so over the course -- by the second year of college I knew exactly what I was going to do. I was going to be a theatrical costume designer and my whole college career was kind of directed at that notion and I spent almost all of my spare time in the costume room of the theater and I majored in speech which was where the theater department was, but I think I had a minor in English and also took a lot of art history courses and art. Also there were some art course that were practical and a bunch of home ec courses that were sewing kinds of courses.

And so by the end -- by the time I was -- after the first year of summer stock most of my work was directed. I think the second year of summer stock I actually had a number of parts in plays but I was also doing costumes for everything and after that I was only doing costumes.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So what was it about costume design that grabbed you?

LYN HILL: I think I found -- it was very creative. I enjoyed interpreting character and taking that interpretation and sending that message through the design of the costume. I enjoyed

the history part of it, you know, studying costume history. It involved analysis of drama which I enjoyed. It was -- I mean it was a way of being part of theater which I had come to live and it was something I was good at. I was decent at constructing costumes and -- I don't draw particularly well but I think that I was able to draw well enough to show that I could design costumes that were good. They were good designs and appropriate for the characters.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So you said that was going into your second year?

LYN HILL: The second year that I did summer stock I did -- I both acted and -- but I did all the costumes. By the third year, I can't remember now whether it was the opera festival or I think I was off Broadway the third year and I was a dresser. And I think the -- I don't know, maybe it was the other way around. Anyway, when I worked with the opera festival it was all costumes, I certainly was not singing.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So how did that change influence the people that you were with?

LYN HILL: The big thing during college was I spent almost all of my spare time in the costume room, and while I had dated in my first year of college and to some extent my second year, I don't think I had a lot of dates after that because I was spending all my time with gay men.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Who did you date in your first year?

LYN HILL: I think I dated, you know, boys that I met both in class and I belonged to a house plan for a while and they had dances and I would meet guys that way. I'm not sure, but I -- it wasn't hard for me to date but then -- and I guess I continued dating because I do remember at least one boy that I dated for quite a while and I got annoyed at him because I would talk about what I was doing in the theater and he thought it just sounded stupid,

you know, that it sounded like a comic book. I remember dating -- for a while I dated a really nice boy who was I think a clarinetist. [00:30:00] He was a very good clarinetist. He was very big in the music department. I don't remember how I met him. I don't remember why we stopped dating but I do remember that we had a number of dates and he was very nice.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So when you were dating these different people and meeting them in different places, what were you looking for?

LYN HILL: At that time I'm not sure except that I complained to my mother, I remember, that they were -- they were too young. They were boyish. Sometimes I called them the pimply faced youths and I do remember that once I graduated and, you know, then I sort of -- for a while I didn't have anybody to date and she said to me, you know, well -- a lot of my friends were getting married at the end of college. This was still the late 60s and she said, well, you know, those pimply faced youths grew up and you didn't want to have any part of them then and now, you know, they're gone.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Typical mother advice.

LYN HILL: Right.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Suck it up. That's funny. So did they -- did your parents have any interest in your dating life or...

LYN HILL: You know, the guys would come to the house and pick me up and they would meet them. My mother had this whole thing about not giving me a curfew because she said, you know, whatever you might want to do you could do anytime so what's the point of giving you a curfew. Now what I did was I often would make up a curfew and tell the

guy because I didn't really want to send the message that this could be an open-ended all night deal but she never put a curfew on me.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: You put a curfew on yourself.

LYN HILL: I did, I did.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: The night is over. It's 11, take me home. That's very funny. So did they care at all if you were seeing Jewish boys or non-Jewish boys?

LYN HILL: I think they just assumed I would see Jewish boys. I think I might have dated a non-Jewish one once or twice. I don't think they were too happy about it but they would never tell me no. And I think we might have even discussed, you know, whether it would be OK for me to date a black boy but I don't think I ever did. I mean I don't think there were that many black boys around for me to date or who would be interested in me. It was a very theoretical question because Queens College at that time was also 95% Jewish. There were a few white Christians and they were -- you could find them if you, you know -- there was some Christian fraternities and sororities.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Something I should have asked earlier is when you were in Forest Hills were you still going to Congregation Habonim?

LYN HILL: Yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: And when you were in college did you still --

LYN HILL: Yes. Yes. Not so frequently anymore but, yes, that was the synagogue that I didn't go to on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. But I certainly did still go there for holidays and so on.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: I'm checking off all the questions that you've answered. So, that's very interesting. So we've gotten you to almost graduation. So it's graduation, what are you doing?

LYN HILL: OK, so it's graduation and it was very interesting what am I going to do because I had this professor of theater history who had the same conversation with me at least three times and it always went like this:

“When are you, you know, how about applying to graduate school.”

“No, Dr. Dierlam don't want to go to graduate school because I'm going to be a costume designer. I don't need to go to graduate school for that. I want to start working. “

“Well, how about Yale Drama School? They have a great costume design program.”

“No, I think I'd rather just go out and start getting work. I've already, you know, made contacts through the summer jobs I've had and I think I can find work. Well, how about going someplace local like NYU or, you know, one of the schools nearby [00:35:00] that have theater programs?”

“No, I don't think I want to go to graduate school.”

“Well, how about our program here at Queens? We -- no, I don't think I want to go to graduate school.”

“Well, don't you think you need some additional training?”

“Well, there's a School of Scenic and Costume Design in the Village. I was thinking I would take some evening classes there.”

“Oh, OK, well that's a plan, OK.”

We had this conversation at least three times but I was -- I knew very well what I was going to do and I was determined that that was it. And so I graduated from college and I

started making the rounds and I wanted to either get a job at one of the costume rental places where what you would do would be to pull costumes for people who are renting and then repair or change them as they needed or a costume -- one of the places where they made the costumes and that was sort of how I was going to get started in breaking into the New York business. You have to be in the union to actually design costumes and that was going to take some time.

So I think I had a job lined up for the summer that was in Ohio. It was a summer stock company and I went out there and I was there for -- I was horrified. The conditions were just awful in numerous ways, but I stuck it out for two or three weeks and then my assistant who I had brought from New York, I had known her at the college and she had worked on costumes there announced she was quitting and then I -- and I felt terrible. I really didn't feel good and I saw a doctor there and he really just kind of attributed what was going on to nerves and, you know, not being happy there. But I finally quit and went -- came home. The guy I left was just furious at me, really, really angry. It was very uncharacteristic to just walk off a job like that but I just knew I needed to leave and I came home and started looking for a job in New York, which I had planned to do in the fall anyway.

And pretty soon I got offered a job, minimum wage, 65 bucks a week at Eaves Costume Company. I was very excited that I was going to start but I really still felt lousy and finally I went to the doctor and he pretty quickly diagnosed me as having Graves disease, which is -- do you know what that is? It's a thyroid disease and it's an overactive thyroid. You develop a whole range of pretty miserable symptoms and usually it's -- or very often it's treatable with medication, which is what he started out giving me, but I

had lost a lot of weight which didn't bother me at all, but I was continuing to lose weight and I was eating like a horse but I was still losing weight. It's an endocrine disease. It's sort of like diabetes. I was tired all the time. My hands shook so I would go downstairs everyday, pour some orange juice and usually drop the glass on the floor and break it. My legs hurt. I was not in good shape and I had to quit the job. I actually was not able to start the job at Eaves, which broke my heart because that was -- that seemed like it would be a good job. But the doctor told me I had to, you know, just stay home and not do anything until I regained my health. I think I had fainted a couple of times on the street. I mean it was -- I was a mess by the time this thing was finally diagnosed. And I actually dealt with this for quite a number of years because [00:40:00] it turned out that I was not responsive to the medication. Eventually I had to have surgery. The surgery was not successful either and then they used radiation and that took a very long -- number of treatments, many more than usual and eventually I -- it resolved but -- I guess to some extent formed what happened next.

So then -- but once I was finally stabilized with the medication, I was stabilized for a while with the medication. I got a job at a local costume shop and I worked there for a while. Then they hired me back at Queens College to do a show. It was a very big show. It was "Peer Gynt" which has over 80 costumes. They let me hire an assistant to help build the costumes and that was a very successful experience. A very gratifying experience. You know I knew the college. I was very comfortable there. I knew the costume room. I had worked for the guy who had the job previously and I was -- I felt very good about being able to organize this thing so that in spite of the fact that there

were 80 costumes, everything was done on time in a way that the director was very happy with. The actors were happy with it. I had it organized so that everybody got their costumes when they needed them and the changes were made the way they needed to be, and it was just -- overall it was a really nice, successful experience. And I felt very good about the whole costume design thing because this was, I felt, the way it was supposed to work.

During the time that I was a student I worked with a designer who was very talented and in retrospect very neurotic and one of the things that he did, and this was not atypical of costume designers in general, was he always procrastinated and he was always not meeting deadlines and there were lots of all nighters. And, in fact, he took speed to keep himself up and he even -- I didn't realize it at the time but now I know, he also gave me speed so that I would stay up all night and be working on these costumes. So I felt very good about the fact that -- you know I kind of thought to myself at the time when I do this and when I'm in charge I'm not going to have to do things this way. I will organize. I will manage my time. I will not try to do things that are impossible to do in the time span. I will plan it so it can be done properly, and that's exactly what happened.

And then after that I got a job working actually with a Broadway repertory company as a shopper and as a seamstress, I guess, on costumes. And that was a great job to have for somebody my age.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: How old were you?

LYN HILL: I was still 20 at that time because I was 20 when I graduated from college.

And so I had that job, I think, from maybe January or February of the year after I graduated from college until -- well in June they had a unit of this thing that was doing a traveling show that was going to go into the parks and they gave that to me to design myself, which was terrific. And I had an epiphany at that point because I designed this show and I had every -- it was another situation where I knew what I had to do. I got it all organized. It was all done and I think on July 2nd or 3rd we had the dress rehearsal and at the dress rehearsal [00:45:00] they started asking for costumes of characters I never heard of, and I said I never heard of this. Well now you're hearing about it. We need it. Somebody hadn't communicated and suddenly I realized that I was going to be spending the whole Fourth of July weekend -- and this was a time when everybody was still closed on days like Fourth of July and the days surrounding it -- trying to scare up these costumes that nobody had every told me about, and I was angry. And I suddenly realized -- I had kind of an epiphany. Theater is synthesis -- theater is working with other people. You are always going to be dependent on other people and sometimes they're going to be reliable and sometimes they're not and you can't -- you're not in control. It's not your thing.

I don't remember now what the sequence of events was but I think just maybe a week or two before that my mother called me and told me that my father had terminal cancer. She had just found out. They weren't telling him but she knew. The doctors had kind of determined that there was nothing they could do. That it was thoroughly spread by the time they found it. So I think between those two experiences, finding out that my father was dying and this terrible experience with that little traveling show which should have been such a nice experience, I just had this thing. I said I'm not going to do this

anymore. And I guess partially because I had the very nice experience at Queens that previous fall and I had kind of reconnected with some of my professors there. I thought - - and I had reconnected with some of the people who had graduated around the same time that I did and they were there as graduate students. They had graduate assistantships and they were teaching basic courses and also taking classes and I thought I could do that. So I called the guy who had had all those conversations with me in my senior year and I said, you know, I really think I've changed my mind. I want -- and now I knew what I was going to be when I grew up, right? I'm going to be a theater historian. That's what I want to do. I want to do research in theater history because that was the thing that I really enjoyed. And that was why he had in my senior year kept saying this to me because I was in his theater history class, and he sensed that I was good at it and enjoyed it. This is what I want to do. I want to get a PhD and teach and do research and can you help me? And he did. He got me into the -- I mean it was much too late to apply. It was July by that time, you know, the semester was starting in September. He got me into the program and he got me an assistantship and so that was the whole big turning point, and I went back to school and started a teaching career. Because now I knew what I was going to do when I grew up.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's amazing. It sounds like this professor really believed in you.

LYN HILL: Yeah, I think he did, you know. And there was a professor who had been my professor when I was a junior in a course called "Persuasive Speaking" which I didn't do that well in. I thought that his grade was a little unfair but he clearly kind of liked me and later in my senior year of college I had taken a course in the "Art Song" and he was a singer and he was friends with the professor who taught the "Art Song" class and so a

number of times he came and he sang some of these art songs, and at one point when we had to write a paper [00:50:00] he said to me, you know, if -- I know you're not a music student. If you would like some help with writing the paper, I'll be glad to help you.

And so he met with me at one point and we -- he gave me some hints and, you know, I went on to write the paper.

And so when I -- one of the things that I needed was -- I needed three recommendations to get into this program and he was around that summer and he wrote one of my recommendations. And he was also the -- kind of the mentor for all the students -- graduate students who were teaching the basic course, so he was the person that then became my supervisor.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So when you were in this period of real transition, how did you feel?

LYN HILL: Well, I had tremendous grief because my father actually died at the beginning of August of that year and it was very, very quick. You know, we had thought he had maybe six months and then it was shortened to maybe six weeks and then it was not even six days, so it was -- I think -- it was a very short period of time between the time that we found out that he was sick and the time he actually died. So that was -- it was a hard year -- that first year of graduate school was a year of dealing with tremendous grief because he was a young man. He was in his early 50s when he died, but it was also certainly very diverting to have a whole new experience of teaching and trying to master the subject that I was teaching ahead of the students because I was teaching "Argumentation and Debate" and I had never taken "Argumentation and Debate." And then also to take the graduate courses.

I was also experiencing a great deal of difficulty because of my health at that time. It was becoming clear that the medication wasn't working. I think, actually, now that I'm thinking about it, one of the things the professor said to me, the one who got me in, was the one thing you must do before I will accept you is you need to have the surgery before you come -- before you begin the semester. So it actually worked out that my father died I think August 5th and I think the surgery was scheduled for maybe August 13th or 14th. It was really -- I remember my mother saying daddy was so considerate he even died in such a way that Shiva will be over by the time you have the surgery.

So I had the surgery but during -- it became clear as the semester wore on that the surgery had been unsuccessful and in the meantime one of the effects that can happen with Graves disease is your eyes become very bulgy and my eyes became extremely bulgy plus one of the nerves of one of them completely failed. So I kind of looked like Cookie Monster and that wasn't fun, you know, with the eyeballs that didn't match and it made it -- my vision was very bad because my eyes didn't coordinate anymore. I had double vision and I had photophobia so I wore dark glasses all the time. I think it was kind of a rough year from that standpoint.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: It sounds extremely rough. I'm sorry about your father, that's terrible. Especially grad school is like a trial in its own. So how would the stress of grad school and the stress of your condition and the stress of mourning your father, how did you continue on? Did it start getting better, did it get worse?

LYN HILL: Well, I was -- I think I was very upset about my health. I was very upset when I found out that the surgery had been unsuccessful. You know I guess then [00:55:00] I started the radiation treatments. I had one -- I made one very good friend in graduate

school. We were close for many years after that and I got through it. And at the end of the second semester our supervisor, the one who I had known also as an undergraduate, announced that he and his wife were separating and then he started dating my best friend. And that summer she started to become involved with -- she kind of dropped him because she became involved with another student and so sometime in July he asked me if I'd like to go out and that was Forbes, that was my husband.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: That was a trick, I didn't expect that ending coming. That's so cute.

All right, so, I was just about to ask like with all these physical ailments and emotional ailments I can't imagine that you would have wanted to date so --

LYN HILL: I didn't -- and there was nobody to date. I mean what we actually did that summer, my friend Kathy and I decided that we had really -- there was nobody in the program for us, absolutely nobody, and so there was really no way of meeting anybody. And so we decided that summer that we were going to meet men and get married because I was 22 by that time -- 22 or 21, maybe -- I think I might have been 22 by then, and she was 24 and, you know, we were getting old. So we got the -- there was a summer issue of *New York Magazine* that had a whole list of things to do in New York in the summer. There was at least 100 of them and we went through the magazine and figured out which ones were events or activities where you could meet men and we made a list for every single day of the summer. So one day we were going to the Academy of Medicine and going to sit in the library. And one day we were going to the boat show, and, I mean we had it all mapped out. Every single day we were going to go -- some days it was just maybe a book store, but we were going to go someplace every single day until we met the right man.

And then she got asked out by Dr. Hill. So she was kind of off -- for a while she was off this grid, and I don't know if I did a couple of these things by myself or not but nothing was panning out. And then she kind of moved on and started to date Arthur who she also later married, and I guess he was kind of left in the lurch, and I had been around that summer too, and he had seen me a couple of times because I would be, you know, with her before or after a date or something like that and he asked me out. And I started to date him and I remember like after I'd had maybe one or two dates with him she said to me, I hope you marry him. It was the most outrageous thing. I mean first of all he was not that -- I don't even know if he was actually legally divorced yet. He was separated and living apart but it was relatively recent that he had separated from his wife and I had like two dates with the guy.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So your reaction was?

LYN HILL: Well, I mean, after we started to date within a couple of weeks, I think -- well what he had done I guess initially when he first separated from his wife -- they planned it, I think, very carefully so that it would be after his son's birthday and so he had time to sort of think this through and he decided -- he had arranged with another professor who also was recently divorced [1:00:00] that in the fall they would room together in an apartment and the other guy had already, I think, found the apartment but it wasn't available yet. So what he did he was had this big tent and he went and pitched it in one of the nearby state parks and that was where he was living.

And so after a couple of weeks he invited me to -- I don't know, I think he moved the tent -- yeah, he took the tent down and he invited me to Saratoga because he wanted to go to the concerts there and the race track. And so off we went to Saratoga and we pitched the

tent. He had very -- he did very luxurious camping. It was a very large tent. He had padded cots with sheets and pillows, and a table, and a typewriter with a typewriter table, and an ice chest, and a stove -- I mean he had all the camping paraphernalia you could imagine. And we -- I think we spent several days at Saratoga. And then I think later in the summer we camped someplace else.

Eventually he ended up in this apartment with a friend and I started spending time with him at the apartment and I think -- I guess halfway through the next year my mother said that she had realized that I wasn't living at home anymore. And I guess at the end -- and so that second year of graduate school basically we were together almost all the time, and at the end of that year -- *⁴

END OF AUDIO FILE B

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Starting again. There we go. And you were just saying that you had just gotten to the point where you and your husband had just gotten married in December for the tax return.

LYN HILL: Uh-huh.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So that's a very, very funny story. But what I'm interested to hear about is how did your mother react to -- or your mother at this point and your sisters -- react to your moving in with this older gentleman and then marrying him shortly?

LYN HILL: You know my mother was pretty much fine with it. I think my mother was very relieved because by that time, you know, I was -- I think I was 23 and still not married, and I

⁴ There is some material missing here. I think I said we decided at the end of the year that we would get married and we chose to get married in December so we could file a joint return in 1970.

think she was relieved that I had somebody that I was clearly in love with. She liked him. She had met him earlier because at one point I had a party for the graduate students and professors in my program. That was before, you know, his separation from his wife, but all of the professors were there and my mother had come down into the basement where I was having this party and had joined the group because she was, you know, she was pretty young. She was about the same age or younger than the professors and even not that much older than some of the people in the graduate program. And she had had a brief conversation with him and so, you know, she had known -- she knew what kind of a person he was. So I don't think she -- you know it didn't come to her as, you know, this is an older man who's not Jewish and is divorced.

It was like here's somebody that Lyn is finally going out with. And then she got to know him while I was dating with him -- dating him. And then we actually -- he actually kind of committed to marrying me because -- he used to tell this -- we skied together a few times. He taught me to ski and he actually used to joke about, you know, if we get married, let's get married skiing down a ski slope. Well, he made the mistake of making this joke in front of my mother. He said something to her like I keep telling Lyn that, you know, that we should get married skiing down a ski slope. My mother heard that and she said when were you planning to get married? And she got her date book out and so she actually forced the issue.

She was fine with it. My father's brother and his wife in Seattle also were much less critical than I think she had expected. I remember she called them and told them and then she told them that he wasn't Jewish, and I think my uncle said something like, well, you know, it's a new time. We have to be -- now her brother and his wife, particularly his wife, were very -- were rather critical at first. I mean what they heard was he's much

older, he's not Jewish, he's divorced and it didn't sound good to them at all. And what happened was their daughter, their oldest daughter, my cousin, was having a Bat Mitzvah and I was invited and I asked if I could bring him and I brought him to the Bat Mitzvah. And his first wife had been Jewish so he was very familiar with Jewish ritual.

And he was a singer so during the service he sang and when he sang, you know, he sang beautifully and loudly and so here we are sitting in the service and he's right behind the Bat Mitzvah girl's grandparents, my aunt's parents, singing. Everybody was so impressed. And then, you know, he had a wonderful way of talking to people. He would make you feel as though you were the most important person in the world [00:05:00] and the most interesting person in the world when he talked to you. So as soon as -- I mean that event turned them completely around. You know, they started to see him as a person and so by the time we got married nobody had any objection.

It was partly informed by the fact that I was 23 years old. My eyes were bulging out of my head, and, you know, I wasn't particularly healthy and they didn't know, you know -- I don't think they thought I had a whole lot of other prospects.

ABIGAIL ETELMAN: They're like, well, at least he's really nice.

LYN HILL: Exactly.

ABIGAIL ETELMAN: That's funny. So what was the wedding like?

LYN HILL: The wedding was small. I was deeply disappointed that neither the rabbi nor the cantor of the Congregation Habonim would marry us. The cantor said he would recommend a friend of his who was a cantor at Central Synagogue who did in fact marry interfaith couples. It was kind of like getting an abortionist recommendation. But they --

when I asked if we could have the wedding in the synagogue which, you know, had been so important to my family, the rabbi said absolutely not. The synagogue represents the rabbi. I'm opposed to this type of marriage. Statistics show that your children will not be raised Jewish and therefore I would not be willing to, you know, to appear to countenance such a marriage by allowing it to take place in the synagogue. And I was furious. I was really angry.

So the wedding was in the library of Central Synagogue. It was pretty small. I think we had maybe 60 people after which we went to a restaurant. Everybody went to the restaurant and there was a nice meal and then we went home to our apartment in Forest Hills that we'd had since September.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So you mentioned earlier that there was a coda to that story?

LYN HILL: Yes, here's the coda. So you have to fast forward about 25 years. I mean I guess we'll get to this but we had joined and been very active in Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn and my daughter and son grew up in that synagogue. My daughter had graduated from college. She was -- I guess it wasn't her first job, it was probably maybe her third job. She was I think director of development for Channel 13 for a number of years. And in the course of that one of her major donors was a woman who was something of a videographer and this woman mentioned to her that she belonged to a synagogue that had been formed by German Jewish Holocaust refugees. And so Effie said to her "Oh, it sounds like Congregation Habonim". And the woman was amazed because first of all I don't think she thought Stephanie Hill was Jewish and, secondly, who knows that about Congregation Habonim, and who has ever heard of it?

So she asked her how she knew this and my daughter said, well that was the synagogue that my mother grew up in.

Then she got very excited and she said, you know, you really need to come to a service with me. I would really like you to see the synagogue and she pushed this a number of times and finally Effie said, OK. So they had dinner and they went to a service. And so the next day, I mean, I said to her so what was it like? And she said, well, almost all the people were pretty old. She said some of them thought I was you because, you know, I guess I was about that age the last time they had seen me and my daughter does resemble me. And the other thing that was going on that night was there was this man there who is making a [00:10:00] a film about the German Jewish refugees who came to New York and what happened to them. And he wanted to arrange to interview a lot of them and they were all very excited about it because they think they're going to be film stars now.

And she said he -- you know they introduced me to him and he said he wants to interview me. And she said -- you know and I don't think the guy knows what he's doing. I really feel bad for these people because I don't think this guy knows anything. And I said why do you think that? And she said, "well, why the heck would he want to interview me? He should be asking if he could interview you or if he could interview grandma. I don't -- I'm not the right person to be interviewed." So in my mind I'm thinking, well, I know a reason why maybe he might want to interview you. She married him. So Congregation Habonim gave back.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Back to help. You helped that marriage.

LYN HILL: That was the child who statistics have proven would not be Jewish.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: And they were wrong.

LYN HILL: They were wrong. And they had a -- they actually ended up having a Jewish wedding that was a tribute to German Jewish liturgical music and they found the cantor who I had grown up with had died, but his wife who was always the organist was still alive and she was -- she actually had been a family friend of my father and his brother in Frankfurt. And they found her and she played the organ at their wedding and they hired a choir and all of the music that they used in the ceremony and they used a lot of it to the slight distress of some people who sat through this wedding was all music from the service at Congregation Habonim.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's amazing. That is a good coda to that story. The wedding that you couldn't have, I guess they had it.

LYN HILL: Yeah, although -- almost on steroids. But they didn't have it at Congregation Habonim.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Did you forgive that guy ever?

LYN HILL: You mean the one who didn't marry us?

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Uh-huh.

LYN HILL: I think I stopped caring about it. It became relatively unimportant as time went by.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's true. Well, we jumped 25 years in the future, so let's go a little bit further back. Clearly there's a happy ending of the children and the happy marriage and everything like that, but how did you guys get from your wedding -- your happy wedding where you've been living together and you're doing well to deciding to have children. You said he was older, he already had a kid.

LYN HILL: He actually had had two children in his first marriage. The younger one had always been -- had always had a serious medical condition. She lived with a tracheostomy her whole life. She was the one that I became very close with but right before she would have started kindergarten they became concerned about the fact that she really couldn't go to school without -- with this tracheostomy and so they decided to do a tracheal resection which would have taken -- lifted the trach and made her normal essentially. And something happened with the operation. They really never found out what but she died a few days later. Very suddenly, very unexpectedly. She had been, you know, really a very vibrant, brilliant, adorable little girl. And it was a tragedy that was just unimaginable.

This was still before we were married. I had -- by that time I had developed a relationship with his ex-wife because she -- they had a pretty amicable divorce and she had a very strong feeling that she didn't want her children to be uncomfortable about spending time with me. When she realized that I was going to be on the scene for a while at least [00:15:00]. I think she came to the realization that it was healthier for them to not feel like if they spent time with me and were happy with me that was being disloyal to her. So she made a show at the beginning of being my friend whether we had a relationship or not, but eventually we kind of realized that we had a lot in common. She had been the one who didn't want to be married to him anymore. And then after this death, we actually became pretty close.

But anyway, that -- by the time we got married it was only Harry who was left. He was seven. And it was a little rough for me to have this seven year old who had had -- I mean he'd had a lot in his life by that time. He had gone through his parents' divorce, the loss

of his little sister and then the remarriage of his father which we included him in. And, you know, Forbes was quite insistent that he was going to see him a couple of times a week. We had him for weekends but Forbes also usually went at least once during the week and spent time with him.

I had a little bit of a rough time because Harry was demanding and he would do challenging things and I sometimes was very resentful of the amount of time and the amount of manipulation that went on because he was kind of manipulative some of the time.

And we had -- I think before marriage we had talked about children in a very theoretical way but I wasn't really interested in having children at the beginning. I was still getting my degree. I was working on -- I was busy with course work and with teaching and eventually I developed a full-time teaching job, but then I think -- I guess some of my friends started having children and all of a sudden I realized I really did want children and I was getting into my late 20s and if I was going to have children, I thought that was already very late. And so we started talking about it and at the beginning he was -- he really didn't think he wanted any more children. He had them and he didn't feel the need for it, but I was pretty adamant and I, you know -- I said, look, this is not fair. You have your son but that's not the -- for me it's not the same as having my own child.

I think, quite honestly if Morrissa had lived, I might have been OK with it because I had a very special and close relationship with her. And it might have been all I would have needed, but I definitely knew I wanted a child. And finally he said OK. I can't deprive you of this if it's something you really want. So we had Effie and it was after five years of marriage.

I remember when I told my mother about it she started to cry because she said, you know, I never wanted to ask you and I just assumed you had decided not to have children. But she was so happy that we had. When Effie was -- I don't know, a year and a half -- I mean he just -- he was crazy about her. We both were crazy about her but he was just nuts about this baby and when I suggested that we think -- I would have -- if he had said that's it, I would have gone along with that but when I suggested that maybe it was time to think about a second one, he was fine with it. It was kind of, well, we've had so much fun with the first one, let's try again. So that was how we decided to have children. The second time was no argument.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So you have two?

LYN HILL: We have two and then I have the third one who's Harry who's I think very much my son now. He's 50.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Wow.

LYN HILL: He turned 50 a few weeks ago.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So the picture that I saw, that's a grandchild, right?

LYN HILL: Yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: OK. So your two children, [00:20:00] there's Harry and then --

LYN HILL: No, my children are Stephanie and Tim. And when you hear me call her Effie, that's her nickname. And then Harry is the older child. He's 12 years older than Effie and he's 14 years older than Tim.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: So that must be interesting.

LYN HILL: They have a very close relationship. So this picture was --

ABIGAIL ETTelman: I can hold them, thanks. Actually, would you mind if we didn't talk about the pictures until after we are done recording?

LYN HILL: Sure.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: I'm just thinking of the poor transcribers.

LYN HILL: Yeah, that doesn't make a lot of sense, you're right.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: They're like I wonder what these look like? Thank you for bringing them. I'm definitely very excited to see them. All right. So you've gotten to how you chose to have all of your children. How did you decide -- how did the conversation go when you were trying to decide how you'd bring them up?

LYN HILL: I think before we were married, when the whole idea of children was still theoretical, before we had the whole discussion about whether we were actually going to do it five years later, I had said I want them to be Jewish and he had no objection because at that time he was not -- although he had a lot of church experience because we had been a choirboy in several churches as a child and had also sung in churches, I think, also as an adult to some extent, he hadn't really been raised in any strong church. And he knew that my religion was important to me and so -- and he had -- earlier he had actually promised Ellie's father that their children would be Jewish which really didn't pan out very well. He was used to making that promise so it was kind of an understanding right from the get-go that that would be the case. That they would be raised Jewish. At the beginning we even -- we found a fledgling congregation that was formed by a rabbi for the purpose of having interfaith couples have a place where they would be comfortable, and he did kind of a Jewish service but he incorporated a few Christian

prayers and I think even some Muslim things into the service so that non-Jewish partners would be a little more comfortable with it. And we did that for a few years.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Where was that?

LYN HILL: That met in -- it met at the Quaker Meeting House in Manhattan. It was called The Temple of Universal Judaism. And I think what happened probably is eventually -- I think it was probably financially unsustainable but -- because there weren't that many people who were part of it. I mean especially at that time many interfaith couples were -- it wasn't so much that the Jewish person gave up the religion because of the interfaith marriage, it was that the whole Jewish tradition didn't mean much to the Jewish partner to begin with. So they kind of did nothing and there was no particular interest or background of having a religious affiliation even though the person might nominally be Jewish.

But then what happened was [00:25:00] some of the Reform Jewish synagogues started welcoming and including non-Jewish partners so there wasn't -- there was really no need for it. And when we came to Brooklyn, I went to a number of the local synagogues and I found that Beth Elohim was very welcoming to interfaith couples. There were already interfaith couples there. The rabbi seemed to have absolutely no problem with it. And so we became affiliated there and eventually quite active in that congregation.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So when you say "came to Brooklyn," you mean?

LYN HILL: Well, we -- the first few years of our marriage we were in Forest Hills. And then our dream had always been really to move to an apartment in Manhattan and in the *Village Voice* we found an ad for an apartment that was in Long Island City and it sounded so good that we went to see it. Long Island City at that time -- this is way before

any of the development that's gone on. It was just kind of an industrial neighborhood with a few kind of small residential properties sprinkled around. But there was one block in Long Island City. There was a block of townhouses like you see in Brooklyn all over the place. Just one little block and there was a guy on that block who had bought up four or five of those houses and then he had managed somehow to get that block declared a landmark block. It was -- at that time it was the only landmark block in Queens. And we rented a lower duplex in Long Island City on that block and just really, really loved the house and having a backyard and the neighborliness of the block.

It also -- it was right next to the Ely Avenue Station on the E and F trains, which was the station that I had gone back and forth numerous times from Queens and passed and noted that nobody ever got off there or on there but that was our station and it meant that it was one stop to Lexington Avenue and 53rd Street, five minutes. But still easy enough to get to Queens College where we were both still working. We could even -- we had a tandem bicycle by that time and we could ride to the college. It was close enough that we could still ride there. It was -- we were there for four years. We were very, very happy there. But what happened was during that time we had the baby. We had four rooms so we had a living room, dining room -- and there was a living room, a dining room kitchen, a bedroom and study. And when we knew we were going to have the baby, we wanted to turn the study into a nursery and there was an unfinished cellar that was only five feet deep and we thought maybe the landlord would think we were such great tenants that he would turn it into another room for us and we could make that the study. And he agreed to do it. We signed a very long-term lease which would make it worth his while and he got a group -- a crew to come in and the first thing they had to do was dig out the cellar.

They dug and they dug and they dug and eventually they noticed that water was coming up. And when they noticed that water was coming up they went to the landlord and they said there's water coming up. Our feet are getting wet. You need to get us boots so our feet will stay dry. And he went out to the sporting good store and got them these like fishing gaiters and when he came back the side of the house had fallen six inches.

So all our plans were kind of shattered. Yeah, I mean -- of course the poor woman on the other side had the same experience. And the only reason it only fell six inches was that [00:30:00] on the other side they had a bookcase that went up to within six inches of the ceiling, so essentially the two houses were resting on that bookcase. So it took them -- it took them months to shore up the house and save it. We actually had to move out finally. We tried to stay in the house while this was going on but in the meantime I was still pregnant and we moved out. We stayed in temporary housing for three months. We moved back in. The house was never the same. Our relationship with the landlord was never the same. I think we knew after a while that we didn't really want to stay there anymore.

Somebody told us if you like -- we looked around the neighborhood -- the block -- by that time we had told all our friends what a great block this was. Everybody had moved in. It had gentrified and we couldn't afford it. So somebody said, you know, if you like houses like this, there's a lot of them in Brooklyn. And we basically tried to follow the G train because that was what went out to the college.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: You can just put it on a soft surface.

LYN HILL: And so a long story short, we ended up in our house in the northwest corner of Park Slope which was at that time truly an abject slum. But it was a beautiful house and

somebody else had lived in it for seven years and they had done all the renovation. And we pretty much knew after the experience of trying to live in the Long Island City wreck and coming back to it and it still needing work, that our marriage probably would not survive a big renovation. So the idea that this house was done was very attractive and we could afford it. And so that was when we moved to Brooklyn. That was 1977.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: And your daughter was born --

LYN HILL: Our daughter was -- yeah, she was not quite two when we moved there. My son was born the following year at this hospital.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That must be nice to be here then. So then you moved here. Is that when you started looking for a Brooklyn specific Reform --

LYN HILL: Uh-huh, yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: -- interfaith family?

LYN HILL: Yeah, we started looking for a Brooklyn congregation. And we -- I think we pretty much determined by early 1979 that we would probably join Congregation Beth Elohim but then we spent a year in California. We had -- he had a sabbatical and so we didn't actually join it until 1980 when we came back.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So what was specific to Beth Elohim other than the sort of interfaith friendliness that made you want to join?

LYN HILL: The service looked to me enough like what I was used to that I was very comfortable with it. The rabbi was friendly. I think the fact that not long after we had attended one or two services he met Forbes on the street and greeted him by name and that pleased us. And we had started to meet a few people who seemed very nice. And we knew that we needed to have the children start religious school. So all of that.

And at the same time, Forbes had started looking for churches. I guess even earlier in our marriage from time to time he wanted to go to church and we had gone together to various churches mostly in Manhattan that he was interested in. But then when we came to Brooklyn he started -- we started looking for Brooklyn churches and I think by the time we went to California he also knew that he particularly liked Plymouth Church [00:35:00] largely for the music and also for the preaching. So actually when we came back we joined both.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So how did that work with the kids?

LYN HLL: You know, Effie started kindergarten at Beth Elohim and that's where I would take her on Sundays. Forbes would go to choir practice early Sunday mornings and he would take Tim because the church had a nursery and he could leave Tim at the nursery during choir practice and during the church service and pick him up at the end of it. And so that was the first year. I think first he joined the choir and then he joined the church. And, you know, joining the church is very different from joining a synagogue. When you join the synagogue you send them a check and you fill out a form and you're a member. With the church, there's no money involved. It involved, you know, making kind of an affirmation, taking some classes to learn about the history of the church and there was actually a home visit by the minister who came and paid a call. And in the course of that, Forbes said to him, you know that my wife is Jewish. I just want you to know that the children are being raised Jewish so don't -- I don't want you to be surprised that you're not going to see them much in Sunday school. And the minister said you don't have to be concerned about that and, by the way, if you ever should want to send them to the Sunday school at some point, they're certainly welcome, and he

looked at me and he said and you don't have to be concerned at all because I can assure you that whatever they're doing in your Hebrew religious school, is so much more intense than anything we do in our Sunday school that the Sunday school will not have any impact on them at all. And that actually turned out to be the truth.

And so the first -- I guess it was that following year, Tim was three -- no, it must have been the year after. Tim was three and Effie must have been maybe just six. Forbes came home one day and he said -- from church -- and he said I need a white sheet for the next Sunday. And I said what do you need a white sheet for? And he said, well, they're having a Christmas pageant and Tim is going to be an angel and they need the white sheet for his costume. And I said, oh, hmm. I said what does he have to do? Well he's got this line he has to learn, peace on earth, goodwill to all people. So I said, well, I guess this is pretty harmless.

Well Effie found out Tim was going to be an angel in a Christmas pageant and she went ballistic. How can this be? It's not fair. I have to go to Hebrew school and he gets to be an angel in a Christmas pageant and I said but, Effie, that's the Christmas pageant is the day that your class is having the Hanukkah party. I don't want to go to any stupid old Hanukkah party. I would rather be an angel in a Christmas pageant. So the following week, it was a Saturday and there was a rehearsal and I guess I was going to learn how to drape this sheet to make it into an angel costume and Effie came along and so Tim got his angel costume draped and there was a little garland of tinsel that went on his head and she's looking at this since she's very unhappy and the minister comes over to say hello to me and to say hello to Effie -- because he knew Effie. We occasionally brought both children to church if there was nothing going on at Beth Elohim and Forbes was singing I

would [00:40:00] bring them to church and they had become somewhat familiar with it. And she also occasionally would go to that Sunday school and as he had promised, there was absolutely nothing that they did that made any impression at all. It was all about being nice and sharing and helping to clean and being nice to your parents. It was harmless

So he says, hello, Effie, and she glowered at him and he said what's the matter? And I said well she's feeling unhappy because Tim is in the Christmas pageant and she's not. And he said to her, Effie, if you want to be in the Christmas pageant, you can be in the Christmas pageant. That's not a problem. She smiled and she was so excited and he said, now, the five year olds are the shepherds and he points at the five year olds who are the shepherds who were wearing bathrobes and fur things on their heads and she takes one look at it and she says, you know what, I can't do it because I have a Hanukkah party that day that I have to be at. So that was that piece of the Christmas pageant story.

The second part was telling my mother. So I said to my mother, Tim is going to be in the Plymouth Church Christmas pageant. And my mother said nothing. She was just quiet. She said oh. And I said, look, it doesn't mean anything. It's just a Christmas pageant and all he's saying is peace on earth, goodwill to all the people. I said why don't you come and watch this thing with me? No answer. I said, look, have a sense of humor about the whole business. How often do you think you will have the opportunity to see your grandson be in a Christmas pageant. It doesn't mean he's not Jewish and being raised Jewish, it just means he's in the Christmas pageant. She said, well, all right, I'll come.

So we go to the Christmas pageant and the angels were almost the first people who came on and they said peace on earth, goodwill to all the people and then the choir sang “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” and then angels were sort of pushed over to a side of the stage, the platform where they were supposed to stand for the rest of the pageant while the rest of the action played out, and I think occasionally to join in the music in the songs. So I mean this is a bunch of three year olds and they’re just standing there and not supposed to do anything. And there were two other angels that I guess he knew a little bit. They were the same age as him and they were twins. And I can’t remember now whether -- I think -- I don’t know if they were together and he was the next one or they were on either side of him -- but one of them had a halo that went askew and Tim decided to help him by straightening it. Well he didn’t realize that that was what Tim was doing. What he thought Tim was doing was pulling on his halo. So he pulled on Tim’s halo at which point Tim punched him. At which point he punched Tim back and his brother, the other twin, also got into the fray and all of a sudden you had three angels up there having this huge fight while the rest of the -- while Mary is there and Jesus and nobody is watching that. Everybody’s watching the angels fight with each other. And the whole church is in hysterics.

And my mother is thoroughly enjoying this thing because here’s her little Jewish grandson screwing up the Christmas pageant. Until finally the woman who was running the pageant just got these angels off the stage but I heard afterwards that she was heard to say all our hard work ruined by a group of unruly angels. And so that was how we learned that Tim wasn’t an angel.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: He was like, well you shouldn’t have put me up there.

LYN HILL: It made a great story for him to tell during his confirmation that he had as a Jew when he was 14 or 15. Yeah, so -- I mean but they both -- we regularly went to the Christmas carol service and a number of other [00:45:00] services where Forbes sang. I think Effie genuinely enjoyed them. I think Tim genuinely hated them but -- and I went some of the time.

The minister changed after a few years and they had had -- when he joined the minister had been very liberal. Almost Unitarian in his outlook and it was very comfortable for me to hear his sermons and I enjoyed them a lot. Later the theology became much more conservative and much more Christian and it wasn't -- I didn't really like hearing it that much so I went less often. And I always felt a little uncomfortable. The church people were extremely friendly and polite, but I always felt like -- I always felt a little uncomfortable about the fact that they knew I wasn't -- I was not only not Christian but that I was Jewish and I was doing something completely different. I never felt totally comfortable.

I think Forbes, on the other hand, for many, many years we went every single Friday night and he was thoroughly integrated into the Beth Elohim congregation to the point where when they hired the first cantor they asked him to be on the committee to help choose the cantor. And, you know, he was certainly not the -- most of the non-Jewish partners at Beth Elohim converted. He did not. Nobody ever asked him to. I think if somebody had asked him to really early on in our marriage, he might have actually considered it. He certainly wasn't going to do it once he had gotten involved with the church but, you know, nobody cared. He was very much part of the whole fabric of the

congregation and I served as president for a couple of years and he was very much around and there during that whole period, as well.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: It sounds actually like a very peaceful and lovely --

LYN HILL: That was one of the -- we had plenty of differences and disagreements. I think it was -- in some ways it was a very tumultuous marriage. There was lots of shouting, screaming and disagreement about various things, but that was not one of them. Neither of us had any problem with the other's religion or anything like that. And we didn't even argue too much about the fact that we were supporting two religious institutions. He used to joke that the only problem about this arrangement was when the bills came due for both at the same time, but, in fact, that was not really a problem. Occasionally we would have a problem if Maundy Thursday came on the same night as a Seder. That posed some issues. I mean there were certain -- you know, or if Hanukkah and Christmas came together, although that was not as big an issue. I always felt Christmas could trump Hanukkah. That was OK. I felt that Seders should trump Maundy Thursday and I forget how we -- there were only a few where we had that problem. You know there were a few logistical issues like that but other than that there wasn't much of a problem.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Do you remember how you solved the Seder --

LYN HILL: We never gave up the Seder. So I guess I probably won out on that.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Well, give up Hanukkah, come on. I think I missed it before. What sort of branch of Christianity was he?

LYN HILL: Well, he -- when he joined Plymouth he became a Congregationalist which is -- a Congregationalist is like once removed from Unitarian. It's a very liberal branch of Christianity, although after a while they did have some ministers who were pretty far

right theologically but the Congregational movement is a very liberal Protestant movement.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's what [00:50:00] I -- when you were you talking about what their Sunday school is like I was like Unitarian, of course. So something I am actually curious about is your children. Are they married?

LYN HILL: Yeah, they're all married.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Are they married to Jewish people, non-Jewish people.

LYN HILL: So Harry who was really not raised anything because his mother just was not interested. Well, his mother eventually married a former Catholic priest who however remained a very devoted Catholic. She did not ultimately convert to Catholicism, I think she flirted with it but didn't. But Harry was pretty much raised nothing. To the extent that he has any Jewish background, it's only from what he gleaned around our house. And he's married to a Japanese woman and lives in Japan, and has lived in Japan since 1985.

My daughter, Effie, is married to the man that she met at Congregation Habonim and he's -- he is a Jew who was raised in Germany. His grandparents, like my parents, they were Holocaust survivors. They actually all managed somehow or other to survive the Second World War either in hiding or in camps. And at the end of the war they all ended up in a DP camp outside of Munich. The plan was to come to Canada and -- but somehow they never made it to Canada and they all ended up having successful businesses in Munich and raised their children, who are his parents, my age, my generation in Munich so the parents had been Polish Jews. Or the grandparents. The parents, his parents who are my generation grew up in Germany and his parents actually planned also to immigrate to

Canada. After they got married they went to Canada where his father completed his education as a doctor and psychiatrist and his mother completed her education as a psychologist and they had their child Benjamin there so he's both Canadian and a German citizen.

And I think when they graduated and he was about three they decided that before really starting their careers they would spend six months or a year in Europe driving around in a Volkswagen bus like everybody else was doing at that time. It was around -- I guess it was -- I think it was late 60s, early 70s or something like that. So they went back to Europe with the baby for this extended vacation and after several weeks the bus broke down and they went back to Munich to spend time with their parents while the bus was being fixed, and suddenly experienced how nice it was to have all of this support from the baby's grandparents. And he got offered a job in Munich and they decided they weren't going back to Canada and they stayed in Munich.

So he -- I think he grew up -- his first language was English but when he was three they went back to Germany and so then he spoke German and he is now the third generation trying to get to Canada. He went back as a Canadian citizen and went to college in Canada and then went from Canada to New York and stayed in New York. So he was actually a German Jew and he was a second generation German, although my daughter says that he's Polish. But -- and that was why he was -- he had grown up in Munich with, of course, [00:55:00] very few Jews. There was a small Jewish community in Munich, mostly Eastern European Jews who had come there after the war. But it was a very small community and, you know, coming to New York and finding all of these Jewish people and then finding out that there was this whole kind of subculture of Jews who had come

from Germany in the 30s, he became very interested in that. He was a filmmaker at that time and he decided to make this film about that group of people. And that was how they met. So that's her husband.

And then my youngest son got married at the end of July, just a few weeks ago and he married a young woman who's a nurse practitioner, and I assumed when I met her that she was not Jewish. And I guess two years ago when I invited her to Rosh Hashanah dinner for the first time he said to me you do know that Pam is Jewish don't you? And I said no. That's nice. It would have been fine if she wasn't but I'm very happy to know that, and well it turns out she's technically Jewish. Her maternal grandmother is Jewish. Her maternal grandmother married a man who wasn't Jewish. Her mother, technically Jewish, was not raised Jewish and also married a non-Jewish man. But Pam is technically Jewish and is very interested in having a Jewish home and is planning to take, you know, beginning Judaism class so I guess I'll have Jewish grandchildren.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: And Harry and his wife are just going to be like --

LYN HILL: Well, Harry's children to the extent that they're anything are Buddhist. I mean if you go in their house there's someplace there's a little Buddhist altar and they -- but Buddhism it's almost like a secular thing in Japan.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Do you just want to flip the metal over the -- perfect.

LYN HILL: You know, and they're also -- the kids are a little bit interested in Judaism. They will ask a question every so often but they are truly ignorant about any religion. I don't think they even get the whole concept of religion particularly. The whole thing doesn't make a whole lot of sense to them.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: So they're in Japan and then you're other two children are --

LYN HILL: Well the three oldest are actually now most of the time in America because Ken is at Syracuse University. Rina has just started her first year at Louisiana State where she has a full basketball scholarship and Ellie is at a prep school in Florida for her kind of gap year. She's finished her senior year.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's nice that they're closer.

LYN HILL: And so they're back. The two youngest ones are still in Japan.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: And then your other children, where do they live?

LYN HILL: Effie and Benjamin live in Battery Park City and they have three boys, a six year old, a three year old and a baby. The six year old is actually [01:00:00] almost seven now. They're all in Germany right now with the other grandparents. And Tim and Pam live here in Park Slope.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That's very nice. So do you get to see the family a lot?

LYN HILL: I get to see the little boys usually every week, not always. I haven't seen them in a long time now because they've been away for so much this summer but I'm sure that when they come back I'll see them regularly again. The older ones I see a little more often now than I did when they were growing up because they kind of use me as a home base in the United States. So they'll all be -- I think they'll all be there for Thanksgiving and Harry may come in himself because Rina's basketball team is going to be playing at Barclays Stadium over Thanksgiving so I think they'll all be here to see her.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That will be great.

LYN HILL: Yeah, I'm going to have a very big Thanksgiving this year.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: One more questions, oh, yes. Do you see all of you staying in Brooklyn? Do you think it's a good place for you guys?

LYN HILL: I do. I mean, well, it's not all of us really. Right now it's just -- it's me and it's Pam and Tim. I think Pam and Tim are pretty committed to Brooklyn. They actually had a very Brooklyn themed wedding. They got married at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. They had their rehearsal dinner at Marco Polo. They had the -- well they had the brunch at my house. But all of their invitations had pictures all over of the Brooklyn Bridge and other Brooklyn landmarks so I suspect that they would stay in Brooklyn.

Effie and Benjamin lived in Brooklyn for a little while after they got married and Benjamin's business now is actually -- he rents -- he has a number of small residential properties and he rents apartment by the month -- furnished apartments and they're all in Brooklyn. But they really enjoy living in Battery Park City a great deal so it's quite possible that they will stay there. I don't think they can stay in the apartment they're in for much longer because it's a two bedroom apartment and they've got three growing boys but I think they'll at least try to find something in Battery Park City that they can afford.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: And, of course, Japan is like --

LYN HILL: Well, Harry -- I think Harry says that at some point he's got to come -- live here again for tax purposes for a year or two but I don't necessarily think it will be in New York. He owns some property in Utah and he owns some property in other places that I'm not even sure of --

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LYN HILL: He did say once that once his kids -- his first child decided on a school he would try to keep them in the same geographical area. So Louisiana and Syracuse aren't exactly in

the same geographical area but I think this means he'll probably try to keep everybody on the East Coast, at least. So that's good.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That is very good. One last question from me would just be do you think that there's -- is there something special about Brooklyn that is keeping you in particular here?

LYN HILL: I love my house and I'm really comfortable in Brooklyn. I think I've, you know, developed roots here that are -- it is more my home than anyplace since Inwood. And I felt at home here almost from the beginning. Sometimes the Park Slope people drive me nuts when I'm acting as the hospital spokesperson and trying to persuade them that it's good for the neighborhood for us to build additional buildings. It doesn't make them necessarily that happy, but I -- well, I think city living is important to me. I don't drive a car. I have a driver's license but it's really safer for everybody if I don't drive, so I need to be someplace where the public transportation system is strong and where I'm comfortable using it. I think that, you know, Brooklyn is far better than it was 35 or 36 years ago when we first came. And having lived through the difficult times, I really am very happy to enjoy the better times.

I moved to an abject slum but my children will inherit a really nice house in a beautiful neighborhood and it's a vibrant neighborhood. It's the nexus of Brooklyn's athletic and cultural activity. So, you know, as I think about getting older, it feels like a really good place to age. And right now I'm not thinking of stopping working either and I love being able to be so close to my job. And that's something that I've been lucky about ever since I stopped teaching at Queen's College. Every job I've had has been pretty much in

walking distance from my house which was really important when the children were young and in school.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: All right. Well, my last question then is usually the same, it's basically sometimes there are stories that you have that are really fantastic and amazing about your life, your family, your family's history, your husband's history, anything that you have in the back of your mind or the front of your mind or wherever and I just haven't asked the right question to bring it out. So if that's the case and there's something that you would like to tell me or tell BHS?

LYN HILL: I don't know that there's -- I'm trying to think. Well, I didn't -- we didn't talk at all about my husband's funeral which was --

ABIGAIL ETTelman: We didn't.

LYN HILL: -- the first interfaith funeral that both Rabbi Wieder and Reverend Fisher had participated in. And it was -- he planned it. When he -- at a certain point in his illness he said I'm not going to live more than another week or two, please call Reverend Fisher and call Rabbi Wieder. I want to talk to them about the funeral. And I was there during both of those conversations and he was very clear on he wanted me to read a poem and he wanted particular psalms to be sung and he wanted both of them to speak, and he just had a very clear vision of how he wanted it to be. And, you know, we followed his wishes but it was a funeral in which the Plymouth Choir sang and it was very beautiful because, you know, this was the choir that he had sung with for almost 30 years. And it was -- but there was also the mourner's Kaddish at the end and it was at Plymouth Church. All three of my [05:00] children spoke and spoke really beautifully. And many people told me it was the most beautiful funeral service they had ever -- it was actually a

memorial service not a funeral. He had been buried a few days before but it was the most beautiful service of its kind that they'd ever been to. It was really -- we felt it was a very nice tribute and I think we all felt good about that.

ABIGAIL ETTelman: That sounds like a really amazing thing to have happen at a really bad time.

LYN HILL: Yeah. And we felt we got -- you know, I guess, here's another thing that I had never really thought about. You know there's a lot of talk about interfaith weddings and there's a lot of talk about the December dilemma. That's a very common topic when you talk about interfaith couples. I've never seen anything about interfaith funerals but I think that's going to become more and more -- well, maybe not. I don't know. I think there are very few interfaith couples that do what we did where there's really two strong faith traditions going on, so maybe it's not an issue, but -- because I think the weddings tend to be more for the parents and by the time you get to the funerals it's more for the children. But, you know, as the first generation of lots of interfaith couples ages it may become something more of an issue.

But the other thing, I guess, that I found that was a little bit shocking and sad for me was that although I had ambivalent feelings about the church, it was very sad for me to just lose it suddenly. And to lose Christmas because my children really had -- when Forbes was alive, especially when the children were young, we had big Christmases that I enjoyed celebrating with him with, you know, a big Christmas dinner and we had a Christmas tree and we had a present opening thing and my mother who had been so uncomfortable about the Christmas pageant at one time loved it.

In fact, when, at a certain point I got disgusted with it because I was doing all the work and I couldn't even get anybody to help me take down the Christmas tree or decorate it. Nobody wanted to do anything, you know, and I said to the kids if you're not going to do anything for this, if you don't care about it, why should I do it? And then I said to Forbes, you know, I'm sick and tired of having to do all of the work and he said to me, you know, after the Christmas Eve service everything is anticlimactic for me. So I said, well, what am I doing this for? I'm going to stop it. And then it took me another three or four years because I had so much pressure from my mother because she wanted to come for the Christmas dinner and the decorated Christmas tree and the present giving and it just -- it was very, very difficult to get her to give it up. But I finally got it to the point where we stopped almost everything and we simply had a little brunch -- Effie was already out of it because she usually -- once she got married usually they were in Germany over December. So Tim would come over and the three of us would have a brunch and exchange gifts and that was kind of that. It was a much simpler kind of thing. But it was still hard to suddenly not have Christmas anymore, nothing. Not have Easter any more. Usually I would go to church with him on Easter because he really wanted me to be at that Easter service where he sang. To not go to the Christmas Carol service because I don't want to go by myself. It's just sad. And even to not have a connection with the church because the church was more a part of my life than I realized [10:00] and so after he died there was one woman who had been in the choir with him for a long time and who had -- she and her husband have frequent parties and we had been invited to some of their large parties and we always invited them -- we always had a Fourth of July party which I've continued to do and we always invited them to that. And if they were in

town, they always came. So anyway, after he died she said, you know, let's have lunch and she came and she had lunch with me. And we enjoyed it. And I think she enjoyed it too. So we have continued to have lunch together about once a month ever since he died. She and her husband go on a lot of trips. Sometimes she'll say, you know, I'm not going to be here but then she always gets back to me, we're back, let's have lunch. And that's kind of my lifeline to the church because she'll tell me what's going on. She made sure that I got onto their email newsletters so I kind of keep track of what's doing there. And occasionally there will be something -- if I can find something I can go to or do, I do. So if they have their Yankee Fair which, you know, is a community kind of thing and I'm around, I will take my grandson and we'll do that. I tried -- I actually tried to get my grandson to be part of their children's choir and my idea was that most Saturdays he stays overnight with me and I would take him Sunday morning to that choir rehearsal and we did that for a little while but Benjamin clearly didn't like it. It made him uncomfortable. And I was surprised because I know that Effie knows that it's not going to make him a Christian. She has every reason to know it, but Benjamin just finally said no more and I - - it's not my decision. It's their child.

So I felt kind of bad about that because I thought that would be a lovely way of kind of keeping contact with the church but that was my thing -- it's not appropriate if that's not what they want and I think my grandson didn't care one way or the other. He was fine with it but he didn't miss it particularly when he didn't do it anymore either. So, you know, occasionally I do find ways that I can kind of connect with the church but really -- I mean I'm not going to go to services there and most of their social events are very intimately connected with membership and I never was a -- Forbes was a member of

Congregation Beth Elohim because you join as a family, but at Plymouth you join as an individual. There are married couples where one belongs and one doesn't and it may be because the other one is in a different church but it also may be that the other one is not interested in being a member.

So, you know, I was never a member and I'm not a member and -- but that's a loss that I wasn't really anticipating. The whole -- that whole part of my life is gone. I think if I had died first, I'll bet you anything Forbes would have continued going to services at Beth Elohim.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: It sounds like they -- at Beth Elohim and at Plymouth were both very welcoming.

LYN HILL: In their own ways, yeah. I think at Plymouth they made an effort to be welcoming.

I think at Beth Elohim they didn't think of that as much. He just became part of it.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Well, that was amazing. I can't think of anything that I'm going to ask you and I think we've actually gone longer than I anticipated because -- which is great because you have so many amazing stories. So I will let you go and eat dinner.

LYN HILL: OK.

ABIGAIL ETTELMAN: Just kidding. We're coming back and the question that we're going to answer that we managed to miss was the ways that she managed to transition from being a theater historian to being a hospital administrator.

LYN HILL: OK. So what happened was that although my field of study was theater history and dramatic criticism and that's [15:00] what I eventually got my PhD in, during the time that I was a graduate student I always taught in communication arts which was what I had my Master's in and that was the department I taught in. I completed -- it took me a very

long time to finish my PhD. I had two children. In between we had the sabbatical that my husband took and when I finally finished my PhD, it was very clear that I was not likely to get a full-time faculty position, although I had had a full-time faculty position in the communication arts department I was --

ABIGAIL ETTelman: What happened to the top of your thing? Interesting. Can you just say something?

LYN HILL: Hello?

ABIGAIL ETTelman: OK. If you'll just hold it like that then --

LYN HILL: Can you hear me?

ABIGAIL ETTelman: Yes, I can. That's the wind screen so you just have to keep it like I think that level --

LYN HILL: Did it fall under me?

ABIGAIL ETTelman: It's probably on the floor somewhere. It's fine.

LYN HILL: I lost an earring the other day. It's here somewhere. OK, so at the time that I finished my PhD, I could no longer teach in communication arts. I could no longer be a lecturer because now I had a PhD. But it became clear very quickly that it was very unlikely that I would have a faculty position teaching theater history, dramatic criticism or any related subject in New York City. New York City is the most desirable place of somebody teaching in that area can be and as somebody who had taken 10 years to finish her dissertation, I was not a particularly attractive candidate by that time. I had very good teaching experience. I had a couple of publications but I was clearly not a tremendously productive researcher and there was no evidence with two children that I was likely to become one.

So the question was, you know, could I get a job outside the city in the field and it looked like there was that possibility but my husband had tenure at Queens College and he was really not willing to go anyplace. We made a couple of efforts to see whether anybody in California had dual positions for us or had some kind of position that possibly we could share and nothing really came of it. And so for a little while I picked up adjunct positions which was pretty easy to do and taught part time. I didn't feel ultimately that was a way of going. It paid very little. There was no respect attached to it. There were no benefits. It meant a lot of traveling around and cobbling positions together and it was not really a permanent solution.

So around that time the school that my daughter was going to, Carroll Street School, merged with the Berkeley Institute and all of a sudden this elementary school that she was going to developed a high school. The school was -- as a merged school it was in its infancy and clearly needed -- it hadn't yet gotten a lot of community buy-in. The Carroll Street School had been popular among Park Slope parents of young children and elementary age children but the Berkeley Institute was not a school that many people in Park Slope were using and it looked like it was going to take a while before they would be accepting of it. So I went to the headmistress because I thought they might like to have a PhD that that might confer some status. It might look good for the school to have somebody with a PhD. And I said to her, you know, I could teach communication arts or I can teach drama and theater, I could direct plays, I could, you know, do all kinds of things and I have a PhD. So she hired me half time and, in fact, everybody at that school called me Dr. Hill. They were acutely conscious of the fact that I had a PhD and I think that was the main reason I got the job. And the first year I directed a play and I taught

some theater classes and at the same time I had a half-time job at Montclair State College and that sort of filled things out. [20:00]

And I got the other thing that was very important to me was I got a discount on my children's tuition. It was a tough year because I was -- two days a week I was schlepping to Montclair on the bus and I really found out that I hated directing high school students in plays. It had some of the same problems that costume design had turned out to have for me years earlier. And I didn't even particularly like teaching high school students that much. So the second year they made a position for me that was much more attractive. It was a three day a week position coaching students for -- I found out that there was this Forensic League and I started coaching kids to participate in oral interpretation and other kinds of events for the Forensic League and I also started doing public relations for the school.

I had never done public relations before but I had been teaching communication theory classes and rhetoric classes for many years. Forbes and I actually team taught for many years at Queens College and we taught a rhetoric class, so I was actually very comfortable because it meant just putting into practice things -- principles that I had been teaching in terms of persuasive speaking, and argumentation translate very easily into doing public relations and all I really had to do was get some templates and learn some formats and I was very comfortable writing by that time because I had written a dissertation and developed a certain facility at writing.

So it worked out very well and the following year I actually developed a full-time position at this school basically just doing public relations which the school badly needed. But at that point I started to develop -- I started to understand that because I had

children in the school and because I had been a parent at the school before, both the board and the headmistress were never really going to see me as anything other than a talented amateur. And I thought now that I've had this experience I really need to go someplace where I'm not known and make it as a professional on my own.

So at the end of that year I got a job at St. Francis College and the job was director of public relations and publications. I got it on the basis of things that I could show them that I had done at Berkeley Carroll and I managed to leave Berkeley Carroll on very good terms with the understanding that I would continue working non-paid as a consultant to the headmistress and help her with various projects in return for which my children kept their faculty discount and they kept it through high school which was a lot more years which was great. I stayed at St. Francis for a couple of years and that was a wonderfully pleasant job and very interesting and I was extremely happy there with everything except the salary which was pretty low.

I knew that I had to -- I had to make more money and I started looking for jobs not at colleges because somebody told me that I would never have real credibility as a public relations professional if I didn't work someplace that wasn't an academic institution.

And the first job that met that description that I could get was at this hospital which is only a mile away from the house. St. Francis was also a mile from the house but in the other direction and so I took the job and came here and that was the first non-academic job I had had since my theater days. Boy was I depressed for the first several months. I couldn't believe what I had done to myself. It was really a very difficult transition and I didn't like [25:00] the man I was working for very much and it was clear that he was very threatened by me. I basically came and I was not happy and I thought to myself, OK, I

gotta put up with it for two years because I don't want to leave right away, but after two years I start looking and I will find something hopefully back in academia.

That was exactly what I did but right at the very same time the CEO here changed and the new CEO had a very different style and one of the first things he did was to have me report directly to him. Then he started slowly but surely adding things to my responsibilities so that I -- at various times have had the responsibility for planning and for development and now also do have pastoral care as part of my portfolio and the medical library which actually nobody else on the administrative staff wants to have anything to do with. I joke that I do all of the things that are not clinical and that the real hospital -- the people who have been trained in hospital administration couldn't care less about, but they're the things that I actually like the best. So, you know, this job that I was going to stick out for two years, three tops I've been here now for over 25 years. You know it's been a pretty good run. I realize that this is probably going to be my last job which is fine. It's always stayed interesting. Sometimes it gets me nuts but I think it's been a very good thing for me.

ABIGAIL ETTLEMAN: Well, it sounds like you're very happy. I just wanted to say --

LYN HILL: And I do have the department of pastoral care which is fun because I get to -- and also the department -- the church relations so having been at St. Francis where I had the Catholics and did things like organizing Franciscan Heritage Day and things like that, now I'm with the Methodists and do the pastor's clinics and all kinds of items like that so the whole religious thing still is very much a part of my life in that way.

ABIGAIL ETTLEMAN: You're just collecting them all.

LYN HILL: Yeah.

ABIGAIL ETTLEMAN: I just wanted to say before we turn off the recording that the hospital she was talking about was the New York Methodist Hospital in Park Slope. And as my last note, I would just like to thank you so much again.

LYN HILL: You're Welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE